

SWAP SESSION NEWSLETTER

“Low Cost Writing Assignments: How to Use Writing to Enhance Learning and Critical Thinking without Increasing the Teacher's Burden”

Dr. John Bean, Professor of English and Consulting Professor in Academic Writing, Seattle University

No. 34

Swap Session held 10/16/2002

Sponsored by the Faculty Exchange for Teaching Excellence

Take Home Message:

What is the purpose of using writing in a course?

To get students more actively involved in learning!

**W
R
I
T
I
N
G**

THEORY

Handout: Examples of critical thinking problems that focus on course concepts.

Goal: To use writing to help students learn to do the kind of thinking that is required in your field (discipline-specific academic thinking and writing).

Dr. Bean illustrated three examples of techniques for increasing writing from his handout:

- Informal/ exploratory writing
- “Micro Theme” short writing assignment
- Small group problem solving exercise

Problems to focus on:

- × Course subject matter
- × Helping students learn disciplinary ways of:
 - Thinking
 - Analyzing
 - Grading
- × Encouraging students to:
 - question assumptions
 - explore alternative ways of thinking
 - explore alternative ways of acting
- × Engaging students in discipline-specific inquiry

DEVELOP A REPERTOIRE OF WAYS TO GIVE CRITICAL THINKING PROBLEMS TO STUDENTS

Small Group Task

Free write for three minutes in response to a packet of articles

Affect Students' Studying Processes

Give students "thinking pieces" (free writing assignments) for homework

What is the difference between motivating students to read for a quiz and motivating students to study with writing?

- *Students may read for "data" when studying for a quiz*
- *Some students have trouble applying the material in writing*

BUT...

- *Writing boosts student interest*
- *Writing encourages peer teaching*
- *Writing involves role playing to develop a better understanding*

General principles for teaching academic writing:

- What do you want your students to learn from your class?
- What is the most difficult to learn?
- How can I design writing assignments that will help them with the above?

Stages of Development of Novice to Expert Writing (*writing like others in the profession*)

Stage 1: Non-academic/ pseudo academic writing (ex: paraphrased reports, book reports)

Stage 2: Generalized academic writing concerned with:

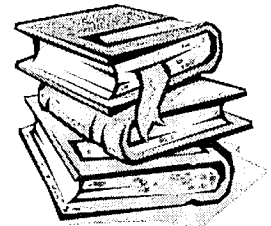
- stating claims
- offering evidence
- respecting others opinions
- learning how to write with authority
- What it means to make an argument in the discipline

Stage 3: Novice approximations of particular disciplinary ways of making knowledge.

This is writing from within the prospective of the discipline.

Process of Inquiry Critical Reading Analysis

- **Arguing within the discipline**
 - Breaking the “vicious reading cycle”
- **Other goals set by the professor**
 - Design critical thinking problems that focus on these goals

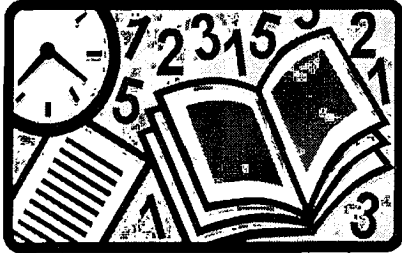


Examples of short critical thinking tasks for course concepts:

- ➔ Have students incorporate certain specific terms into writing
 - (ex. Independent/dependent variable)
- ➔ Explain 'x' to 'y'
- ➔ Incorporating humor into assignments helps relax students

Tips for handling and grading exploratory writing

- Grade with ✓, +, -
- Don't grade everything your students write
- Create incentives for writing other than grades
- Create an atmosphere where they want to share



UPCOMING EVENTS:

**SWAP SESSION: Success
with Large Classes
Tuesday, January 14, 2003**

Panel of KSU faculty members
discussing tips and techniques

Time and place TBA

More Grading Tips:

- ❖ Grade on a scale of 1-6 to cut down on grading time
- ❖ Use student themes as examples to explain concepts and scoring rubric to all students
- ❖ Save comments for in class explanations to show students