INSTITUTE FOR
writing&
thinking
Bard College

IWT HANDOUTS

Writing to Read

The objective of writing to read is to help students explore a text they are reading by writing probatively about it. The structure of this is a modified "loop writing" sequence, derived from Peter Elbow's *Writing with Power* (Oxford, 1981).

Writing in response to someone else's written language is a different experience from writing a personal or "familiar" essay on one's own initiative. We need to hear the other person's language, enter into dialogue with it, recognize whatever larger "poly-logue" it may be part of, find a voice appropriate to this conversation—all the while finding language of our own to talk about the subject at hand, so that the text does not preempt our thinking.

We need to recognize in the text (and in the "community of discourse" to which it belongs): (1) questions it pursues; (2) assumptions it makes; (3) allusions: what goes without saying; and (4) special jargon that is shorthand for a lot of prior conversation. It is a tricky business—attending to another's language while forming our own.

Possible "loops" or probes to begin thinking about:

1. First thoughts about the text

2. Questions

3. Find and respond to

    a. A passage important to you

    b. A passage you think is important for the author

4. Dialogue with the author

5. Vary the audience and explain

6. Record your own reading process: tell the story of your reading of the text

7. Agree first, then disagree with the author (believe/disbelieve)

8. The text reminds you of?

9. What's lurking? Not said in the text?

10. The author's prejudices? Your prejudices?

11. What question is this text answering? What problem is it addressing?

12. Last things first: starting from the conclusion, what does the text say?

—Prepared by Paul Connolly and associates from the Institute for Writing & Thinking, Bard College

2012

Writing to Read in the Zones

1. Make a circle or oval in the center of the page and draw a rectangle at the bottom (the larger the paper the better).
2. Divide the remainder of the page into eight zones in which you will write. The zones should be roughly equal in size and should fill the remainder of the page.
3. Number the zones.
4. In the center, write down the author, title, and the concepts you are most interested in exploring in relation to the text.
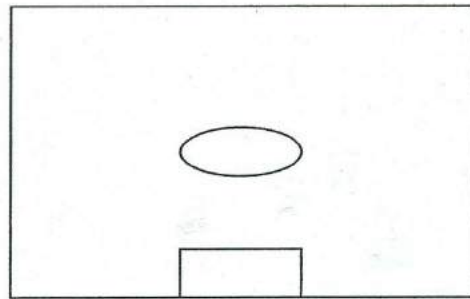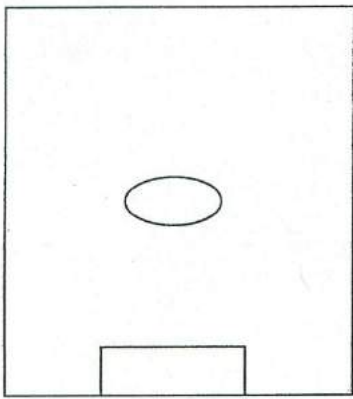
Zone 1 – First thoughts: Write down your thoughts about the text in general or the concepts you wrote in the circle, or write about the title if you find it significant or intriguing.

Zone 2 – Pointing: Select a striking sentence, phrase, word or image from any part of the text. Fill up the zone with writing about it or from it.

Zone 3 – Analysis/Close Reading: Pick a passage that's important to the way you understand or experience the text. Which words or phrases are most central to the meaning and/or beauty of this passage? Why is this passage important to the text as a whole?

Zone 4 – Believing and Doubting: Find a central statement or assumption the author makes and first believe (agree) and then doubt (disagree). Or find a portion of the text that you find challenging and write your way into some understanding of it.

Zone 5 – Making Inferences: What question is this text answering? What makes it speak?

Zone 6 – Summarizing: What happens or what does the text say?

Zone 7 – Evidence: Examples, facts, illustrations, statistics, anecdotes, definitions, comparisons, quotations, reasons, images, metaphors, similes, symbols, words, or structures—which of these
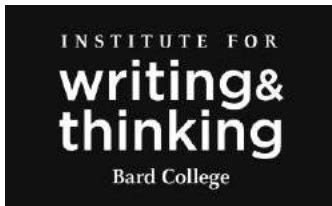
2012

– OVER –

seem important to the argument, the author's intention, or the overall effect and/or meaning of the text? Explain.

Zone 8 – Making connections: What texts, voices, memories, experiences come to mind as you read and write? How do they illuminate your reading?

Rectangle – Now read what you wrote. What's the most important or central thing you're noticing or saying about this text? What does your writing in the different locations add up to? "Sum up this main point…in a sentence. Write it [in the rectangle]. It's got to stick its neck out, not just hedge and wonder. [It should be] something that can be quarreled with…This summing-up process should be difficult: it should tell you more than you already know."[1] Use this sentence to begin a draft of a short essay about this text.

—Prepared by associates from the Institute for Writing & Thinking, Bard College

---

[1] Elbow, Peter. *Writing Without Teachers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998

INSTITUTE FOR WRITING & THINKING
Bard College PO Box 5000, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY 12504-5000 **Phone** 845-758-7484 **E-mail** iwt@bard.edu
www.writingandthinking.org

Writing from Images

PURPOSE

To write an essay in a natural, real voice; on your own informed authority; with the conviction and confidence that arise from attentive reading, creative thinking and personal engagement with text.

> "Fundamentally, the process of understanding a work implies a re-creation of it, an attempt to grasp completely the structured sensations and concepts through which the author seeks to convey the quality of his sense of life. Each must make a new synthesis of these elements with his own nature, but it is essential that he evoke those components of experience to which the text actually refers."
>
> Louise Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*

PROCEDURE

I. Reading:
   a) Read the text at least twice, silently and aloud. Hear the voice of the text and begin to form an oral interpretation.
   b) Before and during class, render parts of the text aloud with various purposes: (1) for basic, clear understanding; (2) to reinforce what you take to be the author's intended emphasis; (3) to dramatize the power of the text; (4) to exaggerate or parody the voice.

II. Writing:
   a) Putting the text aside, list the images you remember. Circle three significant images you will write about. (2 min.)
   b) Describe the first image. (5 min.)
   c) State what it means to you. (3 min.)
   d) Repeat for the 2nd and 3rd images. (8 min. each)
      NOTE: Write on one side only. Look back at the text, but write also from your remembered experience of it.
   e) 4th paragraph: State what these three images have in common. What theme(s) runs through what you have written? (8 min.)
   f) 5th paragraph: What assertion do you want to make about the text, based on the three images? (8 min.)
   g) 6th paragraph: What do you like about the text, and why? (4 min.)
   h) 7th paragraph: What do you dislike, and why? (4 min.)

      NOTE: After (a) and (c) it is valuable in a group to hear read aloud what others have written.

III. Structuring:
   a) Either cut and paste your paragraphs or number them in an order than seems appropriate to you. Or you might follow this order (10 min.):

2012

1. Assertion
2. What you like
3. Three images with meanings
4. What you dislike
5. What these images have in common

    b) Consider this order for a moment: Do you need to make any changes or additions?

IV. <u>Revision</u>:

    a) Write in whatever transitions seem necessary to give this first draft some more unity and coherence. Shape it a bit, smoothing the seams between paragraphs, reorganizing as necessary, and omitting obvious irrelevancies. (20 min.)

    b) Read the draft to a friend, and ask your listener to respond by: (1) pointing, without discussion, to memorable phrases or ideas; (2) saying back to you what your listener has heard, in an inquisitive tone that invites you to elaborate; (3) summarizing, in skeletal form, the primary assertions (and supporting evidence) they have heard you present. (40 min.)

    c) Revise, considering insights gained from your listener's response.
NOTE: Avoid debate. Listeners should try to assist the writers' understanding rather than to recast the argument to fit their own understanding of the text. (45 min.)

V. Finish:
Edit for mistakes. Type or copy over. Proofread. (45 min.)

VI. Celebrate:
According to taste and time. Hear finished essays read aloud.

WRITING TIME: Approximately 3½ hours. Steps I-III should be completed in one unbroken block of time. Steps IV-VI may be done at your convenience (and allowing time for incubation is a good idea). NOTE: The entire "PROCEDURE" should be modeled in class before it is attempted independently.

—Prepared by associates from the Institute for Writing & Thinking, Bard College

decision about what kind of feedback will help you. Don't let readers make those decisions.

Therefore ask readers for what you want or need—and insist that you get it. Don't be afraid to stop them if they start giving you what you don't want. (Remember, for instance, that even after you are very experienced with all kinds of feedback, you may need to ask readers to hold back *all criticism* for a piece that you feel tender about. This can be a very appropriate decision; stick up for it.)

Nevertheless, you mostly have to sit back and just listen. If you are talking a lot, you are probably preventing them from giving you the good feedback they could give. (For example, don't argue if they misunderstand what you wrote. Their misunderstanding is valuable. You need to *understand* their misunderstanding better in order to figure out whether you need to make any changes.)

Let the readers tell you if they think you are asking for inappropriate feedback—or for feedback they can't give or don't want to give. For example, they may sense that your piece is still unformed and think that it doesn't make sense to give judgment. They may think sayback or descriptive feedback would be more helpful. Or they may simply hate giving judgment. Listen to them. See whether perhaps you should go along: they may be right.

If you aren't getting honest, serious, or caring feedback, don't just blame your readers. It's probably because you haven't convinced them that you really want it. Instead of *blaming* the readers, simply *insist that they give you what you need.*

What follows is a summary of the kinds of feedback we have earlier described.

from Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff, Sharing and Responding, (Random House, 1989)

Summary of Ways of Responding

THE TWO PARADOXES OF RESPONDING

First paradox: The reader is always right; the writer is always right.

The reader gets to decide what's true about her reaction: about what she sees or what happened to her, about what she thinks or how she feels. It makes no sense to quarrel with the reader about what's happening to her (though you can ask the reader to explain more fully what she is saying).

But you, as the writer, get to decide what to do about the feedback you get: what changes to make, if any. You don't have to follow her advice. Just listen openly—swallow it all. You can do that better if you realize that you get to take your time and make up your own mind—perhaps making no changes in your writing at all.

Second paradox: The writer must be in charge; the writer must sit back quietly too.

As the writer, you must be in control. It's your writing. Don't be passive or helpless. Don't just put your writing out and let them give you *any* feedback. You need to decide what kind of feedback (if any) you need for this particular piece of writing. Is your main goal to improve this piece of writing? Or perhaps you don't really care about working any more on this piece—your main goal is to *work* on your writing in general. Or perhaps you don't want to *work* at anything—but instead just enjoy sharing this piece and hearing what others have to say. You need to make your own

I. NO RESPONDING: SHARING

How to Use It	*When It's Useful*
Just read your words out loud; see what they sound like. You probably learn more from the act of *reading in the presence of listeners* than from any kind of feedback.	When you don't have much time. Or at a very early stage when you're just exploring or feeling fragile about what you've written and don't want criticism. It's also useful when you are completely finished with a piece: you've finally got it the way you want it or you don't have the time or energy to make any changes—so it's time to celebrate by *sharing* it with others and not getting feedback at all.

II. DESCRIPTIVE RESPONDING

Sayback

How to Use It	When It's Useful
Ask readers: "Say back to me in your own words what you hear me getting at in my writing. But say it more as a question than as an answer—to invite me to figure out better what I *really* want to say."	At an early stage when you are still groping, when you may not yet have been able to write what you are really trying to say. If readers say back to you what they hear—and invite you to talk—this often leads you to *exactly* what you want to write.

Pointing

How to Use It	When It's Useful
Ask readers: "Which words or phrases stick in mind? Which passages or features did you like best? Don't explain why."	When you want to know what is getting through. Or when you want a bit of confidence and support.

Summarizing

How to Use It	When It's Useful
Ask: "What do you hear as my main point or idea (or event or feeling)? And the subsidiary ones?"	When you want to know what's getting through. If a reader says she disagrees with you, you need to know what she thinks you are saying.

What's Almost Said or Implied

How to Use It	When It's Useful
Ask readers: "What's *almost* said, implied, hovering around the edges? What would you like to hear more about?"	When you need new ideas or need to expand or develop what you've written—or when you feel your piece isn't rich or interesting enough. What you *don't* say in a piece of writing often determines the reactions of readers as much as what you do say. If this is an important piece of writing for you, you had better look to feedback about the implications.

Center of Gravity

How to Use It	When It's Useful
Ask readers: "What do you sense as the source of energy, the focal point, the seedbed, the generative center for this piece? (The center of *gravity* might well *not* be the "main point" but rather some image, phrase, quotation, detail, or example.)	Same as for "What's Almost Said," above.

Structure; Voice, Point of View, Attitude toward the Reader; Level of Abstraction or Concreteness; Language, Diction, Syntax

How to Use Them	When They're Useful
Ask readers to describe each of these features or dimensions of your writing.	At any stage. When you need more perspective.

Metaphorical Descriptions

How to Use Them	When They're Useful
Ask readers: "Describe my piece in terms of weathers, clothing, colors, animals. Describe the shape of my piece. Give me a picture of the reader-writer relationship. What's your fantasy of what was on my mind that I wasn't writing about (substitute writing)?"	At any stage. When your writing feels stale and you need a fresh view. If readers learn to give this kind of feedback, their other feedback tends to improve. Sometimes young, inexperienced, or naive readers can't give you other kinds of feedback but give very perceptive metaphorical feedback.

III. ANALYTIC RESPONDING

Skeleton Feedback

How to Use It	When It's Useful
Ask readers to tell you about these three main dimensions of your paper. ("What do • Reasons and support. ("What do	When writing a persuasive essay or any essay that makes a claim. At an early stage when you have a lot of unorganized exploratory writing.

Skeleton Feedback (Continued)

How to Use It	When It's Useful
you see as my main point and my sub-points—and the arguments or evidence that I give or could give to support each?") • Assumptions. ("What does my paper seem to take for granted?") • Audience. ("Who do I imply as my audience? How would my reasons work for them? How do I seem to treat them in general?")	skeleton feedback is a way to get help from your readers in adding to and organizing your material. At a late stage, readers help you analyze strengths and weaknesses. It's also helpful for giving *yourself* feedback.

Believing and Doubting

How to Use It	When It's Useful
Ask readers: "Believe (or pretend to believe) everything I have written. Be my ally and tell me what you see. Give me more ideas and perceptions to help my case. Then doubt everything and tell me what you see. What arguments can be made against what I say?"	The believing game alone is good when you want help and support for an argument you are struggling with. Together they are useful at any stage. They provide strong perspective.

Descriptive Outline

How to Use It	When It's Useful
Ask readers: "Write me *says* and *does* sentences—for my whole essay and for each paragraph or section." *Does* sentences shouldn't mention the content of the paragraph—i.e., shouldn't slide into repeating the *says* sentences.	Descriptive outlines make most sense for essays—and are particularly useful for persuasive pieces or arguments. They give you the most *perspective*. Only feasible when the reader has the text in hand and can give a lot of time and care. Particularly useful for giving feedback to yourself

---

IV. READER-BASED RESPONDING: MOVIES OF THE READER'S MIND

How to Use It	When It's Useful
Get readers to tell you frankly *what happens inside their heads* as they read your words. Here are ways to help them: • Interrupt their reading and have them tell their interim reactions. • Get them to tell reactions in the form of a story (first . . . then . . .). • Get them to give subjective "I statements" about what is happening in them, not allegedly objective "it statements" about the text. • If they are stuck, ask them questions (e.g., about where they go along and where they resist, about their feelings on the topic before and after reading).	Movies of the reader's mind are useful at any stage—but they depend on a relationship of trust and support with readers. They can lead to blunt criticism. They're most useful for long-range learning; they may not give you direct help in improving this particular draft.

V. CRITERION-BASED OR JUDGMENT-BASED RESPONDING

How to Use It	When It's Useful
Traditional criteria for imaginative or creative writing: • Description, vividness of details. (Do we experience what's there?) • Character. (Do we find characters real or interesting?) • Plot. (Is it believable, interesting, or meaningful?) • Language. (Not just "Is it clear?" but "Is it alive and resonant with meaning?"—perhaps through imagery and metaphor.)	When you want to know how your writing measures up to certain criteria. Or when you need a quick overview of strengths and weaknesses. This kind of feedback depends on experienced and skilled readers. And still you should always take it with a grain of salt.

you need to be careful about, for example, "Is it organized?" "Enough details or examples?"

• Don't forget that if you do *process writing* about what you have written, you will probably come up with helpful suggestions for yourself. Talk about what pleases you and where you are troubled; spell out your frustrations.

How to Use It	*When It's Useful*

• Meaning; so what? (Is there a meaning or impact that makes it seem important or worthwhile?)

Traditional criteria for expository or essay writing:

• Focus on task. (Does it squarely *address* the assignment, question, or task?)

• Content. (You might want to distinguish three dimensions: ideas; details or examples; reasoning.)

• Clarity.

• Organization.

• Sense of the writer. (Voice, tone, stance toward the reader.)

• Mechanics. (Spelling, grammar, punctuation; proofreading.)

Of course, you can specify whatever criteria you think right for a given piece of writing: what the particular writing task demands (e.g., persuading the reader) or what you are currently working on (e.g., voice). Or you can let *readers* specify the criteria that they think are most important.
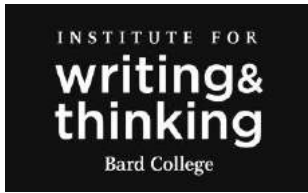
FEEDBACK FROM YOURSELF

Certain of these feedback procedures particularly increase your perspective and thus improve your feedback from yourself.

• Certain kinds of *descriptive feedback* sharpen your eye, help you see things about your text you hadn't noticed (e.g., summarizing; describing the structure; the voice and point of view; level of abstraction/concreteness; language; diction, syntax).

• *Descriptive outline* and *skeleton feedback* are particularly powerful analytic structures that help you see what's strong and weak in any essay.

• *Criterion-based feedback* can help you zero in on features you know

Text Rendering/Collaborative Reading

"Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the
human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning."
—Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Text Rendering/Collaborative Reading provides a way of "speaking about" a text using the words of the text itself. Whether this practice is used with poetry or with carefully chosen passages from fiction, non-fiction, etc., the intent is the same: to animate and experiment with its language using this "human voice." As a group:

1. Read the text so that it becomes clear to the listener, so that its meaning climbs into the head of the listener.

2. Read the text to reinforce what you take to be the author's intended emphasis. Read it in the "right" voice in which it "ought" to be read.

3. Read the text to dramatize its power.

4. Read the text to exaggerate or parody its voice

5. Read the text in voices inappropriate to the text—a good way to find out what is the voice of the author.

6. Read the text as if you were the author.

7. Read the text (particularly for poems and short pieces) backwards. Backwards line by line, word by word, and syllable by syllable.

8. Reconstruct the text as jazz. In this type of text rendering, the entire group reads, sometimes all at once, sometimes individually, with people joining in and dropping out as they hear the music being constructed. The text is not necessarily read in order; lines and phrases can be repeated, even heard as question and answer from different people. The "performance" begins with one person starting and ends when the group feels the piece has reached a natural closure. This type of text rendering is particularly good for seeing thematic and rhetorical patterns, for heightening the living sense of the work, for allowing the group to take responsibility for recreating the text.

9. Read the text as answers to questions posed by the group. Someone asks a question of the text, and the appropriate passages, lines, or phrases are read in response.

2012

10. Read the text to emphasize its thematic or structural or grammatical patterns. Determine beforehand what themes/rhetorical devices/grammatical patterns seem important, then assign one to three people to each theme/device/pattern. Each small group underlines the passages relevant to their idea, then the text is read out loud by one person with these smaller groups chiming in simultaneously as their underlined passages occur. This is tricky to do at first, but provides a wonderful way of seeing the relationship of textual patterns. This can be done as a grammatical exercise (for either English or foreign languages) or as a thematic exercise.

—Prepared by Paul Connolly and associates from the Institute for Writing & Thinking, Bard College

Handout for Students
Effective Revision as Radical Revision
C. Moore, New York University and N. B. Wallack, Columbia University

Getting started:
Note what responses or comments your readers have given you on your draft, and consider what concerns you have about it yourself, then try a few of the approaches outlined in the list of prompts below. Each prompt is followed by a principle so that you will understand the goal of the prompt and the writerly beliefs or values that generated it.

Why only try a few?
Because you don't want to overwhelm yourself. Focusing on parts and pieces of your draft will help you to make some immediate and tangible changes in your work. It is much harder to attempt to revise a piece of writing when the task is unspecified, and when the time-frame is indefinite. Radical revision strategies are designed to focus your attention on particular kinds of work to do. While you can work on each prompt for as long as you like, you can get a lot done by writing for ten or fifteen minutes each on the prompts you've chosen.

Why are there so many approaches?
Because different writers are working on different things—not every writer is in the same place. As many experienced writers know, each new project brings new challenges and reminds us of older ones. For example, many people write "working" beginnings to their poems and essays as placeholders for radically revised ones, which they compose only after they have reached the end of their drafts. This common practice demonstrates how writers create spaces in their processes for discovery, and how they anticipate the need for radical revision. The radical revision prompts offer you additional strategies for making discoveries during your drafting process.

How will radical revision improve my writing?
Radical revision is focused on helping you to clarify your ideas, to make explicit connections between parts of your draft, and to identify alternative structures for your draft. Initially, new writing may make your draft messier in terms of your grammar or syntax, but you will be able to address those issues during a final stage of revision. Since radical revision requires you to make active decisions about your work, you will improve your current draft, but you will also gain valuable insight into issues you can then anticipate in future work.

<u>Radically Revising Essays</u>

Prompts for generating missing text
1. **Go to a place in your draft where you need to say more. Write to explain. Exhaust yourself.** Principle: In early drafts, writers make associative leaps between elements, but don't explain their terms fully. But why exhaust yourself? When you write a little bit too much, you force a little past what you know.

2. **Go to a place in the draft where you seem to be getting at your idea. Write to explain what that idea might be.** Principle: Since many writers get to their ideas only at the end of their draft, this allows the writer to know that she has work to do in other places in the draft. It makes an idea specific when it was previously only almost said or implied.
3. **Write a summary of one of the texts you are working with. Find a place for it in your draft.** Principle: Good writers need to provide context for their audience who may not have not have read what they've read.
4. **Find a key image or key language in your draft. Write to explain what this image or language might mean.** Principle: Images and even individual words often contain ideas and questions that reveal themselves with closer reading and writing.

Prompts for making connections
1. **Write an unexpected, but connected story that comes to mind as you read your draft. You may not know how it fits, but write about it anyway.** Principle: Writers often need help with the show/don't tell problem. A surprising story can also offer a tension or highlight a dilemma that the writer may be ignoring or can't yet see.
   Find a place in a published text that helps you think about your idea. Copy the passage out and explain how it connects. Find a place for it in your draft. Principle: In early drafts writers often don't know why they've chosen a particular passage, but at this point they can often begin to choose texts and passages that really speak to what they are discovering.
2. **Use a passage from another text to resist or doubt something you are writing about. Write to explain the counterargument.** Principle: Good writers often include counterarguments to demonstrate that they understand the complexity of the issue they are exploring.
3. **Write a paragraph in which you incorporate two texts. Put these texts in conversation with one another. (How do they extend, confirm, complicate, contradict, correct, or debate one another?)** Principle: Typical compare-and-contrast paragraphs or essays can be derailed because the motivation is insufficiently articulated. Putting texts in conversation around an idea or a question can help.

Prompts for clarifying an essay's focus or argument
1. **Rewrite completely the beginning of your draft to articulate specifically the problem your essay is exploring, or to change its focus, tone, or contract.** Principle: Early beginnings are often just a placeholder. Writers often need to create a new beginning to accommodate new thinking.
2. **Rewrite completely the ending of your draft to account for how your thinking has changed from the beginning and middle of your essay.** Principle: Similar to the previous one, but endings are often even more difficult for writers than introductions.
3. **Find an arbitrary (six to eight) number of claims, concepts, or questions in your draft that are most important to what you have written. Write a six to**

eight line poem that demonstrates how these claims are related to one another. Principle: Sometimes shifting genres can allow writers to clarify thinking or ideas and then return to the original genre. It can also lead to a distillation of thinking. Sometimes the writer might even make another related piece of writing.

4. **Print out your draft and cut it up into sections (a section can be as small as a sentence) that each contain some discrete piece of thinking. Ask a friend to reassemble the parts in a new order that makes sense, and to tape it to blank sheets of paper, leaving blank space between ideas that are not explicitly connected. If you like this new order, consider what you might need to write in the blank spaces to make transitions or to flesh out ideas. Throw away pieces that repeat one another in essence or in fact.** Principle: Writers often need to radically rethink their parts and how they relate to the whole or the idea. This strategy also allows for cutting.

Radically Revising Poems

Prompts for re-imagining

1. **Go to a place in your poem where you would like to say more or explain something. Create three new images or a stanza or two.** Principle: In early drafts, writers often make associative leaps between elements, but don't explain their ideas or images fully. But why exhaust yourself? When you write a little bit too much, you force yourself a little past what you know.

2. **Cut up the poem line by line with scissors. Spread out the lines in front of you or re-arrange them or ask a friend to re-arrange them in the order that makes sense to her. Add to the poem or cut in response to this new order.** Principle: Writers often need to radically rethink their parts and how they relate to the whole or the idea. This strategy also allows for cutting.

3. **Write a new beginning to your poem.** Principle: Writing a new beginning can help writers articulate what the rest of the poem is or should be about.

4. **Change the point of view of the poem. For example, if the poem is in first person, change it to second or third.** Principle: A shift in point of view can often reveal the idea in the poem or the focus on the poem. Who should this poem matter to? Who is central to the poem? What speaker's voice is most relevant or interesting to the poem?

5. **Write a new ending to your poem.** Principle: Writing a new ending can help writers articulate what the rest of the poem is or should be about.

6. **Write the prose version of the poem or the story embedded in the poem. What can you take from this prose version or story, keeping in mind the original poem itself or that you are still writing a poem?** Principle: Changing the genre of a piece can often allow writers to discover new thinking or ideas in the original piece.

Prompts for clarifying and tightening

7. **Cut at least five lines from your poem. Or cut the parts of your poem that don't seem like a poem.** Principle: Cutting can help writers articulate what to say or get to the kernel of an idea or image.

8. **Fine tune, or make more specific the similes, metaphors, and/or images in your poem.** Principle: Fresh images, metaphors, and language are integral to any good writing. Getting rid of tired language and clichés can reveal new more interesting language and thinking and enhance the pleasure of the reader.

9. **Bring two poems together to create one poem or create two poems out of one.** Principle: Some drafts are actually more than one piece of writing and untangling this writing can allow the writer to revise with more focus.

10. **Consider the syntax or verbs in your poem. What kind of sentence or line are you interested in creating in this poem? Change your line length to alter the shape of the poem or change your verb tenses and re-read the poem out loud.** Principle: Changes in the syntax, verb choice, line length, and shape of the poem can alter the meaning and provide pleasure for the writer and reader of the poem.

INSTITUTE FOR WRITING & THINKING
Bard College PO Box 5000, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY 12504-5000 **Phone** 845-758-7484 **E-mail** iwt@bard.edu
www.writingandthinking.org

Process Writing and Metacognitive Thinking

Various perceptual, emotional, and cultural blocks interfere with our freedom to explore and manipulate ideas, observed James Adams in *Conceptual Blockbusting: A Guide to Better Ideas* (Norton, 1980: 2nd edition). His list of emotional blocks includes:

1. Fear of taking a risk, making a mistake, failing
2. Low tolerance for ambiguity: overriding desire for order and security, fear of confusion or chaos
3. Preference for judging, not generating, ideas
4. Tension: inability to relax, incubate, "sleep on it"
5. Lack of challenge: problems fail to engage interest
6. Inflexibility: inability to redefine challenge, to see a larger problem, to make the work one's own
7. Excessive zeal: over-motivation to succeed quickly,
8. Undeveloped access to all areas of imagination and all tools of thinking, inability to change tools
9. Lack of imaginative control
10. Inability to distinguish reality from fantasy

When students stand back from their work and think about their own thinking (metacognition) and record in writing their process of writing an essay, working on a mathematical problem, conducting a lab experiment, or analyzing a social issue, they often discover similar blocks in their thinking—which they can begin to avoid:

- A tendency to create and criticize ideas simultaneously: to edit and correct work even as generative thinking is beginning, trying to get the "right answer" quickly
- Fear of audience: expectation of harsh external standards and of being judged severely
- An unspoken limiting sense of task, of what are permissible, appropriate, possible procedures for doing a job
- A sense of insufficient time, of lacking "the illusion of infinite time" in which creative work happens
- Resistance (often with good reason) to an "assigned" task, inability to take responsibility for modifying it, making it one's own
- Premature desire for closure that precludes adding, changing, expanding, gathering ideas, or revising one's work
- A solitary sense, derived from the isolated character of much mental work, that "we perish each alone," not knowing whether our problems and anxieties are unique or common

When students allow themselves to observe and record their own learning behavior in process writing; when they explore ideas tentatively in probative language; when they expect to make changes; when they look for meaning and order to emerge from the work process itself; when

2012

they trust that the very acts of thinking and writing help them to think and compose; when they hear the process writing of other students and realize they are not alone, students work more easily, creatively, and critically.

Three "generic" questions for process writing are:
1. Past: How did you do what you did? A closely detailed report?
2. Present: What is your present sense of it? What works, what doesn't?
3. Future: If you had more time, what would you do next?

—Prepared by Paul Connolly and associates from the Institute for Writing & Thinking, Bard College, 1992: revised, 2011

Collaborative Learning

COLLABORATIVE WORK

1. (a) Form groups of 4-5, (b) choosing a "Recorder" to report back for each group to the whole class and (c) reading the text under study aloud, without discussion, to become familiar with it. (5 min.)
2. Pause for everyone to write about three questions or "prompts." (10 min.)
3. (a) Hear each person's response read aloud, around the group, without discussion. (10 min.)
   (b) In conversation, seek "consensus" and "dissensus"—defined as the most everyone in the group can agree to believe and what its members agree must remain in doubt. This conversation may follow hearing responses to *each* question or after responses to *all* the questions, as each group prefers. End by reviewing the Recorder's sense of consensus/dissensus, to test that it reflects the sense of the group. (20 min.)
4. Groups report to the whole class and, through continuing conversation, seek a sharper sense of consent/dissent both within the class and between the class and the larger "discourse community." (15 min.) TOTAL TIME: 60+ min.

COLLABORATIVE QUESTIONS

Reflective practitioners make knowledge through "reflective conversation with the materials of a situation," suggests Donald Schon in *The Reflective Practitioner* (Basic Books, 1983). Good questions begin such conversation. When creating questions for the group to use as the basis for focused freewriting, keep the following in mind:

1. Ask no more than three sequenced questions, brief, not over-determined (leading to a single answer), carefully phrased.
2. Questions may be odd-angled, even ambiguous, giving students permission to interpret and clarify the questions, as well as to respond to them.
3. Questions may be complex, seeking reflective understanding, not simple information, and at least one of them, the first, may make a personal connection with the text.

COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

When first introducing collaborative learning, ask students to write and talk metacognitively about the process:

1. What happened as you discussed the text? What did you learn? From whom?
2. Describe your role in the group. How did you feel about it? Describe another's role and how you felt about that.
3. What was the effect of seeking consensus and dissensus?
4. Describe my teacher's role.

Task is everything in collaborative teaching: forming groups; choosing textual passages that are challenging yet manageable; posing questions and writing prompts; timing activities.

—Prepared by Ken Bruffee and associates from the Institute for Writing & Thinking, Bard College

2012

Principles of Writing & Sequencing Prompts

1. "All there is to thinking is seeing something noticeable, which makes you see something you weren't noticing, which makes you see something that isn't even visible."

   —Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It*

   Ask first about what is **noticeable**; then, about what is **peripherally visible**; finally, about what is **invisible** (i.e., interpretive and evaluative questions about meaning and worth).

2. Three is a good number of questions; four are too many and two are too skimpy.

3. Make a personal connection with the first question, inviting some writing not necessarily <u>about</u> the self but <u>out of</u> the self, i.e., some writing that is invested, engaged, subjective.

4. Emily Dickinson begins a poem:

   Tell all the Truth but tell it slant –
   Success in Circuit lies

   Particularly the first time, ask an **odd-angled** question that relaxes the imagination.

5. Never ask a question to which you know the answer. Knowing **an** answer is okay, but questions should be genuinely inquiring, capable of fresh, multiple answers, and not testing what is on the teacher's mind.

6. Invite translation—questions that require explaining something, for example, by analogy or by shift of audience.

7. Ask experimental, not empirical questions—questions that probe and test their environment, rather than only gathering data. John Dewey, in *The Quest for Certainty*, observes that science is often mistakenly associated with empiricism, rather than with experimentation. Experimentation turns the key of a question in the lock of the world; what opens is knowledge.

8. Are there "generic" prompts that might be adapted to many purposes? Yes, for example: "What do you need to believe for it to seem true that…?"—a question that asks about the warrants supporting a claim (to borrow Stephen Toulmin's language from *The Uses of Argument*).

—Prepared by Paul Connolly and associates from the Institute for Writing & Thinking, Bard College

2012

# Informal Writing: Uses and Kinds

USES

Informal Writing is done both in preparation for, and quite independently of, formal writing assignments in a course. It is freewriting, unconstrained by any need to appear correctly in public. It is not yet arranging, asserting, arguing. It is still reflecting and questioning. This is probative, speculative, generative thinking that is written in class or at home to develop the language of learning. It may not always be read by a teacher. Generally, it is not graded. Parts of it are often heard in class, but as a means of collaborative learning, not of individual testing. Its basic purpose is to help students to become independent, active learners by creating for themselves the language essential to their personal understanding. Specifically, informal written language serves:

1. **To develop abilities:** the abilities to define, classify, summarize; to question; to deconstruct complex patterns; to generate evaluation criteria; to establish inferences; to imagine hypotheses; to analyze problems; to identify procedures.

2. **To develop methods:** for example, methods of close, inquisitive, reactive reading; of recording and reporting data (observing); of organizing and structuring data into generalizations; of formulating theories; and, most importantly, of recognizing and applying the "methods" themselves.

3. **To develop knowledge:** knowledge about central concepts in a course, but also, for example, knowledge about one's own problem-solving, thinking, learning, language; about knowledge itself ("metacognition"); about the broad aims and exact methods of a discipline.

4. **To develop attitudes:** for example, attitudes toward learning, knowing oneself and one's work; toward mistakes and errors; toward the knowledge and opinions of others; the attitudes that affect behaviors and, therefore, aptitudes.

5. **To develop communal learning:** encouraging, for example, open exploration and discovery in a community of inquiry, rather than isolated competition; to promote "connected," not separated, teaching and learning; to develop active listening; to teach through tasks, rather than just through data; and, finally, to locate the motivation for learning not in the "relevance" of the subject or in the performance of the teacher but in the social dynamic of the learning community.

6. **To develop, in summary, general capacities for learning:** the ability to question; to create problems (as well as solutions); to wonder; to think for oneself while working with others.

KINDS

1. **Freewriting.** To become centered, present for the learning that is about to begin, grounding out the static we bring to class—time to breathe, hear oneself think. What's on your mind that needs acknowledgement, to be set aside for the moment?

2. **Focused freewriting.** All reflective, probative, speculative writing, freewritten yet focused, that explores a term, problem, issue, question openendedly. First thoughts on a subject, casting a wide net of inquiry. May be used to initiate or conclude a class discussion or, mid-class, to focus a discussion that is confused or lacks energy: What are we learning?

3. **Attitudinal writing.** Focused freewriting expressing the attitudes that influence aptitudes for learning. How do you feel about…? What do you bring to this reading, issue, or subject? What difficulties did you have with the last assignment? Where are you stuck? What is most difficult for you at this point? What questions do you have? What have you valued most in the course? What more or different do you need to know or do?

4. **Metacognitive process writing.** Examining how and why you acted (or will act) in a situation—done before or after reading an assignment, taking an exam, working on a problem, writing a paper, thinking about an issue. Anticipating and observing one's own learning behaviors, in order to become more autonomous, less passively reliant on the information and authority of teachers and texts.

5. **Narrative writing.** Stories, related to what one is thinking about—one's own thinking. Collecting all that one thinks—thoughts, feelings, memories, associations, biases. Personal, subjective, particular writing and holistic thinking, done prior to organizing linear discourse.

6. **Explaining errors.** On a test or homework—a form of "process writing" (#4) that helps students and teachers recognize where learning went wrong, and how and why.

7. **Listing questions.** Another form of "process writing" that helps students and teachers recognize where learning went wrong, and how and why.

8. **Creating problems.** Rather than solutions, defining problems and issues of one's own in the class.

9. **Quotation, paraphrase, summary.** What was noticeable in a reading or class?

10. **Defining.** One's own definitions, however imprecise initially, used to develop conceptual understanding in a way that memorization of textbook terms does not attempt.

11. **Writing to read.** Double-entry or "dialectical" notebook: recording and reporting what a reading says and, in a facing column or page, responding to the text. Convergent and divergent thinking. Noticing what both the reader and the author of the text think. Dialectical notebooks integrate attitudinal writing, questioning, summarizing, and process writing.

12. **Learning logs, microthemes, collaborative problem solving**—this list only begins to suggest possibilities.

—Prepared by Paul Connolly and associates of the Institute for Writing & Thinking, Bard College
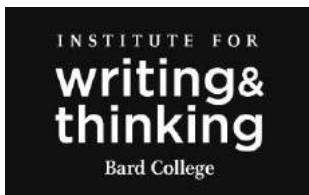
Believing and Doubting

PURPOSE

To introduce students to the complexity of argument and the multiple sides of issues as well as to the importance of suspension of judgment until the consequences of a position have been thoroughly explored. This is a useful strategy in conjunction with a close reading assignment, a dialectical notebook, or on its own in connection with students' writing.

PROCEDURE (This should be modeled in the large group.)

1. Students each write a concise statement of their position on an issue or text.

2. Working in small groups, students read their statements for the following group response:

   a. Believing or operating on the philosopher's "principle of charity." Group members offer arguments, information, analogies, examples, references, and sources in support of the student's statement. Another way to introduce this part of the strategy is to ask, "What would have to be true in order to believe this position?

   b. Doubting or devil's advocacy. The group now assists the student in learning how this position may be attacked by offering counter-arguments, examples, etc.

ALTERNATIVE PRACTICE

1. Students write a concise statement of their position <u>on the board.</u> Working in the whole group, students first "believe" and then "doubt" each assertion. In this way, students learn from hearing each other's responses.

2. Working with a selection from a difficult text—to which the student might be preparing to write a response—each student writes her belief and doubt and shares this in a small group. After writing and hearing, the student writes, "Where is your thinking now? What do you need to know?"

—The inspiration for this practice comes from Peter Elbow's essay, "Methodological Doubting and Believing: Contraries in Inquiry," in his book *Embracing Contraries*, New York: Oxford University Press (1986).

2012
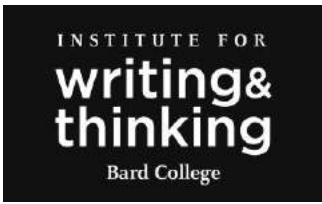
Dialectical Response Notebooks

PURPOSE
To have students interact with a difficult text and with one another through writing as a mode of critical thinking.

MATERIALS
(1) Brief text pertaining to issues or ideas you are treating in class. The text you choose should be a challenging one. (2) Notebook paper divided into three columns widthwise.

PROCEDURE
(50 minute class session) Assign text the night before asking students to underline and/or annotate what they find interesting and puzzling, as well as any aspects of the material you wish to stress. Tell them to look up in the dictionary any words, names, places they don't recognize. Alternatives: this could be done in class at the end of the period the day before, either as reading or as oral text rendering. (See IWT handout "Text Rendering/Collaborative Reading."). In class, have students choose two or three brief passages in the text to comment on as follows:

After numbering the chosen passages in the margin of the text
1. Comment: Place corresponding number in the left-most column of the notebook and write comment. Continue until all numbered passages are commented on.

2. Response: Students now exchange both texts and notebooks with a partner. Each student responds to the numbered portion of their partner's comments in the middle column.

3. Reply: Partners return texts and notebooks to one another and reply to the responses in the third column, exchanging notebooks a final time to read replies.

COMMENT	RESPONSE	REPLY
1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ Etc.	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ Etc.	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ Etc.

This procedure can, of course, be continued for as long as time allows within a class period, with the exchange moving on to second or third pages. It may also be done as an ongoing process between designated partners outside class in response to assigned texts for the duration of a subject unit with notebooks to be turned in to teachers at the end of the unit.

—Prepared by Paul Connolly and associates from the Institute for Writing & Thinking, Bard College

2012