Write-to-Learn Activities

Exit tickets: Useful activity that can be used quickly each day. Collect at the end of class to check student engagement and understanding (can also be used for attendance). Ex: take 2 minutes: On a slip of paper, write down one thing you learned today, one thing that changed your mind, or one thing you still have doubts about.

Listing: simple lists can be used in all kinds of ways. Have students list questions they have about the material, important points from an article, aspects of their work they need help with, ideas they have for their next paper, etc.

Revision plans: after receiving feedback on a paper, students write a revision plan in which they explain how they understand the comments, and what they plan to do in revision to address the comments on their papers.

Writing inventory: When students hand in a draft of a paper to review, have them critically reflect on their progress in the paper thus far. Students can reflect on what is going well, tell you what they need help with, and ask questions.

Speed date a thesis: Students post a working thesis statement on large pieces of paper around the room. Students then suggest revisions to the thesis on the paper, spending only 5 minutes at each thesis.

The Believing and Doubting Game (courtesy of Peter Elbow): First, play the believing game. Make a list of the reasons why you might agree with an argument presented in a reading. Accept their point of view and try to extend the paper's argument--provide additional examples, suggest questions that might provoke further thought, discuss parallels, etc. Then, play the doubting game: Make a list of all the weaknesses in the argument. Provide counter-evidence and counterarguments. If you did not accept this argument, what objections might you raise? Are there other solutions or interpretations for this problem?

Letters: Letter-writing can be useful as it provides a clear audience and purpose for the writing task. Students could write to various audiences: scholars in the field, each another, public officials, etc.

Scenarios: Invent a single scenario that will challenge students to write their way out of a difficult situation or to apply what they have learned in class up to that point to a new (and possibly real) situation. Give the class five minutes to write their own ideas for addressing the scenario and discuss what they came up with as a class.

Reflective notebooks: Use the last five minutes of class time once a week to have students write in a reflective notebook. Each week assign a single writing prompt for the class based on the material you covered that week, and require that students write to that prompt before they leave for the day.
The reading journal: This assignment is similar to the reflective notebook, but is done outside of class when students are reading assigned materials.

The freewrite: At the beginning of class, ask students to take five minutes to write freely (without any attention to grammar, spelling, punctuation, focus, organization, etc) about the reading assignment from the night before. You can provide some prompts for their writing, but the main point of a freewrite is to get as much thinking down on the page as possible, so students shouldn't feel pressured to answer your prompts if they want to follow another line of thought. Ask for 2-3 volunteers to share their freewrites with the class and use these to generate a class discussion about the reading.

Bumper sticker or Tweets: Ask students to compose 140-character posts that pose critical questions or challenges based on the material covered that week, summarize the week's work, or suggest new information that the student would like to have about the topic.

The 1-minute paper: On 3x5 note cards, have students compose a single compelling argument from the course readings or material, answer a single challenging question in a single sentence, or compose their own question on one side of the card and pass that card to a classmate. Then have the classmate write in response to that question. Collect these at the end of class and use a small sampling of them as discussion starters for the next class.

Discussion Questions: Have students prepare discussion questions about their readings before class. Collect questions at the beginning of class, and use the best ones to stimulate discussion about the material.

Other resources for WAC-y ideas:


The WAC Clearinghouse: http://wac.colostate.edu/
Has links to WAC journals and books, as well as teaching resources