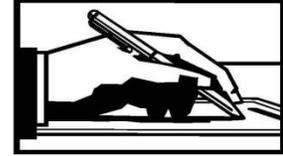


Teaching with Writing (TWW) Tip



Reflective Writing for Metacognition and Synthesis

Rationale: Students may view writing assignments as tests or as merely the means to a larger end (communicating results, voicing a position, completing an assignment, earning a grade). With such a viewpoint, writers may readily assume that their work on a writing project did not affect them as writers or as learners. One way to help students become more conscious of what they have learned by completing writing assignments is to prompt their reflection.

Reflect on a particular learning activity

Have students write reflectively after completing the major project or paper in a course. Possible prompts include:

- What steps did you take in fulfilling this assignment? Were any of these steps new to you?
- Where did you get stuck? How did you get “unstuck?”
- What do you think is the strongest element of this draft?
- What would you work on if you had more time to revise?

Such reflections can be a required part of the original assignment, and can factor into the grade. Or they can be less formal: required at submission, but not graded. In either case, these reflective opportunities can help students become aware of choices they made and of growth as writers; they can also help instructors focus their responses.

Reflect while in process

Reflective writing may be most familiar to students when it is *ex post facto* (as above, or in a [Revision Memo](#)), but metacognition is equally useful in the midst of a writing project, in the form of [a learning log, a blog, or brief in-class writing](#). Such opportunities also give students opportunities to practice reflection, and allow instructors to discuss and underscore its importance and functions.

Reflect on the course as a whole

Option 1

Ask students to write a reflection on their writing in the entire course. Possible prompts can be variants of those listed above. If the course involved experiential learning, service-learning, or attending on-campus or off-campus events, this can also be an opportunity for students to think further about those experiences in the light of subsequent course readings, discussions, concepts, or theories.

Option 2

Ask students to write “Advice on How to Succeed in This Course” for the next group of students who take the course; you might ask students to focus particularly on the writing in the course. Tell students that you will publish the most helpful ones on the course website the next time you teach the course (and let them know when you have done so).

This activity gives students a chance to reflect on their learning while recasting it for a different audience and purpose; it will also give you an interesting perspective on the students' experiences.

Learn more:

- “[Metacognition: Cultivating Reflection to Help Students Become Self-Directed Learners](#)” (Sweetland Center for Writing, University of Michigan)
- Bean, John C. (2008). *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. 2nd Ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008.

Questions? Visit us online at <http://writing.umn.edu/tww/index.html>

Further support: Contact a member of the WAC (Writing Across the Curriculum) team for a phone, email, or face-to-face teaching consultation:

<http://z.umn.edu/twwconsultation>

Our purpose is to provide practical strategies for teaching with writing. Our goal: to offer timely and pragmatic support to faculty members and instructors who teach with writing in undergraduate and graduate courses in all disciplinary areas.