WRITING ACTIVITIES

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Writing activities encompass the broadest range of assessment opportunities, depending on ...

- Length
- Formality
- Development
- Reference to external sources
Writing activities can assess ...

• Higher order thinking skills
• Basic academic success skills
• Discipline-specific knowledge and skills
• Liberal arts and academic values
• Work and career preparation
• Personal development
Writing activities are particularly well-suited for higher order thinking skills.
Writing activities show if the student can develop

– the ability to apply principles and generalizations already learned to new problems and situations
– analytic skills
– problem-solving skills
– the ability to draw reasonable inferences from observations
– the ability to synthesize and integrate information and ideas
– the ability to think creatively
– the ability to distinguish between fact and opinion

Adapted from Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers, 1993
GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND BEST PRACTICES

Because writing activities vary considerably in purpose and form, instructors should identify in advance which learning outcome(s) the writing activity will assess and construct the assignment accordingly.
GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND BEST PRACTICES

Short, informal, low-risk writing activities

– can prepare students for discussion or longer projects
– may be assessed holistically and count only for a small percentage
– are formative in purpose
– are designed to help students prepare or reflect upon other course assignments
– will be one page or less
Writing activities that are longer in length, formal in presentation, and worth a high percentage of the course grade help assess higher order thinking skills.
GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND BEST PRACTICES

Longer writing activities require...

- More detailed guidance, outlining the expectations for success
- Clear criteria for evaluating success, such as a grading rubric distributed in advance
Writing activities are particularly useful in the online teaching environment because they demonstrate process as well as final product.
Short informal writing assignments can ...

- track progress towards a longer formal writing assignment and demonstrate student ownership
- help the instructor ensure a match between the student writer and the completed assignment
Faculty Example:
English 355 “Literature for Children”

Students write two longer essays which assess higher order thinking skills.

Essay 1: Analyze a picture book’s text and illustrations

Essay 2: Create a persuasive argument about a key literary element of a novel
Faculty Example:
English 355 “Literature for Children”

For Essay 1, students...
• Analyze a picture book’s text and illustrations through application of illustration theory, literary concepts, research, and critical thinking skills
• Provide a brief background on the author/illustrator
• Write a literary book review
Faculty Example:
English 355 “Literature for Children”

• Assignment sheet walks students through the steps they should take to ...
  – assemble the information
  – reflect on that information
  – synthesize that information within the length restrictions of the assignment
• Grading rubric highlights the criteria for evaluation of the completed essay
For Essay 2, students...

• Develop the argument for the selected literary element

• Incorporate at least two sources beyond the novel
  – A peer-reviewed scholarly article
  – A second peer-reviewed scholarly article or the textbook used for the class
Faculty Example:
English 355 “Literature for Children”

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• Grading rubric highlights the criteria for evaluation of the completed essay