



ELON
UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR
Writing
Excellence

Writing-to-Learn Activities: Text-Based & Multimodal

Main Takeaway

Writing-to-learn activities are informal, low-stakes exercises that increase student engagement in course content, deepen student learning, and help faculty quickly assess comprehension. These activities can be text-based or multimodal, and they should feel approachable, flexible, and can be integrated into any discipline. These activities can be integrated as isolated activities throughout the term or be used to build up to a longer writing assignment. Note that writing-to-learn activities are not the same as short assignments, which may receive instructor comments and have grading criteria.

Why Use Writing-to-Learn?

- Encourages deeper thinking, questioning, and making connections
- Low-pressure way for students to experiment with ideas
- Builds student confidence before formal writing tasks
- Helps faculty identify confusion early
- Improves class discussions and peer interactions

Text-Based Writing	Multimodal Writing
Typed or hand-written reflections	Audio, video, or blog-style posts
Pen and paper, Word, Moodle, etc.	Flipgrid, blog, short videos, podcast, etc.
Critical thinking, idea generation	Engagement, creative expression
Very simple	More complex and involved
Credit/No credit	Credit/No credit
Analytical and introspective	Expressive and creative

Multimodal Activities

- Add variety for both students and instructors
- Students can use phones to record audio or video responses
- Students can access simple free software
- Easily shared with peers and instructors

Example Multimodal Activities

- Brainstorm ideas or respond to prompts via audio or video
- Respond informally or collect thoughts before recording audio or video
- Create a blog that can contain all three modes (written, audio, video)
- See free blog software

Writing-to-Learn Examples Across Disciplines

- Math: Keep a problem-solving journal
- Science: Reflect on experiential limitations
- Humanities: Free-write about gaps in scholarship or thesis ideas

Planning and Assessment

- No rubric or detailed comments required
- Usually assigned credit for completion or simple point system
- Track with a checklist or completion grade
- Let students collect their work in digital forms
- Develop “Reading Worksheets” that ask students to answer questions you pose, identify an article’s main thesis, or list and reflect on key quotes

Ask students to respond to prompts like:

- Talk through where/why you get lost when understanding an article or solving a math equation.
- Brainstorm possible thesis statements you might for your next paper. List sources you might use to prove each thesis.
- Explain something that is unclear to you, or the most important takeaways, after completing this course unit.

Example Writing-to-Learn Activities:

- Sean Bean: 22 Exploratory Writing Ideas
- Free tools: Squarespace, Wix, Weebly, WordPress