PRINCIPLES OF WRITING-TO-LEARN

- Writing doesn't have to be graded.
- Covering less content with more writing often results in better learning.
- Teachers who assign writing don't need to be grammar experts.

EXAMPLES

**SOCIOLOGY:** The second session of each week is a grad-student-led discussion. In preparation for that discussion, students are required to bring a brief summary of the previous session’s lecture and a 50-word take-away from the assigned reading. These are graded quickly, credit/no-credit, and are used to seed discussion, with volunteers or selected students reading their summaries to get the review going.

**BUSINESS:** For a business communications class, the professor wants the students to have more practice at writing memos. He triples the number of memo assignments. Students submit memos anonymously, then peer-review them according to a class rubric, each piece receiving two anonymous reviews. Writers see their feedback and discuss it in class, then reflect in writing on how they will improve next time. Only the last memo is formally graded. Everything else is handled as credit/no-credit.

**HISTORY:** To help students better understand categories of sources, the professor has them conduct a 3-step assignment. First, they propose a research question, something they might be able to answer through closer investigation of historical documents. Then they find and analyze four sources (two primary, two secondary), identifying what kinds of insights they’re good for, and how the secondary sources use their own primary sources. Then they take a tentative shot at answering their research question. Each stage becomes an opportunity for class discussion about challenges encountered, and most of the feedback comes from these talks.

**BIOLOGY:** For a large Introductory Biology course, the professor wants to give students more practice responding to essay questions because they are struggling with them in final exams. She gives students several in-class practice essays, with templates to scaffold responses. Each student first writes a response and then meets with their team to select a “best” answer, discussing pros and cons of each and submitting all answers in a team folder. Each participating writer gets a “check” in the gradebook. Exemplary answers are shared with the class at the next meeting. Only when students take the final does any writing get graded.