

The Value of Writing-to-Learn Activities
(According to John C. Bean's *Engaging Ideas*)

WHY EXPLORATORY WRITING?

Common Objections

It will take too much time!

- ⦿ Only if you feel compelled to read and respond to everything they write.
- ⦿ Read some, not all.
- ⦿ Respond to some, not all.
- ⦿ Respond well, read for insight.

Students don't like busy work!

- ⦿ That may be related to learning styles.
- ⦿ Grade- vs. learning-orientation.
- ⦿ How effectively is WtL integrated into course design?
- ⦿ How to pose self-sponsored questions?
- ⦿ Help students see its value.
 - Incorporate it into the texture of the course
 - Use WtL to stimulate class discussion
 - Make the case for its value.

It's junk writing that promotes bad habits.

- ⦿ Bad analogy between writing and house keeping, i.e. sloppiness is a vice.
- ⦿ Writing is a developmental stage in a process of cultivating and articulating an understanding of something.
- ⦿ It's messy because creating is messy. Order comes later.
- ⦿ It's thesis-seeking rather than thesis-supporting.

Why It's Valuable

- ⦿ Presents students with higher-order critical thinking problems.
- ⦿ Changes the way students approach course readings.
- ⦿ Creates higher level of class preparation and richer discussions.
- ⦿ Can be enjoyable for the instructor to read.
- ⦿ Can help the instructor get to know students.
- ⦿ Can help the instructor to assess learning problems as they arise rather than when it's too late.

Exploratory Learning Assignments as Formative Assessment

Facilitating and monitoring through class discussion

- Collaborative Small Group Tasks
- Paired Interviews

Submit Early in the Process

- Gain a sense of the direction your writers are headed
- Synthesize informal writing into drafts/stages in nascent formal assignments
- A Prospectus
- Two Sentences: Question and Thesis
- Abstracts

Efficient Methods for Feedback

- ⦿ Comment on drafts rather than on final projects, or allow rewrites
- ⦿ Make limited, focused comments and avoid marking errors—*especially* on WtL activities
- ⦿ Use “Models” feedback for short pieces