Common Place Views…

see CRITICAL THINKING as thinking “outside the box,” and understanding “both sides.”

see “WRITING” as, a matter of correctness, a reflection of thinking ability, or even a mask for poor thinking.

Better understandings…

Brookfield sees CRITICAL THINKING as, “a learning process that focuses on uncovering and checking assumptions, exploring alternative perspectives, and taking informed actions as a result” (xi).

A different view sees WRITING as a complex intellectual activity, a set of social practices associated with different areas of life, as purposeful and embedded in social goals and cultural practices, as constantly changing, and as a skill acquired and developed over time through processes of formal and informal learning (Barton and Hamilton 8).

“There is a growing consensus in our field that reading should be thought of as a constructive rather than as a receptive process: that "meaning" does not exist in a text but in readers and the representations they build. This constructive view of reading is being vigorously put forth, in different ways, by both literary theory and cognitive research. It is complemented by work in rhetoric which argues that reading is also a discourse act. That is, when readers construct meaning, they do so in the context of a discourse situation, which includes the writer of the original text, other readers, the rhetorical context for reading, and the history of the discourse. If reading really is this constructive, rhetorical process, it may both demand that we rethink how we teach college students to read texts and suggest useful parallels between the act of reading and the more intensively studied process of writing”. (Hass and Flower, 1988)

Reading Strategies

✔️ DO NOT use reading quizzes; quizzes encourage surface reading for correct answers
✔️ DO NOT lecture over readings; students will need help with difficult passages, but they must see that being an engaged reader is an expectation of their work outside of class (Flipped classes)

Instead,

- Model “rhetorical reading”; help students see how difficult texts (textbooks, articles, book chapters, etc.) are structured, how they address a specific audience, how the authors’ own viewpoint and assumptions are visible
- Describe your own reading strategies for different types of texts
- Show your own note taking strategies; students will benefit from seeing how you do it
- Talk with students about the meaning of the text, but also what the text does; emphasize how a reading works to help students understand what they need to do in their writing and then they also have a model for how to do it themselves
- Link reading and writing assignments:
  - Margin note taking
  - Reading logs/journals
  - Responses to teacher-posed questions
  - “Précis” assignment
  - Graphical Reading Maps
Writing Activities

One of the best ways to promote critical thinking in classes is to regularly assign exploratory writing in response to disciplinary problems. The benefits for teaching and learning are multiple.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;Freewrites&quot;</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Link to “formal writing”</th>
<th>Others...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... to gather thoughts ... to refocus lagging discussion ... to pose questions or concerns ... to summarize understanding</td>
<td>o Open-ended o Write every day o Response to teacher questions o Response to current events o Double-entry Response o Précis</td>
<td>o Rapid first drafts o Practice essay-exam questions o Thesis statement writing o Paragraph templates o Abstracts</td>
<td>o Outline text structure o Write out predictions of the text o Rewrite text for a different audience o List assumptions prior to reading, compare assumptions with information after reading o Concept Map</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When using writing in your classes, you have many options for the writing tasks you assign. The activities listed above can be used to help student achieve specific learning outcomes for your course, while others may be used to help students learn, experience, and understand the thinking and writing processes in your field.

Using Assessment Findings to Improve Instruction: To Revise and Improve Writing

Overall, the most frequent types of revision observed in the portfolios (n=174) addressed changes that preserved, rather than changed the meaning of the text:

- Source information added, removed, or modified (68%)
- Copyediting that reduced distracting errors (67%)
- Sentence-level changes in word choice, word order, and redundancy (55%)
- Paragraphs added, removed, or moved (55%)

The two least frequent types of revision observed addressed attempts students made to complicate their thinking:

- Implications and/or questions articulated (26%)
- Multiple or alternative perspectives are considered (30%).

However, revisions improved their essays the most addressed complexity of thinking and that were seen to improve essays the most addressed issues of complexity:

1. Source information has been added, removed, or modified to support claims/thesis (.80)
2. Implications and/or questions are articulated showing increased complexity of thought and audience awareness (.74)
3. Multiple or alternative perspectives are considered showing increased complexity of thought and audience awareness (.73)

What can you do to help students complicate their writing?

**Feedback-Oriented**
- In-class Peer Review
- Take-home Peer Review
- In-class Analysis of Peer Reviews
- Instructor feedback
- Teacher-Student Conference
- Writing Center visit

**Modeling-Oriented**
- In-class Discussion of Evaluation Criteria/Rubric
- In-class Workshop on Student Writing
- In-class Modeling of Revision
- In-class Sentence or Passage Revision (Using Computer)

**Reflective**
- Revision Plans
- “Self-Assessment” Questionnaire
- Reflective Essay
- “Track Changes” Drafts
- Portfolio with Reflective Cover Letter
## Course Design Principles

Problems, questions, or issues are the point of entry into the subject and a source of motivation for sustained inquiry. (Bean 5)

Courses are assignment-centered rather than text- or lecture-centered. Goals, methods, and evaluation emphasize using content rather than simply acquiring it. (Bean 5)

### Process of Creating a Writing Assignment Sequences

1. Determine, as well as possible, the essential features and strategies of the writing task.
2. Invent **gateway activities** that enable students to engage in those strategies by encouraging **inquiry** and generating **knowledge of discourse features** (Hillocks 149).
3. Develop sequences that are **engaging, building, integrative, and lead to independence**. These sequences should prepare students for and reinforce the gateway activities, which in turn, will enable students to develop the full range of strategies and general writing processes, required by the particular writing task.
4. Put sequence into **practice** and re-evaluate the full sequence so that it may be **redesigned** as necessary. (Hillocks)

Students are required to formulate and justify their ideas in writing or other appropriate modes. (Bean 5)

### Sources


---

**David S. Martins, UWP Director**

David.Martins@rit.edu

X56376