

Using Informal Writing Within Formal Writing Assignments

The following writing tasks may be incorporated as part of a formal writing assignment, perhaps making each item worth a point or two in the general scheme of the paper. These are valuable exercises for tuning students in to their writing processes and they require very little of the instructor's time. The key is to have the activities built in as REQUIREMENTS for the writing assignment-- that is, part of the grade.

- **Assignment Paraphrase.** On the day an assignment is handed out, **ask students to turn the assignment sheet over and write a three or four sentence paraphrase of it on the back.** Several students can read them aloud, and then the class can discuss the degree to which these paraphrases accurately reflect the work they've been asked to perform. (This one works well if students do it collaboratively, and it doesn't really need to be "graded," thus, just shared. It also helps you figure out if they know what the assignment is asking, from day one.)
- **Progress Statement.** Mid-way through a project or paper, have students write a self-evaluation of their progress on it, noting what they've accomplished thus far, what they're most satisfied with, and what specific work remains to be done. (This can be either a heads up for procrastinators, or an opportunity for students to think critically about their writing process.)
- **Assignment Cover Sheet.** On the day students turn in an essay, have them write for 5-10 minutes, reflecting on the project and discussing the process, and then hand that reflection in as a cover sheet to their assignment. *What problems and concerns did they have along the way, and how did they overcome them? What insights did they attain? Explain in what ways the project was and was not worthwhile. Can they pose one or two specific questions for the instructor to respond to?* Such cover sheets are quick reads which give the instructor a good sense of the typical kinds of problems students had and make responding easier and more focused.
- **Response to the Response.** When graded papers are distributed, students respond in writing to their instructor's comments. Students may be asked to paraphrase the end comments and identify one strength and one area to work on. They may be required to correct grammatical errors using an error assessment sheet, with help from the Writing Center.