

Writing to Learn

Wisconsin State Standards

Reading
Informational Texts
Range of Reading
and Text
Complexity

Grade Level
6-12

Purpose

Use with students to support comprehension: explicitly connect reading and writing on a variety and range of reading materials

When to Use

Before Reading
During Reading
After Reading

Grouping

Whole Group
Small Group
Partners
Individuals

ABOUT THE STRATEGY

WRITING TO LEARN is a strategy that helps students think deeply about a text by activating background knowledge about a text, recording thinking while reading a text, and extending thinking about what was read. It is used before, during, and after reading a text. This strategy supports students' comprehension by using writing to facilitate students' processing of their understanding of a text.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY

- Select the text passage to be used.
- Read the text yourself and then create writing prompts that will extend students' thinking about a text.
- Decide the format for students to write to learn (e.g., exit slip, 3-2-1, journal entry, paragraph response, notes).
- Introduce the strategy and establish its purpose.
- Have students write to learn, modeling how to respond to a writing prompt with an interactive write and a think aloud.
- Have students practice responding to writing prompts with multiple print and digital texts in diverse media, formats, and lengths.

MEASURING PROGRESS

- Teacher observation
- Conferencing
- Student journaling
- Writing to learn formats as formative, ongoing, and summative assessments

RESEARCH

- Anderson, N. L., & Briggs, C. (2011). Reciprocity between reading and writing: Strategic processing as common ground. *The Reading Teacher*, 64(7), 546-549.
- Bos, C. S. (1991). Reading-writing connections: Using literature as a zone of proximal development for writing. *Learning Disabilities Practices*, 6(4), 251-256.
- Fitzgerald, J., & Shanahan, T. (2000). Reading and writing relations and their development. *Educational Psychologist*, 35(1), 39-50.
- Weiser, B., & Mathes, P. (2011). Using encoding instruction to improve the reading and spelling performances of elementary students at risk for literacy difficulties: A best-evidence synthesis. *Review of Educational Research*, 81, 170-200.

Writing to Learn

Decide if you want students to write to learn before, during, and/or after reading a text. Then select a format for student to activate their learning, record their thinking while reading, and/or extend their thinking about what they read.

Before Reading	
Admit Slips	Students write on an assigned topic upon entering the classroom.
Yesterday's News	Students summarize the information from a presentation, discussion, reading, or lesson from the day before.
Crystal Ball	Students describe what they think will happen next in a book, lab, or class.
Artifact Prompt	Teacher sets out several "artifacts" (items around the classroom or home) and gives the students the following prompt: A good ____ is like a ____ because ____. Students explain how a concept, theme, etc. is like the artifact selected and presents reasons why. For example, a good lab conclusion is like a magnifying glass because it makes the important things easier to see.
Misconception Check	Teacher presents students with common or predictable misconceptions about a concept, principle or process then asks the students whether they agree or disagree. Students explain their responses. Format can be written, oral, multiple choice or true-false. (For example, Northern lights are caused by reflections off the glaciers.)
Brainstorming, Mind Dump, or Topic Blast	Can be used to pre-assess or gain access to prior knowledge. Teachers give students a topic or prompt in which they list or write all they know about the topic. Teachers can use this information to guide instruction.
K-W-H-L	Given a topic, students write in columns what they <i>Know</i> , what they <i>Want</i> to know, <i>How</i> they will learn it, and after the lesson, what they <i>Learned</i> . Students can share aloud or with a partner what they learned. Teachers can monitor student responses to guide instruction, as well as assess what was learned.
During Reading	
Annotations	Students interact with a text by writing notes in the margin and coding the text.
Notes	Students write the main idea and supporting details during/after interacting with a text.
After Reading	
Exit Slip or Ticket to Leave	A closure activity where students write on an assigned prompt.
Awards	Students recommend someone/something for an award the teacher creates supporting their reasons using concepts from class. For example, the Most influential leader in WWII Award.
3-2-1	Teacher creates writing prompts for students' response. For example, 3 ways to identify an insect, 2 ways insects differ from spiders, and 1 question I still have about insects.
Summary or Paragraph Response	Students write a short piece that contains the major ideas or concepts of a topic. The emphasis is on the use of as few words as possible that will accurately communicate the understanding of the concept.