

Teaching Learning Center

USING WRITING TO PROMOTE THINKING

John Bean identifies seven steps teachers can take to integrate writing and critical thinking into their course. Teachers must plan their course with these in mind and prepare a plan to foster them throughout the course.

Step 1: Become familiar with some of the general principles linking writing to learning and critical thinking. A way to begin the critical thinking process is to make students aware of the problems around them. It is thought by some that it is beneficial to begin every class with “something that is a problem or a cause for wonder,” John Dewey (1916). John Bean defines writing as “both a process of doing critical thinking and a product communicating the results of critical thinking.”

Step 2: Plan your course with critical thinking objectives in mind. Design assignments that require students to use the content they acquire rather than simply acquiring it. Problems, questions, and other issues are opportunities to delve into the subject and motivate students.

Step 3: Design critical thinking tasks for students to address. “A crucial step in teaching critical thinking is to develop good problems for students to think about,” says Bean. Tasks can be simple questions involving the required reading or complex issues regarding major disciplinary issues.

Step 4: Develop a repertoire of ways to give critical thinking tasks to students.

- ◆ Formal writing assignments
- ◆ Thought-provokers for exploratory writing
- ◆ Small group tasks for problem solving
- ◆ Inquiry-based class discussions
- ◆ Think-on-your-feet questions for ‘cold calling’ in class
- ◆ In-class debates, panel discussions, fishbowl questions
- ◆ Practice exam questions

Step 5: Develop strategies to include exploratory writing and talking in your courses. Engage students in active discussions that solve difficult problems. Once they learn to thoroughly analyze a specific issue and argue their point they will be better equipped to write successful exploratory papers.

Step 6: Develop effective strategies for coaching students in critical thinking. Critiques are valuable to show students the kind of critical thinking you are looking for.

Step 7: When assigning formal writing, treat writing as a process. Class time can be used effectively to brainstorm with classmates. Require students to then submit something early on in the writing process ie. a prospectus, question and thesis, or abstract. These are much easier to grade and provide some feedback while illustrating writing is a process.

Engaging Ideas, John C. Bean



TIME SAVING TIPS FROM THE TLC:

Use hotkeys when you can to save time! Here is a list of a few common and useful hotkeys.

- ◆ Ctrl + c = Copy
- ◆ Ctrl + v = Paste
- ◆ Ctrl + z = Undo
- ◆ Ctrl + x = Cut
- ◆ Ctrl + s = Save
- ◆ Ctrl + u = Underline
- ◆ Ctrl + i = Italics
- ◆ Ctrl + b = Bold
- ◆ Ctrl + p = Print
- ◆ Ctrl + f = Find
- ◆ Alt + Tab = Allows you to toggle between open windows
- ◆ Prntscrn = Copies a screenshot of the current screen to the clipboard
- ◆ Alt + Prntscrn = Copies a screenshot of a current active window to the clipboard



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“A crucial step in teaching critical thinking is to develop good problems for students to think about.”

-Engaging Ideas, John C. Bean

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PRODUCTIVITY TIPS:

This is a recap of Tim Xeriland's well received workshop titled 'Work Hackers.' Tim clues us in to a multitude of excellent time saving practices which streamline the workday resulting in far less stress! Here are a few of his great ideas in case you missed hearing them in person.

To-do lists: Many of us use a to-do list but end up with several things that we never get around to crossing off the list. Tim suggests the list be categorized by importance. If you have some tasks which are very large, it's a good idea to break those items down into smaller steps so you won't continue to put them off.

Park on a slope: Before you leave for the day organize your workstation so you will be able to 'hit the ground running' first thing in the morning. Studies show we are most productive in the morning so if you are able to jump right in when you arrive at your desk you will be able to mark more off your to-do list.

Focus on short bursts: Most people are able to concentrate for no more than 50 minutes at a time. Figure out how long you are capable of focusing your attention and work for that period of time then take a break. Tim suggests increasing this amount of time gradually over time and working up to 50 minutes or more if you are unable to focus for longer than a few minutes.

Stop caring about things that don't matter: Some things that have been on your to-do list forever may be able to be dropped off. You may be able to locate a business to do a task for you like scanning all of your pictures to make them digital.

HAVE A SAFE AND HAPPY THANKSGIVING!