

Using Writing to Improve Student Engagement in the Online Classroom

Utilizing a variety of writing activities, both graded and ungraded, is a good way to boost virtual student engagement. These activities can be adapted to synchronous or asynchronous classes.

Writing Activities to Build Classroom Community

Structured Discussion Boards



To add structure to weekly discussion board posts, assign students specific roles each week. Commenters make initial remarks, Responders reply to those remarks, and Synthesizers (summarize the week's comments).

Collaborative Notetaking



Crowdsource class notes or lecture summaries from a changing group of 2-3 students, in a collaborative document. This encourages teamwork within the small group, and provides a useful resource for the class as a whole.

Questions for Clarification



Periodically ask students to write down one question, outlining something in the course they are confused about. Students should then write responses to one another. This can be done on a discussion board, or as a synchronous activity.

Peer Feedback



Having students provide each other with peer feedback at early stages of assignments both improves the quality of their completed assignments, and also creates a collaborative classroom environment.

Online Student Spaces



Encourage students to chat to one another, as this helps students to open up. On text-based platforms like Slack or Discord, a 'random' channel can be established as a space for informal exchanges.

Writing Activities to Think Through Course Content

Open-Ended Questions



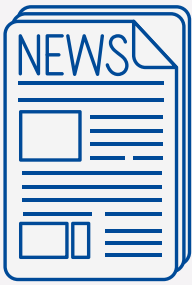
Start each week on an upbeat note by requiring that students respond to an accessible, open-ended question. This might be a fun course related question, or a very general question (e.g. if you could visit anywhere in the world, where would it be?)

One Minute Paper



At the end of class (synchronous) or at the end of a week (asynchronous), give students 60 seconds to respond to a prompt. This prompt might ask the main thing they've learned that week, or to list one thing they are confused by. This is a quick and easy way to check student engagement.

Contemporary Issue Journals



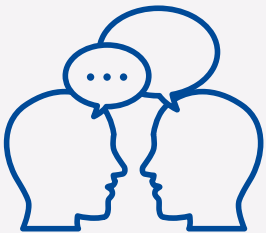
Ask students to relate course content to current affairs, through contemporary news sites and blogs - the relevance of the course to everyday life often invigorates students. This writing can be highly guided or relatively open-ended.

Reading Logs



Ask students to write regularly about course readings. Encourage them to respond personally - how the texts made them feel, whether they were persuaded by the texts, what kinds of associations the texts trigger.

Dialogue Assignments



As a creative alternative to a formal paper, instruct students to write 'meeting of the mind' dialogues between people with opposing views. This assignment might also work well as a group project.

For more information, or for other help with student writing at BCC, please reach out to the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) team.

bccwac.commonsgc.cuny.edu

SOURCES:

Bean, John. Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001. <https://dlinq.middcreate.net/digital-inclusion/community-building-online>