

# Writing to Learn



**PRACTICES  
THAT FOSTER  
EFFECTIVE LEARNING**

## DESCRIPTION

Writing to learn encompasses an instructional method for evoking self-regulated learning, critical thinking, and, depending on the implementation, collaborative learning. Writing to learn essentially involves a well-constructed writing task that prompts learners to execute higher order thinking skills to synthesize multiple factual or conceptual elements of a domain. When learners extend cognitive effort to think critically during a writing to learn task, they externalize ideas and may make new inferences while rereading or revising their response. In addition to well-constructed writing prompts, a writing to learn activity may also include a rubric for self- or peer-evaluation of a written response.

Design recommendations focus on the appropriate tools and task time. For example, if the task involves peer review, then a rubric can ensure a critical review of writing. If the task is collaborative (with multiple authors) then adequate tools for collaboration need to be used, such as a wiki page. Additionally, learners must be given appropriate time to collect thoughts and review/revise responses before submission.

Writing to learn as a learning principle was first discussed by Emig (1997) and Britton et al. (1975). Varieties and examples of writing to learn activities can be found in Comer, Clark, & Canelas (2014).

## CAPABILITIES

- Assessment: Essay
- Cognitive Tools: Asynchronous social learning: document based
- Cognitive Tools: Planning/outlining

## SAMPLE DESIGN IMPLEMENTATIONS

- Robust Technology: Collaborative writing space and toolset for peer reviews
- Simple Technology: Short answer or journaling activities
- Content Support: Well-constructed prompts that provide topic(s) to write about as well as critical thinking guidance

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## SELF-ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT



Principle Criteria	Integration (4-5 points)	Exploration (2-3 points)	Consideration (1 point)	Not Applicable (0 Points)	Total Points
<b>Definition</b>	Strong emphasis across all of the planning, translating, and reviewing phases of the writing process	Some emphasis across all of the planning, translating, and reviewing phases of the writing process	Poor emphasis across all of the planning, translating, and reviewing phases of the writing process	Does NOT qualify as a worked example	= ____
	Strong emphasis on effective communication through written works	Some emphasis on effective communication through written works	Poor emphasis on effective communication through written works		
<b>Model</b>	Strong use of planning to support recall, organized outlining, and communication goals	Some use of planning to support recall, organized outlining, and communication goals	Poor use of planning to support recall, organized outlining, and communication goals	Does NOT address design from a cognitive load theory perspective	= ____
	Strong use of translating to apply appropriate grammar, tone, style, etc. to support communication goals	Some use of translating to apply appropriate grammar, tone, style, etc. to support communication goals	Poor use of translating to apply appropriate grammar, tone, style, etc. to support communication goals		
	Strong use of reviewing to detect errors, correct errors, and revise written works	Some use of reviewing to detect errors, correct errors, and revise written works	Poor use of reviewing to detect errors, correct errors, and revise written works		
<b>Design</b>	Strong use of evidence-based strategies to support high-quality writing and domain-specific knowledge modelling	Some use of evidence-based strategies to support high-quality writing and domain-specific knowledge modelling	Poor use of evidence-based strategies to support high-quality writing and domain-specific knowledge modelling	Does NOT use design effectively	= ____
	Strong use of technology to facilitate the writing and peer review processes	Some use of technology to facilitate the writing and peer review processes	Poor use of technology to facilitate the writing and peer review processes		
	Strong use of scaffolds, prompts, and other guidance techniques to support strategy development as individual differences dictate	Some use of scaffolds, prompts, and other guidance techniques to support strategy development as individual differences dictate	Poor use of scaffolds, prompts, and other guidance techniques to support strategy development as individual differences dictate		
<b>Assessment</b>	Strong application of peer review as part of the assessment process	Some application of peer review as part of the assessment process	Poor application of peer review as part of the assessment process	Does NOT assess effectively or not an assessment-based activity	= ____
	Strong application of self-assessment	Some application of self-assessment	Poor application of self-assessment		
	Strong use of feedback to support formative development over time	Some use of feedback to support formative development over time	Poor use of feedback to support formative development over time		