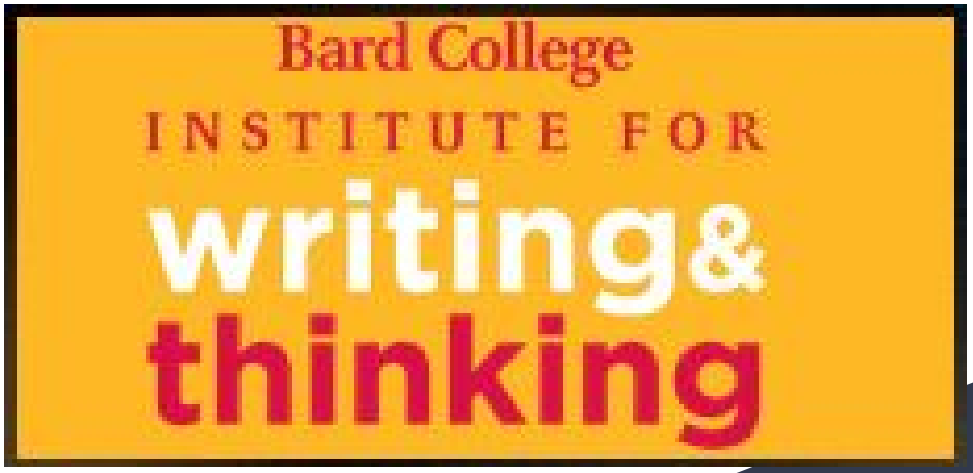
Writing to Learn



Leah Nelson @ Roosevelt High School

Purpose of Writing to Learn

It has NOTHING to do with grading essays.

Purpose of Writing to Learn

Bard College
INSTITUTE FOR
writing&
thinking

to enrich and deepen learning in all disciplines with programs that focus on the role of writing as a catalyst for learning

writing strategies that help students gain a better understanding of complex ideas, historical documents, literary texts, and mathematical problems

- support close reading of documents and literary texts
- allow students to make personal connections to people, places, and events they study
- encourage students to learn from one another

Working together on pertinent texts, teachers experiment with the use of student journals and classroom writing assignments to stimulate engagement with the language, ideas, and issues relevant to their subjects.

Purpose of Writing to Learn

Teachers often explain too much, are too analytical

- Students do “heavy lifting”
- Students are the last text, need authority to include themselves in synthesis
- Students learn important thing is NOT the conclusion; it’s the path of the thinking
- Students put personal thinking on the page

Teachers need to get students confused enough to learn something better

What are some challenging topics or standards you'd like your students to learn better this year?

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Bracket a part of your writing that you'd be willing to share.

Listening to each other is a really important part.

A Slew of Writing to Learn Practices

- Text rendering
- Jump-in reading
- Key concept / word
- Pointing / echoing
- Freewriting
- Focused Freewriting
  - Dialectical notebook
  - Loop writing / writing to read
  - Overview & Inventory
  - Writing in the Zones
  - Collaborative Learning Questions
  - Odd-angled questions
  - Process write

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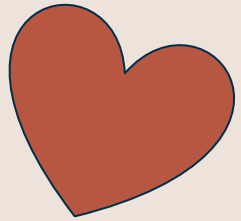
  - **Process writing**



What is process writing?

Writing is thinking. Thinking is a recursive process.

Different types of PWs:

- About the topic to move us deeper & synthesize

What did you hear about ___ that you'd like to keep thinking about?

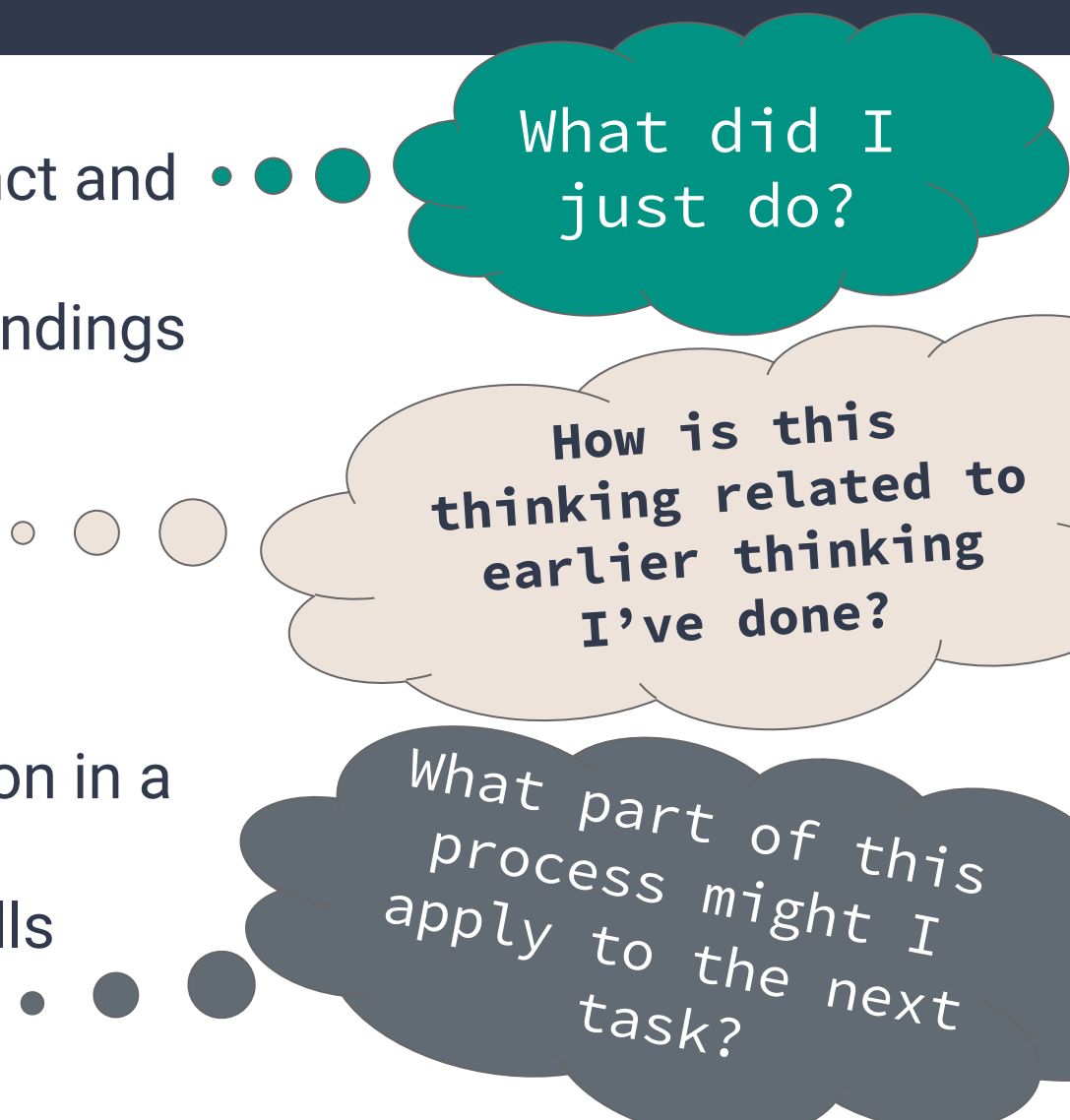
- About our own thinking to help us stretch our cognitive styles

Where in the process were you stumped, confused, or surprised? Where did your thinking change? What allowed your thinking to change? How does your mind like to roll? Where does it struggle?

What are the benefits of process writing?

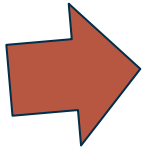
Students

- see themselves as distinct and individual thinkers
- talk about their understandings and difficulties
- construct meaning
- pose questions
- value their personal and experiential knowledge
- take part in a conversation in a community of thinkers
- transfer learning and skills better



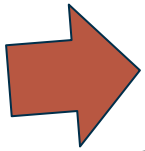
How important is process writing?

20 minutes of process writing at the end of a semester course



Students transfer 25% more content

But it often comes at the end of a cycle so is often skipped



Make time for it

What did you learn, and how can you apply it in your next class?

What is the process of process writing?

1. Teach something.
2. Provide students a PW prompt.
3. Give them 3+ minutes to write.
4. Have them share their writing aloud.

When writing, it's important that students write for the whole allotted time.

When sharing, it's important to read what was written, not summarize it, and to NOT include a disclaimer, which asks a lot of people.

"Pointing" is more powerful than expected, but students won't realize it until it's happened for them, which points to the importance of repeated sharing.

1. Review your FFW from earlier about difficult topics.

Let's write some PW questions.

2. For each topic, what assignments or tasks do you already ask students to do?

3. Pick a few of those and write a PW question for each.

Final Reflection (a PW of its own)

Try to imagine your own classroom at the end of the year in which these writing practices have been frequent. How would these practices change what students do and learn? Your own role? What do you see as the benefit to doing such work? What do you see as the limitations or obstacles?