

Connecting Writing, Revision, and Thinking in the Classroom

Precis: Frequently, students encounter course work in which writing and revision practices are not integrated into the work of the classroom. These tasks are left to students to undertake independently and this approach reinforces a belief that writing and revision are separate from learning and understanding content. The aim of this set of techniques is to forge a stronger connection among writing, revision, and thinking practices so that students see these as continuous across the parts of a class, from lecture, class discussion, writing drafts, revising, and producing final papers.

Here's how one might integrate writing, revising, and thinking into the class period:

1. Begin by having students write individual responses to a discussion question grounded in the course readings (5 mins). These responses may take the form of a position with or against the author's argument, statement of doubt about a key claim, question about the reading, or something else. The important feature is to have students explain why and how they came to their conclusions or questions.
2. Have the students share their individual responses with a partner (5mins). This move stages the larger class conversation by giving students a chance to test their ideas.
3. Before inviting students to have a larger class discussion, ask them to fine tune their initial response given the conversation they just had with their partner. Again, ask them to explicitly identify both how they are modifying their initial response and how their conversation prompted the change (3 mins).
4. Facilitate the larger class discussion on the question you posed to students. Leave time for students to write in their notebooks at the end of class about how their thinking about the reading changed by virtue of listening and taking part in the class discussion (5 mins). Encourage them to identify specific remarks made by their classmates that nudged them to reconsider their initial responses and/or perspectives they had not considering in their initial evaluation of the reading. Once again, encourage students to be explicit about how the introduction of new ideas prompted to revise their thinking.

Finally, take a moment to go “meta”—that is, address the meta-learning that these practices are meant to enforce either at the beginning or end of class, or ideally at both the start and end. The purpose is explicitly connecting the thinking, writing, and revising practices in the classroom to how these same practices should be employed by students working independently on writing and reading assignments.

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