

What is Low-Stakes Writing?

- Frequent, informal assignments that make students spend time regularly reflecting in written language on what they are learning from discussions, readings, lectures, and their own thinking.
- They don't have a lot of weight in the final grade.
- Sometimes done **in class** and sometimes **for homework**.
- The goal of low stakes assignments is not so much to produce excellent pieces of writing as to get students to think, learn, and understand more of the course material.

Low Stakes Writing Objectives Include:

- critical thinking about course content and issues
- independent thinking
- understanding multiple perspectives /finding the heart of the issue
- learning to compare and synthesize
- finding logical connections in experimental result or between concepts, events, themes
- learning how to generalize from data
- learning how to prioritize information
- learning how to ask good research questions
- learning to find and select relevant research materials
- comprehending and summarizing difficult reading material

“In a sense, we get to throw away the low stakes writing itself but keep the neural changes it produced in students’ heads.” (Elbow, 5)

Examples of Low-Stakes Writing Assignments

<p align="center">Outside of Class LSW (Preparatory)</p>	<p align="center">In-Class LSW</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study Questions • Triple-Entry Note Taking • Class Letters • The Position Paper • The Reading Response Sheet • Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipatory writing about upcoming topic • Class Notes • Free-writing • Focused Free-writing • Imaginary Letter to Absent Colleague • Writing through Problem Solving • Visual Concept-Map • “Circulating the Question” • The 1-minute paper: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The main point ○ The most important thing learned during class ○ Questions remained unanswered or concepts still unclear ○ One word/sentence from readings

Based on:

Anson, Chris M. and Deanna P. Dannels, “The Heart of the Matter. Writing, Speaking, and Inquiry-Guided Learning” 219-127. In *Teaching and Learning through Inquiry*. Ed. Virginia S. Lee. Stylus Publishing, 2004.

Elbow, Peter. “High Stakes and Low Stakes in Assigning and Responding to Writing.” *New Directions in Teaching and Learning*. 69 (Spring 1997). 5-13.

“Do the Write Thing: Teaching with Writing,” The Writing Center, University of Iowa.