

Lecture Case Study 1: Stop and write

Short bursts of writing can be used effectively in teaching situations to get students engaged and participating actively.

What one lecturer did: He started to use the technique of asking students to spend the last few minutes of a lecture writing down what they thought the main points were. As they left the lecture theatre he collected the comments in from students and then spent about ten minutes every few weeks looking through them and gaining insight into what they were making of the content. Towards the end of the term, he decided, on the basis of the feedback he'd had, to abandon the two or three final lectures he'd planned and spend the time instead working with the students to develop what they'd covered already, making connections, reviewing. To do this, he confessed, he needed to overcome a kind of vanity about what he, as the expert, thought a course on this topic should contain...

Getting students to write means they externalise what they know (or, as usefully, recognise what they don't know) and how they are thinking, in writing. Once they've done this they can do things with what they've written: look back at it, speak about it, compare it, shape and extend it....

Activity ideas:

- Before the start of a lecture or seminar ask your students to write down the main points they learnt in the previous week and what they hope to learn today.
- Stop in the middle of your lecture and ask your students to formulate in a couple of sentences what they think is the main point so far, or a question/confusion they have in their minds.

From *Thinking Writing*, QMUL: <http://www.thinkingwriting.qmul.ac.uk/node/48>

Questions for discussion:

- Do you use writing tasks in your lectures? How effective are they? What is their pedagogic value?
- How might you incorporate writing tasks into your lectures? Where would you fit them?
- Are there any barriers to including writing tasks in your lectures? How might you overcome these?