**Writing Across the Curriculum:**

Teaching to Think Through Writing

“We have to continually be jumping off cliffs and developing our wings on the way down.” ― Kurt Vonnegut

“A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song.” ― [Maya Angelou](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/3503.Maya_Angelou)

**Fighting the Stereotype**

* Writing is a skill used to express one’s thoughts.
* “**As teachers we can choose between (a) sentencing students to thoughtless mechanical operations and (b) facilitating their ability to think. If students' readiness for more involved thought processes is bypassed in favor of jamming more facts and figures into their heads, they will stagnate at the lower levels of thinking. But if students are encouraged to try a variety of thought processes in classes, they can, regardless of their ages, develop considerable mental power. Writing is one of the most effective ways to develop thinking**.” - Syrene Forsman, University of Washington

**Daily Writing**

* Create a course journal
  + It is all in the name – Give it a thoughtful title that will work against the stereotypes and focus on its function.
  + Constant go-to for writing to think opportunities
* Bell work
  + Safe way to stretch and model critical thinking
  + Encourage sharing
* Think, pair, share
  + Students have an organized way of responding to classroom discussion/content for future reference
* Note taking
  + Students need to synthesize
    - Let them listen, sort, record, reflect
    - After smaller chunks of notes/lecture/content reading/discussion, have them write to process and make meaning,
      * Make statements, find connections, create questions

**Writing to Demonstrate Understanding**

* Assessing what a student knows about a topic.
  + Ask – What is my purpose?
    - Select necessary DoK
      * Explain, Analyze, Synthesize, List
      * Demonstrate what this type of answer looks like
  + Ask – Who is my audience?
    - Most writing for courses is academic and formal if handed in for formal evaluation.
    - \*Note\* If a student is informally using writing to sort through or make meaning for his or her self, there should be a freedom from formal evaluation.

**Activities**

* Topics in the Round
  + Place students in small groups, giving each student a topic or question on a note card. Give students a few minutes to write as much as they can about the content. After the time is up, they pass the card to the next member of the group and repeat the process until all group members have had each card. Then ask groups to discuss the topics and add to their notes.
* Through Another’s Eyes
  + Often there is a different way to look at the content of a course. Have students write about an event from varying first person perspectives. Example: Have the student describe the Prohibition from the voice of a Midwestern, church-going mother, and then contrast it with a young man in New York willing to do anything to make some money. This can help with developing empathy and argumentation skills.
* Chunk It
  + To help students get an idea on how to chunk information in an essay, break the class into small groups and give each group a question to answer with bulleted information. The questions should all stem from an overarching concept. Then have them turn the bulleted lists into paragraphs with a topic sentence that rewords the question into a statement. Once completed, have all groups bring their paragraphs together to create the body of an essay. This can be done with large paper or by using your document camera. This gives you an opportunity to talk about how it should be organized, or how to write an appropriate intro/conclusion.
* Silent Conversations
  + Students carry on conversations on paper. They use conversation comment threads all the time. The more we can get students to realize that typing IS writing and writing IS expression of thought, the more likely they will get over the thought that writing is something an English teacher makes them do.

**Resources**

* University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, Writing Center
  + http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/
* The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)
  + https://owl.english.purdue.edu/
* Gayle Morris Sweetland Center for Writing, University of Michigan
  + http://www.lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/instructors/teachingresources
* WAC Clearinghouse, Writing to Learn, Colorado State University
  + http://wac.colostate.edu/intro/pop2d.cfm