

Couple of Low Stakes Assignments for You

To Get Started

10 minutes: consider the last academic paper you wrote for a class (or one you are composing now if that is easier). **HOW did you use informal writing (or any mode, such as talking or drawing) to compose the final product?** For example, I used texting pretty extensively as a means of composing for the last collaborative piece I published. Try to describe your process and/or make a list, if that's easier.

To Round Off

15 minutes: with someone from (or near to) your discipline, develop a low stakes writing assignment. You might choose one of the aims (e.g., provoking class discussion) on the handout to help focus your assignment. You might develop a one-time assignment, or, consider an assignment you can repeat over the semester. Take risks: have fun. This is low stakes!

EXAMPLES OF LOW STAKES WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Writing to Discover Before, During, and After a Final Product

✓ Learn About Your Class / Create Calm Moments / Prepare for Reading

Anthropology : What does the word culture mean to you?

Ethnic Studies: What does silence mean for you? When have you felt silenced?

✓Work with Content / Focus Discussion / Encourage Participation

Statistics : Define "statistical significance."

Literature: We've discussed Burke's essay on nature as beautiful and sublime. Here are the film clips + artworks you posted. In groups, select one, and then discuss the extent to which it uses the imagery of the sublime.

Literature: Refrigerator magnets play an important role in Atwood's novel *Oryx & Crake*. What do the magnets on your refrigerator say about you + others?

Media: Each week, blog on a major concept from the assigned essay; after discussing how the author defines the term, relate it to your experience. For this week, begin with what is "watching television"?

✓Build Essential Skills / Build a Process

Psychology : In class, watch a video of a child playing. Take observational notes. Read the notes aloud and discuss: how can you achieve objectivity when observing others?

Film: Write a long email to an older friend or relative about why they should or should not see *Burn After Reading*.

✓ Make the Process Visible

Any class: What is your paper topic going to be? Why is that topic important to you, personally? Why is that topic important, either academically or to the general public?

Any class: What did you notice from your textual annotation?

CONTINUUM: from free writing to informal pieces

Journals, blogs, WIKI posts, discussion boards, public annotation (Hypothesis)

Difficulty papers, position papers, personal narratives, rough drafts

→→→Low Stakes Building Into High Stakes: A Sequence

Literature: create a photo essay on nature, drawing on poetry, film, short stories, novels, paintings, etc.

Bi-weekly: Write difficulty papers & write questions on board

Bi-weekly: Write about visual inter-texts & post on WIKI

In-class: Practice close reading; annotate texts;

plan essay: formulate a question.

Write drafts & receive audio commentary on Kaizena

After writing: Respond to my commentary on Kaizena

Create high stakes project.

Low stakes = if you complete them all, you receive a B. To get an A, you must create a high quality high stakes project.

For the difficulty paper assignment and ideas about annotation: Mariolina Salvatori & Patricia Donahue, *The Elements (and Pleasures) of Difficulty* (2005; I can make my version available to you). For more assignments embedded in their context, see Katherine Gottschalk and Keith Hjortshoj, *The Elements of Teaching Writing* (2003) and Jonathan Monroe, *Local Knowledge, Local Practices: Writing in the Disciplines at Cornell* (2006); Mary Segall and Robert Smart, Ed. *Direct from the Disciplines* (2005); Mary Soliday, *Everyday Genres* (2011). Hypothesis and Kaizena are free digital tools that make a process visible.
