Elizabeth Vallance, a professor in art education, asks her pre-teaching students in ARTE 463 to do a series of three “visual-culture image inventories.” She wants them to understand how writing helps improve their visual thinking skills.

This four-part activity requires the students first to provide a brief description and second, to do a clear sketch of an everyday object. Then the students must find a traditional work of art with which the object can be compared. For example, they might choose a food display in a supermarket and compare it to a still life. Finally, the students must invent ideas for activities in a K-12 classroom that would encourage learners to explore the object’s aesthetic values through the perspectives of art history or criticism.

Vallance’s students write three different image inventories. Once they have completed the assignments, Vallance plans a class discussion where the students reflect on what they’ve learned. She puts the students into small groups and gives them 15 minutes to prepare. Afterwards, each small group reports out to the class.

Students find that they formed a habit of looking for and thinking about connections between common objects and fine art. They state that they developed a more critical eye, improving their ability to describe and understand artistic composition. They brainstorm ideas for lesson plans based on the activities their assignment required. Some even notice the importance of being able to write more articulately about art, suggesting that writing reinforced their “visual thinking” skills.

Vallance’s students also propose ways to change the assignment. They’ve suggested, for example, that the image inventories could include analyses of architecture, tattoos and body art, billboards and signs, or music videos. They’ve proposed doing inventories for an extended period, in journals or worksheets.

Current WAC research strongly indicates that students benefit more from reflecting on their assignments, but Vallance’s practice implies that professors can gain much, too.

Research and initial write-up by Sheena Williams, Graduate Studies—English.

Teaching Students to Reflect at the Research Stage of Writing

Research should give students practice in analysis and synthesis. But when students gather sources for a written project, they often believe that “facts speak for themselves.” We can help students reflect more analytically and synthetically if we ask them to consider:

**Historical development.** How do sources show the consensus, contradiction, and stipulation that contributed chronologically to an idea’s evolution?

**Stakeholders.** How do sources interpret and apply a concept, depending on whose interests the concept serves?

**Plausible causes/explanations.** How do sources depict the contributing factors of a problem or an issue?

**Variable solutions.** How do sources suggest different ways to approach or resolve a problem, and how effective are these solutions?

**Changing criteria.** How do sources evaluate an issue differently, and why?

**Basis of inquiry.** What fundamental questions do sources raise about a concept, and how do those questions shape the concept?

If we encourage students to reflect in such ways earlier in their research—maybe by drafting a literature review or an annotated bibliography—the quality of their later work often bene-
Two Tools that Promote Reflection During the Drafting Process

Once students create the first draft of a paper, faculty can introduce a reflective exercise that moves students toward active revision. Two tools facilitate the exercise: a thoughtfully developed rubric and a "demonstration model" of the paper.

Distributing the rubric reminds students of the assignment’s expectations. The best rubrics convert the language of the assignment into a set of four to eight criteria. Good criteria concisely define both format and standards. For example, a good criterion might tell students: "The methodology section of your paper shows what approach you are using in your analysis and accurately represents one of the four methods our textbook discusses."

Distributing the model of a good paper helps students understand format, adequate research, documentation, development, writing style, etc. Often, model papers that exercise different, but equally valid choices help students make their own choices in producing the revision. A discussion of a model paper’s attributes allows writers to review material they’ve studied, so that what they’ve learned in class and during research gets reinforced. A model paper doesn’t need to be perfect—in fact, good but underdeveloped drafts can show problems that even accomplished writers struggle with.

Once students grasp the assignment’s rubric and have a good model to follow, they can look over their own drafts more closely. Or students can get into small groups, where classmates can discuss what further work they must all do.

Afterwards, each student should write a reflection on their progress. What specifically have they accomplished in their drafts? What specific changes, deletions, additions, and so forth must they make, to meet the assignment’s expectations? Two or three students should read their reflective pieces out loud for others to hear, so the class learns what kinds of revision tasks await most of them.

Following this "collective reflection," it’s easier for faculty to read through the drafts and use the rubric to confirm what aspects of each student’s work are strong, okay, or weak. Faculty can also show students where they have failed to meet the assignment’s criteria, so students can address their problems before they receive a final grade.

This kind of reflective exercise cuts back significantly on the paper load, while it also urges students to become more proficient at reading their own work.

Writing Tutors Ask: How Can Faculty Make Use of Students’ Reflections on Tutoring?

When students use the Writing Center, their tutors provide them with feedback forms. The UWC collects demographic information on the forms, but the forms also help students reflect on the drafts they’re developing.

At the beginning of a session, students go through a checklist, indicating what they hope to improve. The checklist is divided in sections with basic elements that help students reflect on where they are in the writing process: Prewriting (understanding assignments, selecting topics outlining, grasping sources, generating ideas)
Drafting (addressing assignment requirements, formulating a thesis statement, clarifying sentences, expanding paragraphs, organizing)
Revision (checking grammar and word choice, setting

tone, using sources, refining readability)

This information gives tutors a sense of the students’ priorities and shows how well students can assess their own work.

After a session, tutors ask students to itemize what they’ve discussed. Often, students are surprised by how much more they’ve covered. Then students briefly explain what changes they anticipate making in their drafts. This kind of reflection reminds them to take responsibility for their work.

Faculty can give students credit for following up on their Writing Center reflections. They can provide students with further comments. And they can notify Writing Center staff about other concerns that tutors can help students address.

Written Reflection as a Capstone to Learning

Kathleen Yancy, keynote speaker at the recent NIU Portfolio Integration Conference, emphasizes the importance of embedding reflection throughout students’ learning experiences. Written reflection, especially, prompts students to reveal aspects of their learning that we can’t otherwise identify or anticipate. One of the most valuable times to get students to provide written reflection is at the end of a project or at the end of a course.

To get the maximum response in such a summative reflection exercise, we can ask students to:
• Pinpoint the specific strengths and critique the specific weaknesses of the written work they’ve produced
• Explain how they believe their written work satisfies course objectives as well as the requirements of a specific assignment

• Articulate what they’ve gained from the overall process of researching, drafting, responding to feedback, revising, etc.
• Explain what they’ve found most valuable and least valuable in their work
• Suggest which aspects of their learning they still need to improve upon and develop
• Estimate what aspects of their learning will carry over to other classes or apply in the workplace

Engaging in such reflection gets students to make vital connections and see the reasoning behind course requirements. It also gives them a more global perspective of how core courses, general education courses, and the required courses in their major complement each other.