Potpourri of ideas for informal writing prompts:

Choose three of the activities below that you could adapt for use in a class you teach. Briefly explain why you’d try each.

- **Practical applications**: (e.g., math) Students write a series of short paragraphs, responding to questions about calculations for remodeling their room (quantity of carpet, paint/paneling/wall paper; cost; time), for planning a field trip (distance, price of gas, cost of lunch, time), making the school more environmentally friendly, or some other project.

- **Dramatization**: Students develop, through a series of short writing exercises, a cast of characters, scenes, plot, dialogue, and costume description for a piece of literature, unit on single-cell animals, job search, etc.—leading up to a dramatic enactment.

- **Resolving a conflict**: Students suggest how to resolve a disagreement or problem regarding characters in a book, a community environmental concern, a school budget, a workplace dispute, etc.

- **Postcards**: Students draw/collate photos for postcards and write messages to friends in tandem with a unit, e.g., Impressionists at the Chicago Art Institute; a scuba-diving visit to a coral reef; life under a rock; a series of job sites; a visit to the setting of a novel or play;

- **Comics or graphic narratives**: Students narrate a concept, situation, or problem through the combination of frames of photos/illustrations and dialogue.

- **Diaries**: Students write a “day in the life” entry of a literary character, artist, unsolved equation, creature, mineral, plant, employee, etc.

- **Tableaux**: Students compose a “living characters” still life from a literary work, a mathematical equation, a drop of water, each writes (and speaks) about how and why s/he decided represent her character, upon presenting the tableaux to class.

- **Dictionary**: Students keep an ongoing alphabetized class dictionary of important terms in each unit, illustrating where appropriate, and using the words in end-of-week review paragraphs.

- **Dialogues**: Students compose short dialogues (e.g., 6 speaking turns) to answer questions such as “What would X say to Y about N?”

- **Family, friend, or neighbor interviews**: Students prepare questions ahead of time and conduct interviews with people close to them who have insights about a topic relevant to a unit being studied—then they report back to class or small groups.

- **Website summary-critiques**: Students go online to answer a research question relevant to course content, writing “minute reports” and brief explanations of the extent to which they think the information on the website is reliable.

- **Information scavenger hunts**: Students each do “flash” interviews, library visits, or web searches in response to a course-content question assigned only to them, individually, or to their small group. They report back in a “guided discussion” on the next day.

- **Double-entry notebooks**: Students write a review of a day’s course material covered in one column, then in a second column, they write questions, concerns, or opinions about what they did or didn’t understand.

- **Agree/Disagree questions**: Students write a short paragraph, explaining and supporting why they agree or disagree with a controversial statement they are given in relation to a lesson’s content.

- **Exit tickets**: Students write down two or three important points that they have learned during a day’s lesson, explaining why those points are particularly important—and they are not allowed to leave without turning in their answers. Another version: students answer to a key question on a 3 x 5 notecard and turn it in.

- **Discussion-stoppers**: Students must write down a summary, examples, possible answers, opinions, or interpretations of a specific problem or question that is posed in the middle of a discussion—especially if there is disagreement or confusion about a point in the discussion that needs to be clarified or “cooled down.”

- **Textbook poems**: Students identify key words and phrases in a textbook page or passage, and compose a poem that helps express the meaning of the passage to them. They may also illustrate or decorate the poem.

- **Eye-witness reports**: Students stop in the middle or at the end of a lesson to write a report of what was being taught, why, and how, as if writing for a brief news report on TV. It’s okay to include observations of student behaviors, as long as they’re related to how the lesson seems to be getting across. Some reporters may be asked to read their “news” the same day—or the next.

- **Class journal**: Students take turns writing entries in class journals, documenting what happened during each day’s lesson and what content material was covered. Those students are responsible for reading the entries to the class the following day—or, perhaps, posting it on a class Facebook page.
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- **Role-playing or what-if situations:** Students must respond to a situation that relates to a lesson’s content, explaining what they would do to apply what they’d learned.
- **If/then chain:** Students write a series of if/then statements to illustrate a cause/effect relationship that shows how something happened or will happen in steps, e.g., a mathematical proof, the consequences of characters’ actions/reactions in a story, a scientific experiment. Can be playful and humorous or serious.
- **Data-provided exercise:** Students are given a set of data, e.g., mathematical information, or the results of an experiment, or a drawing that creates an unusual illusion, or evidence from a story. They determine what concept, hypothesis, or theme the data support. Alternative: they come up with at least two ways the data can be interpreted.
- **Online discussion:** Students have a discussion online about a controversial topic related to course content and must not only post supported opinions, questions, or comments, but also respond to two other students. Civility required.
- **Alternate outcome:** Students consider the answer to a problem about or in a literary or artistic work, mathematical solution, biological mutation, etc. and speculate about the outcome if one or two crucial elements were changed.
- **Seeing the other side:** Students examine a strong, well supported opinion that they disagree with and list points or logical explanations that help them understand how and why that opinion has been formed—then they list counterpoints that support another perspective.
- **Drawing a concept:** Students take an abstract concept related to course content and draw a diagram, flow chart, character map, book cover, or some other visual aid that illustrates the concept. Then they write an explanation of how they want their drawing to be interpreted.
- **Interpreting a visual aid:** Students are given a visual aid that illustrates some important concept related to course content, and they write an interpretation.
- **Letters home:** Students write letters to parents or guardians reviewing what they have learned in a key lesson, during a week’s work, or at the end of a unit. They are required to get a confirmation signature that the parent or guardian has read the letter.
- **Ridiculous vocabulary review:** Students write a paragraph that incorporates all of the week’s “words for the day”—words have to be relevant to the course content—but the paragraph can be ridiculous or nonsensical, as long as it shows that the vocabulary is used correctly.
- **Rewriting the text:** Students take (or are assigned) a passage in a text and rewrite it so that the passage would be clear to someone else—e.g., a partner in class, a friend, a younger sibling, a parent.
- **Memo to editor or author:** Students identify a difficult or problematic passage in a text and write a memo to the editor or author, explaining why the passage presents a problem, and what the editor or author could do to improve it.
- **Small-group mini research:** Students in small groups are each assigned to come to class with notes, a printout, a newspaper article, or some other form of an issue that’s in the news and relevant to course content. Different media are also assigned ahead of time. They compare how TV, radio, newspapers, websites, and other sources have covered the issue and put together a 1-page report, drawing information from each student’s source.
- **Change of perspective:** Students write an initial perspective on an issue at the beginning of a day’s or week’s lesson. After the lesson, students examine their initial perspective and explain how the lesson has helped them maintain, expand upon, or change that perspective.
- **Outlined reading assignment:** Students briefly outline a section or short chapter of a text and then write a brief response to what they think are 2-3 of the most important points (and why).
- **Reading review questions:** Students write 2-3 questions about a reading assignment and exchange with a partner (no questions that can be answered yes/no or with a single word). Partners must choose 1 or 2 and write answers. Best questions/answers are shared in class and possibly used on a later exam or quiz.
- **Beginning/end exercise:** Give students the beginning and end of an experiment, story, or process. They must discuss what happens after the beginning that explains the end result, e.g., “One day, we came into class and noticed that the color of the chrysalis had changed from light green to black and orange…. At the end of the day, we set the transformed insect free.”

For more ideas, please go to: [http://www.tengrrl.com/blog/lists-of-ten/](http://www.tengrrl.com/blog/lists-of-ten/)