



## Use Writing to Help Students Learn

### Have Students Write to Understand: Do not Simply Assign Scholarly Articles to Read

Simply assigning students to read additional scholarly sources does not mean that they will actually better understand the topic. Include forms of writing to increase the likelihood of student comprehension.

Here is an example of doctoral students memorizing material, but having no understanding of the material. Engaging students with the material through writing may have promoted a better understanding:

Richard Feynman, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist asked some doctoral students about polarized light. He received immediate, correct responses. But when he told them to look outside and describe the phenomenon, they were unable to do it: "Students had memorized everything, but they didn't know what anything meant"; students had not understood what they learned. (p. 17)

### Use Writing to Help Students Understand the Material

1. Using student writing, pre-assess what your students already know
2. Have students write to connect new knowledge to pre-existing knowledge
3. Analyze student writing to discover incorrect frames of knowledge [for example, I once had a student write a 10-page paper with only 5 paragraphs because he did not know how to write in any format but the 5-paragraph essay]
4. Assign students to write to foster transfer of what students learned in your course to the "real" world
5. Use student writing to see if new knowledge is learned correctly [assessment/ tests]

## What Kind of Writing Will Help Students Understand Better?

Whatever works!

Short in-class writing prompts

Literature reviews

Essays

Lengthy scholarly papers

Social media posts

Wikipedia entries

**Help Students move beyond simply transmitting information. Help them understand what they are learning.**

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