Individual Invention Activities

Brainstorming
In order to write a paper for a class, students need ways to move from the received knowledge of the course material to some separate, more synthesized or analyzed understanding of the course material. For some students this begins to happen internally or through what we call “thinking,” unvoiced mulling, sorting, comparing, speculating, applying, etc. that leads them to new perspectives, understanding, questions, reactions about the course material. This thinking is often furthered through class discussion and some students automatically, internally move from the initial sorting of ideas into complex, logical interpretations of material at this point. But, for more students, their thinking will remain an unorganized, vague set of ideas referring to the subject. Many will have trouble moving beyond this vague sense or simple reaction toward ideas that are more processed, complex, or what we often call “deep.” We can foster that move to a deeper understanding by providing opportunities to externalize and fix their ideas on paper so that they may both see their ideas and then begin to see the relationships between them. The following activities will help students both generate and clarify initial responses to course material:

- **Free-writing**
  - Find a clock, watch, or timer to help you keep track of time. Choose a topic, idea, question you would like to consider. It can be a specific detail or a broad concept—whatever you are interested in exploring at the moment. Write (on paper or on a computer) for 7-10 minutes non-stop on that topic. If you get stuck and don’t know what to say next, write “I’m stuck and don’t know what to say next...” or try asking yourself “what else?” until another idea comes to you. Do not concern yourself with spelling, grammar, or punctuation. Your goal is to generate as much as you can about the topic in a short period of time and to get used to the feeling of articulating ideas on the page. It’s ok if it’s messy or makes sense only to you. You can repeat this exercise several times, using the same or a variety of topics connecting to your subject. Read what you have written to see if you have discovered anything about your subject or found a line of questioning you’d like to pursue.

- **Clustering/Webbing**
  - Find a clock, watch, or timer to help you keep track of time. Put a word you’d like to explore in the center of a piece of paper and put a circle around it. As fast as you can, free-associate or jot down anywhere on the page as many words as you can think of associated with your center word. If you get stuck, go back to the center word and launch again. Speed is important and quantity is your goal. Don’t discount any word or phrase that comes to you, just put it down on the page. Jot words for between 5-10 minutes. When you are finished you will have a page filled with seemingly random words. Read around on the page and see if you have discovered anything or can see connections between any ideas.

- **Listing**
  - On a piece of paper list all the ideas you can think of that are connected to subjects you are considering exploring. Consider any idea or observation as
valid and worthy of listing. List quickly and then set your list aside for a few minutes. Come back and read your list and do the exercise again.

- Cubing
  - This technique helps you look at your subject from six different points of view (imagine the 6 sides of a cube and you get the idea). Take your topic or idea and 1) describe it, 2) compare it, 3) associate it with something else you know, 4) analyze it (meaning break it into parts), 5) apply it to a situation you are familiar with, 6) argue for or against it. Write at a paragraph, page, or more about each of the six points of view on your subject.

- Journalistic questions
  - Write these questions down the left hand margin of a piece of paper: Who? What? Where? When? How? And Why? Think about your topic in terms of each question.

- What? So What? Now what?
  - To begin to explore an idea first ask yourself, “What do I want to explore?” and write about that topic for a page or more. Then read what you have written and ask “So what?” of the ideas expressed so far. Again, write for a page or more. Finally ask yourself, “Now what?” to begin to think about what else you might consider or where you might go next with an idea.

- Defining terms
  - Although this suggestion is simple and may seem obvious, it is often overlooked. Write definitions for key terms or concepts in your own words. Find others’ articulations of the terms in your course readings, the dictionary, or through conversations and compare the definitions to your own. Seek input from your instructor if you can’t get a working definition of a term for yourself.

- Summarizing positions
  - Sometimes it’s helpful to simply describe what you know as a way to solidify your own understanding of something before you try to analyze or synthesize new ideas. You can summarize readings by individual articles or you can combine what you think are like perspectives into a summary of a position. Try to be brief in your description of the readings. Write a paragraph or up to a page describing a reading or a position.

- Metaphor writing
  - Metaphors or similes are comparisons sometimes using the words “like” or “as.” For example, “writing is like swimming” or the “sky is as blue as map water” or “the keyboard wrinkled with ideas.” When you create a metaphor, you put one idea in terms of another and thereby create a new vision of the original idea. Sometimes it may be easier to create a metaphor or simile may help you understand your view of an idea before you can put it fully into sentences or paragraphs. Write a metaphor or simile and then explain to someone why your metaphor works or what it means to you.

- Applying ideas to personal circumstance or known situations
  - Sometimes ideas come clearest when you can put them in a frame that is meaningful to you. Take a concept from your reading assignments
and apply it so a situation in your own life or to a current event with which you are familiar. You may not end up using this application in your final draft, but applying it to something you know will help you to understand it better and prepare you to analyze the idea as your instructor directs.

**Provided by and adapted from the UNC Chapel Hill Writing Center website at http://writingcenter.unc.edu/faculty-resources/tips-on-teaching-writing/in-class-writing-exercises/**.
"Who Are You?"

Overview:
We are starting into research and all of its trappings. We are in the middle of the proposal, you are working on an annotated bibliography, and we will end the semester with a research paper and reflective portfolio. Therefore, it is time to sharpen the thesis. The thesis statement is usually a sentence where the author states the main claim that she will further clarify throughout her paper. The reflective activity below will get us thinking more about thesis statements and how they work in rhetoric.

One of my favorite movies and books is Alice in Wonderland. The hookah-smoking caterpillar is one of the most interesting characters to me, personally. However, he asks Alice a question that we all might wrestle with at some point or another: “Who are you?” Essentially, he asks Alice to define herself. He is asking her for a thesis statement. What is she about? Who is she?

Here is the video clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41KMByxE6lo.

What to do:
We will be writing a two-word thesis statement about ourselves in this reflection. First of all, think of two words that describe who you are. You may be creative. Please, be creative! Once you have figured out what two words describe you, write your two words on the top of your paper. Then, I want you to reflect on what your two words are and what meaning they have to you. Essentially, this activity will mimic a thesis paragraph and supporting details. It also lets the class understand more about each fellow student.

Take your time with this. Coming up with a thesis to who you are will take a few minutes; and you will have time to reflect in writing. Once time is up, I will ask everyone to read their reflection.

So, who are you?
**Instructions:** Use your research paper proposal to break down your larger argument into smaller, more manageable, arguments with key terms that will help you find secondary sources.

**Writer/Name:** ____________________

**Research Paper Concept Map**

Main Topic:  
Example Topic: The role of women in the United States during World War II

Break down main topic into at least 4 concepts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept 1</th>
<th>Concept 2</th>
<th>Concept 3</th>
<th>Concept 4</th>
<th>Example: The role of women working in munitions factories in the United States during World War II.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Now, break down each concept into at least 3 keywords each. Think of words that describe elements of the concept.

| | | | | Example: Munitions factories |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | World War II |
| | | | Women |
| | | | Rosie the Riveter |
| | | | Propaganda / Controversy |

*Adapted from Amanda Finn’s handout.*
Instructor Response Sheet

Writer: ________________________________ Process Credit: __________________

Draft #2
(Paper 1.2)

1. Feedback on Concerns Identified in Draft Cover Letter:

2. Meets the Assignment:

3. Overall Development:

4. Organization/Flow of Ideas at This Point:

5. Other Comments:
Glossing Exercise

As an approach to reading and writing, glossing is an activity that can help you see what’s at the center of each paragraph and see the “skeleton” or overall structure of a piece of writing—kind of like creating an outline after the fact, showing what you’ve said and where (and, by implication, what you haven’t yet said or how another order might be created). Read over your draft, and give this approach a try:

1. Read each paragraph of the draft and ask of each, “What’s the gist of this paragraph?” or “What’s at the heart of this paragraph?” Write that gist in your notebook. If there’s more than one gist, list them all. Aim to be as specific as possible. In a draft about a grandparent, for instance, the gist “This paragraph is about my grandfather’s storytelling” would tell you more. Write your gists in a column doing down the page, creating that outline, that skeleton view of your draft.

2. Read over this list of gists and ask, “Which seem to go together?” Try reordering these gists to see another possible order for your draft. Try two or three possible orders.

3. Read over this list of gists and ask, “Are there any paragraphs that have more than one gist?” Try rewriting any such paragraphs into two (or more) paragraphs, developing and exploring each gist further.

4. Read over this list of gists and ask of each, “Is this highlighted and explored in the actual draft?” Try rewriting a paragraph to draw out and highlight what you think is at its heart.

5. Read over this list of gists and ask, “What contribution does each gist make to the overall center or heart of this piece?” If any gist seems not to connect with your sense of the draft’s center, think about what difference it might make if you cut that paragraph or consider how that paragraph might be revised to connect better with your sense of what’s at the draft’s center.

(Based on ideas from Ann Berthoff and Nancy Welch. Handout adopted from Beth Carroll.)
Loop-Writing (Adapted from Peter Elbow and Nancy Welch)

Loop-writing is freewriting that helps you to explore a topic from a variety of perspectives. Loop-writing can show you how much you have to say about a topic—without worrying about a “perfect” first sentence, “perfect” organization, or falling into fear of the blank page. Loopwriting can also be a powerful revision approach—generating new scenes, ideas, and questions without yet having to worry, “But does this belong in my draft?” And loopwriting can be a way of finding, working with your connection and commitment to an assignment without yet worrying, “Am I allowed to talk about this in my draft?” and “Does this matter to the point I want to make?”—very real questions but ones that can eclipse discovery, surprise, complication.

To start: Jot down a list of five or so memories, issues or questions that are on your mind. Include in your list the topic(s) you’re currently working with, might want to shake up your thinking about. Select one topic from that list that seems most compelling to you right now. You’re not making a commitment to stick with this topic, just choosing what you’d like to think about right now.

1. For five minutes, write down your First Thoughts about this topic, what comes instantly to mind. You can use narrative thinking: “When I think about X, I think about . . . .” Free-association, scattering words and impressions across the page, is fine here too.

When your pen begins to slow, go to the next step, drop down a few lines on the page, and start again!

2. Scenes. Think of these as still photographs. List the places, rooms, surroundings, that come to mind when you think about your topic. If you were to take a snapshot of one of these scenes, what would that snapshot look like? Describe sights, sounds, smells, surroundings.

3. Stories. What happens if you put one of the above scenes into motion, considering what was happening within the scene, before it, after? Or list other moments, specific events, specific memories, anecdotes, stories that come to mind when you think about this topic? Choose one, tell its story.

4. Portraits. Who are the people—real and imagined, people you’ve met, people you’ve encountered through reading, through conversations with others—you associate with this topic? List those people. Choose one and imagine creating a portrait of that person. What has he/she told you about your topic, either in words or in action?

5. Other Voices/Other Rooms. Who else or what else have you encountered in books, TV, movies, music—that might help you think about this topic even if that connection wouldn’t be immediately obvious to others? Or what’s another topic, another experience or question that comes to mind as you work with this topic, that might be connected to it? Make a list and return to, think about one.

6. Changing the perspective. Imagine this topic from another point of view or imagine how you might have thought about, written about five years ago (or more) or how you might think about it, write about it five years (or more) from now. Try a “flash-back” to an earlier time or a “flash-forward,” imagining where you’ll be in relation to this topic—where you want to be, where you fear you’ll be—in the future.

7. Lies, Errors, Sayings. Write down things you don’t really believe are true about your topic. (For instance, if I were writing about revision, I’d write down this ‘lie’: “Revision is punishment for not getting it right the first time.”) Knowing the “lies” that surround a topic can be as important as knowing the “truths” that surround it. Looking at what makes a common belief about your topic not quite right or even downright wrong can lead to more thinking and writing.

8. Return to those steps that seemed most fruitful for you. Or write Second Thoughts or Where I seem to be with this now . . . .
Revising

Once the first draft has been written, students can more clearly see what information does and does not work within their papers. Rarely have they explained everything clearly, included enough research, or kept a focused idea running through their papers during this first draft. Revising is much more than just changing words and sentences; it involves adding information, deleting unnecessary paragraphs or sentences, changing the overall structure, or moving sentences. Ideas that can help students with revision include the following:

- Does the paper say everything that the writer wants it to?
- Is the thesis statement too broad or too narrow?
- What is confusing for the audience? What is clear?
- What needs more evidence? What claims are fully supported?
- What is tangential? What is relevant?
- What is poorly developed or incomplete? What is well developed or clear?

Professors often feel overwhelmed at the idea of having to read multiple drafts of students’ papers. One way to avoid this is to hold peer-revision workshops. These sessions can be helpful for the students because writers see another’s view of their paper. Also, students are more responsible for their learning and often become more aware of what is required of them to fulfill an assignment by reading others’ work.

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Fulwiler identifies four suggestions for students working with tutors in a writing center, which would apply to anyone, of course: limiting, adding, switching, and transforming.

In limiting, Fulwiler means asking for telling details, forcing students to become specific rather than general, a problem with many first draft narratives. He also notes that students draw conclusions too soon rather than letting the story speak for itself. Often this is not the conclusion they end up with when the story is reworked and revised. This may stem from students fulfilling what they believe the reader (i.e., the teacher) wants.
In response, Fulwiler asks students to take one paragraph and write two new pages about it, paying special attention to specifics and not telling what “usually” happens but what happened on one specific instance, "limiting time, place, and action . . ." (194).

He also suggests that students become intimately involved in the up-close geography of a topic, working in groups so as not to harass people and organizations with too many interviews or visitors. Besides being more efficient, it replicates the typical work collaboration that goes on in the work world.

In adding, Fulwiler suggests ways to make writing more vital, such as adding dialogue in a close approximation of what might have been said, including interior monologue. These voices may also be contributed from real interviews with people, which would require accuracy then. The result would make any writing more compelling.

In switching, he asks students to try out different perspectives, such as a different point of view with the writer role-playing (meaning third person if the event was personal). Other perspectives might be gained by changing the tone of the piece, such as satire, comedy, or drama.

Transforming is similar to switching but in genre rather than voice. Some ideas might be to make a personal experience into a series of letters, or a straight forward essay into a “modest proposal.” The idea is that no real-world writing looks anything like what most students write in college English, according to Fulwiler. Writing a scene for a soap opera may be more informative—and often more influential—than a sober expository or argumentative paper. As in Fulwiler’s example of the student writing about picking potatoes in her youth, her final draft proved to be infinitely more powerful with some of these revision devices.
Peer Workshop Handout

Writing can be very personal and difficult to share with others. Sharing our writing with a group often makes us self-conscious, especially when we feel that our writing “isn’t ready” for public scrutiny. This handout will help guide us through a respectful, effective, and efficient way of editing each other’s papers.

Richard Straub, in his article “Responding—Really Responding—to Other Students’ Writing,” suggests approaching peer edits this way: “Consider yourself a friendly reader. A test pilot. A roommate who’s been asked to look over the paper and tell the writer what you think. Except you don’t just take on the role of… [Mr. Nice Guy] and tell her what she wants to hear” (17). You should balance being too nice and being overly aggressive in your remarks to others. Respect others’ writing and remember that you are a reader. Straub says that “readers read and show what they’re understanding and maybe make suggestions” (17).

Directions:
I will place you into groups of three (maybe four). Pass out your two extra copies to your group-mates. In your groups, each person will take turns reading their papers aloud. After you have read your paper aloud to your group, you need to write a reflection for 4-5 minutes about “how do you feel this paper went.” While the writer reflects on the paper, each group member will answer the following questions on the back of the paper. Before trading off papers, discuss comments and suggestions as a group.

Questions to consider as you respond to your peer’s writing:

- What would you like to hear more about? Why?
- Were there any parts that confused you or that you found unclear?
- Was the structure logical and easy to follow?
- Does the narrative effectively answer the assignment?
- List three strengths not mentioned above...
- List two weaknesses not mentioned above...
FEEDBACK

Below are eight methods you can use to elicit feedback from readers about what you have written. As a writer, keep in mind that you need to direct the type of feedback you want, and it is up to you to sift through what they say to determine what is most effective for you on this particular draft. As a reader, listen to what the writer asks for. Be honest in your responses but do not be overly critical. Offer helpful, constructive feedback that will help the writer improve the paper.

1. **What’s the point?**
   - What sticks in your mind? What do you remember most?
   - Summarize the paper’s main point(s).
   - What points *could* be emphasized?
   - What *could* be the focus for the paper?

2. **What is almost said?**
   - What details do you like?
   - What do you want to hear more about?
   - Where could the writer add detail?
   - What could be added?

3. **Reply**
   - What are your thoughts about the writer’s topic?
   - Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

4. **Voice**
   - Describe the person speaking. Can you picture him/her?
   - Describe the narrator’s tone: Is he/she sarcastic, serious, satiric, pompous, respectful?

5. **Movie of the Mind**
   - What do you see as you read/listen?
   - What images come into your mind?

6. **Believing and Doubting** (good for argument papers)
   - Read as though you believed everything written. What questions would you have?
   - What evidence or arguments would strengthen the point?
   - Read as though you doubted everything. What questions would you ask?
   - What arguments would the opposing side have with this writer’s position?

7. **Criterion-based:** Ask specific questions about requirements for the assignment:
   - Describe the characters’ personalities: Are they distinct people?
   - What jokes work for you? Which don’t? Why?
   - How could I organize the paper better?
   - How could I make this part less technical?
   - Does the writer include a description of him/herself as a writer and reader?
   - What parts of the assignment need to be addressed more fully?

8. **Metaphorical**
   - If this piece were a car (or clothing, weather, animal, etc.), what kind would it be?

(Adapted from Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff’s *A Community of Writers*, 3rd Edition, McGraw Hill, 2000.)
Draft #4  
(Paper 1.4) 

1. Please list two concerns you have about this draft that you would like me to address in my feedback:
   
   A. 

B. 

2. Meets the Assignment:

3. Overall Development:

4. Organization/Flow:

5. Editing/Documentation: