

**ACTIVITIES FOR INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING IN THE  
LANGUAGE CLASSROOM**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This project aims to provide teachers with a selection of practical activities for integrating reading and writing in the language classroom. It first looks at the connections between reading and writing and discusses how their integration enhances learning. A compilation of before-reading, during-reading and after-reading activities with detailed lesson plans follows.

## **ERIC DESCRIPTORS**

Class Activities  
English (Second Language)  
Instructional Materials  
Reading  
Reading-Writing Relationship  
Writing

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The context in which I developed this project is the Intensive English Program (IEP) of the American University of Sharjah. The university, which is located in the United Arab Emirates, opened its doors in 1997 with the mandate to offer higher education based on the American model to the Gulf region and beyond. Since all courses at the university, other than language courses, are conducted in English, it is essential for students to have a very good command of that language. The role of the Intensive English Program is to help those students who do not attain the minimum TOEFL score required for matriculation to increase their proficiency in English. In addition, the IEP aims to provide students with skills they need for academic work.

There are five levels within the IEP, from novice to bridge. The course in which I implemented the activities presented in this project was a bridge level reading and writing course that I taught for two consecutive semesters. Whereas reading and writing are usually taught in the program as two separate courses with separate texts, I requested to teach a combined course. I felt that the two skills complement each other and are best taught and learned together. In order to integrate reading and writing as fully as possible in the course, I had to look beyond what the course textbooks had to offer. As a result, I used a variety of activities, which are the foundation of this project.

The activities aim to integrate reading and writing in the language classroom. Each activity incorporates listening and speaking as well, so students get practice in using

all the language skills. I have chosen activities that move students away from black-and-white thinking; that ask them to respond to readings, rather than answer questions. In this way, I hope to cultivate critical thinking among students. Diverse activities provide for variety – an important factor in motivation. In addition, all the activities allow students to work both individually and in groups of all sizes, creating opportunities for them to learn from each other. The informal writing that students do in these activities can serve as a springboard for more formal writing assignments.

Although activities have been placed in categories according to what students can do before they read, while they read, and after they read, many of the activities may be used in any of those categories. What is important to consider is whether there is a good fit between an activity and a reading, and whether activities used for a selection clearly connect to each other. It may not be appropriate to use all three kinds of activities for every reading passage. It is also important to give students support and guidance when they are learning to do these activities. Teachers can model the procedures or parts of them until students are able to do them on their own. In some cases, I have provided suggestions on how this might be accomplished.

I have sequenced the activities in each section of this paper in order of difficulty, since my students found some activities more accessible than others. For example, students began with retelling readings and worked up to writing summaries. I found that open-ended prompts were better starting points than more specific text-related tasks. Therefore, I would suggest that teachers introduce students to the activities in the sequence in which they are presented and move on to the more difficult activities once students have developed a level of comfort and fluency.

The following information is included for each activity:

- Level: beginner to advanced
- Time: indicates the estimated time it takes to do an activity
- Rationale: what students should be able to accomplish through an activity and why
- Preparation: anything the teacher has to do to get ready for the activity, including materials that are needed
- Procedure: steps that are taken to complete the activity
- Variations: different versions or modifications of an activity
- Comments: further notes to explain or extend an activity

The following works were invaluable sources of ideas for the activities in this paper:

*Guidelines: A Cross –Cultural Reading/Writing Text* (Spack, 1998a), *Changes: Readings for Writers* (Brooks, Cummings and Withrow, 1998), *Reading in the Composition Classroom: Second Language Perspectives* (Carson and Leki, 1993); on-line resources from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the Learning Network Teacher Channel, the Canadian Council of Teachers of English Language Arts, Saskatchewan Education, and the Utah Education Network. Resources that were helpful in formatting and putting the activities together were *Beginning to Write* (Brookes and Gundy, 1998), *TESOL Journal*, and *English Teaching Forum*.

Many people contributed to these activities. My teachers and mentors at the School for International Training, Jack Millett and Claire Stanley, planted the seeds for this project. Jack encouraged me to see class texts as guides in planning curriculum, but to develop a bank of activities to extend and enrich student learning. He taught me to use

retelling as a tool in the classroom ("Retelling," p. 24). Claire introduced me to the technique of active visualization (p. 13). She opened my eyes to the interrelatedness of language skills and helped me find ways to integrate them in the classroom. The work of Ruth Spack and Vivian Zamel inspired me to delve deeper into the nature of the reading and writing relationship and provided me with insights as to how I could encourage academic literacy in my students. They are the source of several of the activities included in this paper ("Responding to a Quote," p. 7, "Relating an Experience," p. 12, "Double-Entry Response," p. 22, "Open-Ended Response," p. 27, and "Summarizing," p. 34).

The students in the integrated reading and writing courses participated in and gave me irreplaceable feedback on the activities, which allowed me to revise and make changes where needed. Deborah Wilson, colleague and reader for this project, lent her support, enthusiasm and discerning eye to the development of the activities. Rita Zsargo's IPP served as a model with its clarity and practical, classroom-based application. Many other colleagues contributed to the activities through discussion at workshops in which I presented some of the activities. John Shannon, director of the Intensive English Program, lent his support to the project by fostering an atmosphere that is flexible and encourages innovation in the teaching and learning process.

In this paper, I will first review the rationale behind integrating reading and writing. Then, I will present a selection of activities in the categories of before-, during-, and after-reading. Detailed lesson plans include an outline of procedures as well as variations to the activities and a comment section. Material that can be used to prepare handouts for some of the activities is found in the appendix.

## **RATIONALE**

The connections between reading and writing are multifaceted. The most obvious connection is that both skills depend on the written forms of language for communication. At a deeper level, however, the relationship seems more complex.

Recent thinking about the nature of reading and writing views the two skills as interdependent and transactive (Carson, 1993, Church, 1997, Spack 1998b). Reading, as well as writing, is seen as an active, constructive process (Barnett, 1998, Church, 1998, Reid, 1993, Spack, 1998b, Zamel, 1992). Meaning is created through interaction between the reader, the writer, and the text in a give-and-take relationship in which each partner shapes and is shaped by the other. A range of elements such as the reader's prior knowledge, experience, feelings and the context in which the reading takes place determine what a text communicates to a reader. As a result, readers' interactions with a text and the meanings they construct are personal and unique (Reid, 1993, Spack, 1998b). If the kinds of teaching and learning activities employed in the classroom are to reflect this view of the reading process, then traditional reading comprehension exercises that call for a single correct answer need to be replaced with ones that allow for a diversity of responses. Students need to be given the authority and independence to figure things out for themselves within a supportive classroom atmosphere.

Reading and writing, since they are so closely linked, mutually reinforce each other and, therefore, promote learning when they are integrated in classroom activities.

Their integration allows for multiple approaches to tasks, covering all learning styles (Cobine, 1995). Students become better readers, writers and thinkers when they learn reading and writing together (Carson, 1993, Spack, 1998).

Writing activities motivate students to read and re-read in that they provide a purpose for reading and require students to become actively engaged with a text. Writing enhances students' understanding and improves the retention of what they read. It can serve as a vehicle through which students organize and clarify their thoughts on a reading. In addition, writing makes comprehension of a reading visible, providing teachers with opportunities to assess students' ability and to spot any misconceptions or areas of confusion (Reid, 1993).

On the other hand, without the benefit of reading, students cannot become effective writers. They need to see and experience how the written language works. While reading gives students exposure to vocabulary, sentence structure, and rhetorical structures of English writing, writing activities give students practice in using them. Students can use readings as a model for their writing, or they can write about readings (Reid, 1993). Through writing, students can practice skills related to reading such as paraphrasing and summarizing.

Finally, integrated reading and writing activities help students cope in university courses (Badger and Thomas, 1992, Grabe, 1991, Reid, 1993, Spack, 1993, Zamel, 1993). In an academic setting, student success is dependent on their ability to interact with a text. Activities such as summarizing can prepare students for academic tasks in which they will be asked to extract and work with ideas and information from readings (Reid, 1993).

This paper demonstrates practical ways in which to integrate reading and writing through before-reading, during-reading, and after-reading activities. Before-reading activities aim to activate schema by helping students relate what they already know to a reading, or by building relevant background knowledge (Alvarez and Risko, 1989, Barnett, 1988). Readers rely on schema, or prior knowledge and experience, to understand a text. Students may be introduced to vocabulary and ideas found in a text. They can raise questions or make predictions about what they will read, or they can preview the text in some way. Before-reading activities encourage students to anticipate a reading and stimulate their interest and motivation to read (Jacobs, 1999).

During-reading activities help students integrate their own background knowledge with the new information they get from the text. As students read, they can gather, organize, analyze, and evaluate evidence. They can look for answers to questions they raised and revise their predictions. They can then be encouraged to formulate new questions and predictions (Jacobs, 1999). During-reading activities engage students in the text and aid them in monitoring their own understanding.

After-reading activities provide students with the opportunity to articulate their understanding of what they have read (Barnett, 1988, Jacobs, 1999). Besides functioning as a comprehension check, these activities also help students deepen, extend and clarify their understanding. As students explore ideas from the text, they can be asked to extract and organize information. In writing and in discussion, they get practice in using vocabulary and sentence patterns they find in the reading.

## **WRITE-BEFORE-YOU-READ ACTIVITIES**

### **Activity I: Responding to a Quote**

**Level** Intermediate—Advanced

**Time** 30 minutes

#### **Rationale**

The purpose of this activity is for students to form associations with the topic of a passage they are going to read by writing in response to a quote.

#### **Preparation**

1. Select a suitable reading passage from the text the students use or from any supplemental reading materials. Find a thought-provoking quote that relates to the topic of the passage. The quote could come from the passage that students are going to read or from another source.
2. Prepare a handout. Write the quotation at the top of a piece of paper along with writing prompts that either invite an open-ended response or ask students to respond to specific questions. Examples of open-ended prompts can be found in Appendix A.

#### **Procedure**

1. Give students the topic or title of the reading passage. Tell them that they are going to write about a quote in preparation for the reading.

2. Distribute the handouts and read the quote aloud once or twice. Clarify unfamiliar words, but allow the students to discover the meaning of the quote for themselves.
3. Read the writing prompt to the students and give them about 10 minutes to write their thoughts on the quote. Encourage students to quickly write whatever comes into their minds without worrying too much about grammar or spelling. You may choose to write along with the students.
4. In pairs, have students take turns reading aloud what they have written.
5. Ask for volunteers to share their writing with the whole class. If students are slow to respond, you can read your response first.
6. Have students read the passage. Students can follow up with a discussion about how they think the quote relates to the text in light of new information they have after reading.

### Comments

When students explore issues from their own unique, individual perspectives, they become authorities for the knowledge that they generate. Writing in response to a compelling, authentic quote draws out personal, often very rich responses from students. Textbooks are a good source of quotes as they are often included in chapter or unit activities.

If students have not done this kind of activity before, it is a good idea to model or scaffold the activity before they do it independently. For example, before they begin to write students could brainstorm any words or phrases that they associate with the quote. Then, they can then use those words and phrases in their responses. I write along with my students and read my own writing to the class both to model the process, as well as to

share in the vulnerability of writing for an audience. When students share what they have written, they read their work aloud because this establishes a sense of community, helps students gain confidence in their ability to write, gives a sense of purpose to the writing, establishes voice and audience, and is a pleasurable activity. Finally, students can use this informal writing in order to work on a more formal writing assignment in connection with issues connected to the original text.

## **Activity II: Definition Posters**

**Level** High-Beginner—Advanced

**Time** 30 minutes

### **Rationale**

The aim of this activity is for students to define a concept that plays a key role in a text that they will read.

### **Preparation**

Find an appropriate reading passage. Factual articles, essays or textbook passages that define or classify something work well for this activity. You will need chart paper and markers.

### **Procedure**

1. Tell students the topic or title of passage that they are going to read. Ask a question or two to get them thinking about the topic. Write some of their answers on the board.
2. Give students a sentence starter to draw out a definition of the key concept in the reading. For example, possible sentence starters on the topic of friendship are:
  - *A friend always \_\_\_\_\_*
  - *A friend never \_\_\_\_\_*
  - *A friend is \_\_\_\_\_*

Ask students to write as many possible endings to the sentences as they can.

3. Have students work in small groups to discuss their sentences and to look for similarities and differences among them. Ask each group to pool their ideas and to

write them on a large piece of chart paper. Post these lists on the classroom walls and ask each group to briefly present their ideas to the class.

4. Read the passage.
5. Follow up the reading with a discussion of similarities and differences between the way the text and the students defined the concept.

### **Variations**

Have students divide posters into before reading and after reading sections. Ask them to write their own ideas in the before reading section of the poster. After reading the passage, students fill in the second section of the poster with ideas from the text.

### **Comments**

This activity brings out a lot of known vocabulary and background knowledge about a topic. Students in my classes have been surprised to notice the similarity between their ideas on a topic and the ideas in a reading passage from a “real” writer. This awareness on the part of students builds confidence and gives them authority for the knowledge. The activity leads nicely into a writing assignment, as students have already gotten most of the information that they need to write an extended definition.

I have found that students at all levels seem to enjoy the poster-making activity and put effort into making colorful, interesting posters. I leave the posters on the classroom walls for some time in order to reinforce the vocabulary that is associated with the reading. The posters also brighten up otherwise bare classroom walls.

**Activity III: Relating an Experience****Level** Intermediate—Advanced**Time** 20 minutes**Rationale**

The purpose of this activity is for students to write about something they have experienced that relates to central ideas, themes or events in a passage that they are going to read. In this way, students form schema-building associations with the text.

**Preparation**

1. Select a suitable reading passage.
2. Devise a writing prompt that will draw out the kinds of responses you are looking for from the students. For example, for a reading passage that deals with issues around schooling or education, you could ask students to write about something they recall from their own experiences with school. Write the prompt at the top of a piece of paper and make enough copies for all the students.

**Procedure**

1. Tell students the topic or title of the reading passage. To activate known vocabulary, have students brainstorm words that they associate with the topic. Write their responses on the board or on a large piece of paper. Students get practice writing if they write the words in their notebooks, as well.
2. Give students the writing prompt and clarify the task. Ask students to write for about 10 minutes. If necessary, model this step with the students before they write.

3. Have students read their writing aloud in small groups. Then ask for volunteers to read to the whole class.
4. Discuss similarities and differences in experiences.
5. Read the text.

### Variations

Before students begin writing, guide them in an active visualization in order to draw out the experience. Ask students to close their eyes and imagine sights, sounds, smells, and feelings they associate with the experience. You may ask them questions such as, *where are you, who is with you, and how old are you?* Then have students open their eyes and begin writing.

### Comments

Through this activity, students discover what they already know about a topic. When students form connections with a text by relating it to their own concrete experience, they gain a deeper understanding of characters and issues in the text. After reading the text, students can reflect on and consider their own experience in light of issues and the point of view they encountered there.

This activity can be used to prepare students to write a formal paragraph or essay. For example, this first piece of informal writing could be developed into a longer narrative of students' own experiences.

**Activity IV: Predicting****Level** High-Beginning—Advanced**Time** 30 minutes**Rationale**

The aim of this activity is for students to preview a reading passage in order to predict its content.

**Preparation**

Select an appropriate reading passage.

**Procedure**

1. Have student's preview the text they will be reading to get a general idea of what it is about. The following are suggestions for strategies that students can use:
  - Read the title and any introductory material
  - Read the first paragraph
  - Read the first sentence of each paragraph
  - Read the last paragraph
2. Ask students to put the text aside and write down what they think the passage will be about or what they think will happen in the reading based on the information they got in step one. Depending on the nature of the reading and the level of the class, students could write lists of words or phrases, or they could write a paragraph.
3. Invite students to read what they have written to a classmate. Then ask for volunteers to read to the whole class. Compare predictions.
4. After reading the entire passage, students can compare their predictions with the text.

## Variations

1. After previewing the text, ask students what questions they think will be answered in the text. Have them write their questions in their notebooks or on a large piece of chart paper. After reading, get students to note which of their questions were answered. Ask them to write down the answers they found.
2. Give students a large piece of paper and ask them to divide it into three columns. In one column, have students write a list of things they are sure that they already know about the reading. In the other column, students write questions that they would like to see answered or that they still have about the text. As they read, ask students to look for answers to their questions and, later, to add those answers to the third column of their charts. The students' predictions and answers to their questions can be used to reconstruct the reading passage in writing or to write a summary.

## Comments

In this activity, students begin to pose questions about a text and make predictions about it before they read. In this way, students become authors of the text and may come to understand the kinds of expectations that a reader has of a writer, which can be helpful for them in their own writing. Students may also begin to see the role that previewing and predicting play in understanding what they read. In addition, this kind of activity gives students a purpose for reading and motivates them to discover whether their predictions about the passage are correct.

## **WRITE WHILE YOU READ ACTIVITIES**

### **Activity I: Split-Page Notes**

**Level** Intermediate—Advanced

**Time** 30 minutes

#### **Rationale**

The purpose of this activity is for students to get practice in identifying main ideas and supporting details in a reading passage.

#### **Preparation**

Choose an appropriate reading passage.

#### **Procedure**

1. As students read a passage, ask them to look for and mark phrases that represent main ideas and details. Students can underline or highlight their selections in different colors, or they can mark them with different symbols.
2. When students have completed the reading, ask them to divide a piece of paper into two columns. Have them write the main ideas they found in the passage on the left side of the paper, and the details on the right side.
3. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to compare and revise their selections.
4. As a class, ask students for their ideas and clarify any misunderstandings. You may choose to write the ideas on the board or on a large piece of paper.

## Variations

1. You can give students questions to guide them in finding the main ideas and details in the reading. Write questions that draw out the main ideas in the left column of a worksheet, and questions that draw out details in the right column. Ask students to look for and mark the answers to the questions as they read. They can write the answers on the worksheet after they finish. With some practice, students will be able to move into the less guided version of the activity (Cobine 1995).
2. Students can take notes on a reading using a three- or four-column format. In addition to finding main ideas and details, students can note unfamiliar or interesting words in a third column, and can write questions they have about the reading in a fourth column. As a follow-up activity, students can find the meanings of the words and the answers to the questions they noted.

## Comments

In this activity, students are asked to pay close attention to specific features of a reading passage. They are encouraged to go back to the text, reread part of it, and skim for information. The skills that are practiced in this activity - gathering, noting and organizing information from a reading passage - are necessary skills for students who need to read in order to learn. In addition, by seeing how authors use detail to support their ideas, students may be able to do the same in their own writing. I use this activity after students have already had some practice in finding main ideas and details in a reading.

**Activity II: Post-it Notes<sup>1</sup>****Level** Intermediate—Advanced**Time** 30 minutes**Rationale**

In this activity, students find key ideas in a reading passage, mark them with Post-it notes, and summarize each idea.

**Preparation**

1. Select an appropriate reading passage.
2. Bring enough small Post-it notes to class so that each student can have several.

**Procedure**

1. As they read, ask students to find and mark each key point in the passage with a Post-it note.
2. When students have finished reading the passage once, have them go back and look at the points they marked. Tell them to leave Post-it notes only on those points that they still feel are the most important points in the reading.
3. Tell students to write on each note a word or phrase that sums up the ideas they have chosen.
4. Have students work in pairs to share their selections and make any revisions.
5. As a class, ask students what ideas they chose and write a few on the board.
6. Have students write a summary of the reading passage using only their Post-it notes.

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<sup>1</sup> Orme and Masson 1999

## Comments

This activity can be used to help students learn how to use logical order and sequencing in their writing. It is also a good way to introduce summary writing. In addition, students can use the strategy for reviewing written material in their content courses.

Before attempting this activity, students need practice in finding key ideas and in distinguishing those ideas from details. They will also benefit from guidance in summarizing the ideas from the text.

### **Activity III: Plus-Minus-Interesting<sup>2</sup>**

**Level** Intermediate—Advanced

**Time** 25 minutes

#### **Rationale**

As students read, they put information or ideas from the passage into three categories.

The purpose of the activity is to help students learn to evaluate and form opinions about what they read.

#### **Preparation**

Choose an appropriate reading passage.

#### **Procedure**

1. Ask students to draw a table with three columns and to label the columns *Plus*, *Minus* and *Interesting*.
2. Have students find key information in the reading passage and write it into one of the three columns. Tell them to write ideas that they see as being positive or that they like in the *Plus* column; ideas that seem negative or that they don't like in the *Minus* column; and ideas that they find particularly interesting in the last column marked *Interesting*.
3. After reading, ask students to work in pairs or small groups to share the information on their charts and to explain their positions on the topic.
4. As a class, discuss and compare the selections students made.

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<sup>2</sup> Orme and Masson 1999

## Variations

1. Students can do this as an after-reading activity. They can fill out their charts individually or in groups.
2. As a follow-up to this activity, have students write a four-paragraph essay with one paragraph focussing on each of the categories in the chart:
  - Introduction, beginning with what students found interesting
  - Pluses (or Minuses)
  - Minuses (or Pluses)
  - Conclusions

## Comments

Through this activity, students get practice in applying critical thinking skills to their reading. As they read, they interact with the text and focus closely on key concepts while at the same time evaluating or analyzing those concepts according to their own criteria. In addition, students get practice in sorting information into categories. It is a useful activity for looking at and forming opinions about issues. As such, it makes a good starting point for a more formal writing assignment in which students write about their opinions, argue for or against an issue, or write an evaluation of a consumer product or service.

When doing this activity for the first time or with low-level students, you can do it with the whole class and put the categories and student responses on the board.

**Activity IV: Double-Entry Response****Level** Intermediate—Advanced**Time** 20 minutes**Rationale**

In this activity, students select what they find to be significant points from a reading passage and write a response to each point. The activity helps students interact with the reading, focus on what the author is saying, and explore the meaning of the passage for themselves.

**Preparation**

Select an appropriate reading passage.

**Procedure**

1. Ask students to divide a piece of paper into two columns. They can either fold the paper in half or draw a line down the middle of the paper.
2. Tell students that as they read they should copy interesting or important points from the passage on the left side of the paper. Those points could include words, phrases, sentences, ideas, or details.
3. After reading, ask students to write their responses to the copied text on the right side of the paper. Students can ask questions, note confusion, make connections to something else they've read or seen, make personal associations, and express feelings, thoughts, disagreement, or agreement.
4. Have students share their entries by reading them aloud in pairs or small groups.
5. Invite the class as a whole to compare and discuss their choices and responses.

## Variations

1. Rather than copying the exact words from the reading passage, students can summarize the points they find interesting or important. They can do this for each paragraph or for larger portions of text.
2. If the margins of the reading passage are wide enough, students can copy or summarize points in the left margin of the text itself. They can then write brief responses to those points in the right margin.
3. Instead of sharing their responses verbally, students can engage in a written conversation with each other using triple-entry notes. Have students divide a paper into three columns. After they have selected significant points from the reading and responded to them, ask the students to exchange their papers with each other. Have each student read another's work and then write responses to it in the third column.

## Comments

In this activity, students are actively engaged in and focussed on the reading as they separate what the author is thinking from what they think. Students enrich their reading and deepen their understanding of a passage because they look for and form their own unique, personal connections to the text. Students also get practice in taking notes from a text.

## **WRITE-AFTER-YOU-READ ACTIVITIES**

### **Activity I: Retelling**

**Level** High-Beginner—Advanced

**Time** 30 minutes

#### **Rationale**

After reading a passage, students are asked to recall as much as they can of what they read, first in speaking and then in writing. Reconstructing a reading helps students clarify their understanding of the text and gives them practice in using the language they are learning.

#### **Preparation**

1. Have students read an appropriate text. A relatively short reading works best for this activity since students will be asked to recall what they have read without referring to the text.
2. Select key words from the reading that students can use in retelling. Prepare a handout with the words in random order. Alternately, put the words on the board or on a large piece of chart paper.

#### **Procedure**

1. After reading, give students a few minutes to review the text. Tell them to remember everything they can.

2. Go over the list of key words to make sure students know the meanings.
3. Ask students to put aside the passage and take turns with a classmate to tell each other in their own words what they remember from the reading. Encourage students to use as many of the key words as they can.
4. As a class, invite volunteers to tell one thing each that they remember from the reading. Have students refer to the text to clarify any misunderstandings or confusion.
5. Ask students to write down what they remember from the reading, using the key words from the handout. Depending on the level of the students, they could write phrases, sentences, or a paragraph.

### Variations

1. Give each pair of students two separate sets of words. Each partner uses one set to retell the reading.
2. This activity can be adapted to give students more guidance and modeling in retelling. As a class, students tell everything they can remember about a reading. Write their comments in any order on the board or on a large piece of chart paper. Have students go back to the text to clarify any inconsistencies and to make any necessary corrections to the information on the board. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to organize the information into a list or graphic organizer. As a final step, students can reconstruct the reading in sentence or paragraph form from the information they have organized. Have students tell you the sentences while you write them on the board. Ask students to make corrections as a class and then to copy the completed retelling into their notebooks. More advanced students can complete this step on their own.

3. In order to make this activity more challenging for advanced students, have them take notes or mark significant parts of the text as they read. Then ask them to use their notes to reconstruct the reading in writing.

### **Comments**

Retelling is a valuable step in the reading process because it becomes quite apparent whether students have understood the reading, thus allowing the teacher to discover and work with any misconceptions that might arise. It gives students practice in all skills, enhancing both their written and spoken language. In addition, students learn to see how writers organize texts and they get practice in organizing them. As an extension to retelling, students can extract the main points of a reading to write a summary.

**Activity II: Open-Ended Responses****Level** Intermediate—Advanced**Time** 30 minutes**Rationale**

In this activity, students write personal responses to a reading guided by open-ended prompts. The purpose of the activity is for students to learn to react thoughtfully to a text in order to discover ideas and extend their understanding.

**Preparation**

1. Select a narrative or factual reading passage that has a good chance of evoking a response. That is, the text itself should have qualities that motivate students to write a reaction to it. Have students read the passage, completing appropriate pre- or during-reading activities.
2. Prepare a handout with instructions for the activity along with an open-ended response prompt or prompts. Students may be given only one prompt to write from, or they can be given several from which to choose. The possibilities for responding to a reading are many. Students can be asked to respond in a perceptive (noticing) mode, in an affective (feeling) mode, or in an associative (relating) mode (Beach 1993).

Students can:

- Explore their thoughts or feelings about the reading
- Relate the reading to their own experience
- Agree or disagree with the text
- Link texts to each other

- Raise questions about something they found confusing or didn't understand
- Write about what they found significant

The prompts can take any of the following forms:

- Statements (*Describe what you agree with.*)
- Questions (*What do you agree with? What do you disagree with?*)
- Unfinished sentences (*I think the author is right because... I think the author is wrong because...*)

Examples of open-ended prompts can be found in Appendix A.

## **Procedure**

1. Tell students that they will be writing a response to a passage they have read. Give them the handout and explain the prompt or prompts if necessary. If there is more than one prompt, students should choose just one. Alternatively, students could also be given the option to write whatever they want. Invite the students to write for about 10 minutes. Ask them to put thought and care into their responses, but not to worry overly about grammar and mechanics. The aim is to have their writing flow smoothly as they put their thoughts on paper.
2. After writing, have students share their responses by reading them to a classmate or to a small group.
3. Invite students to read their responses to the class as a whole. Students can be asked to reflect on the variety of responses.

## Variations

1. This activity can be modified so that it is accessible to novice students. One possibility is to ask students to respond to a reading by writing words or phrases under headings such as, *Things I Like*, or *Things I Don't Understand*.
2. Before beginning this activity, students could spend a few minutes telling each other what they remember from the reading. This step helps ensure that students have understood the main points.

## Comments

Activities such as this one encourage students to pay attention to meaning rather than to literal recall of information. Because there is no single correct response, students are challenged to move beyond memorizing facts and regurgitating information. Instead, they are engaged in analyzing and reflecting on ideas, themes, or issues. Students practice using critical thinking skills as they generate hypotheses, form insights, and build connections between the text and their lives. The response process promotes involvement, questioning, deeper understanding, as well as motivation. Through sharing what they have written, students may become aware of the many different possibilities for interpretation, which may lead them to reflect on and revise their own ideas.

Writing responses to readings is a learned activity that requires a fair command of the language, so students may need time and practice before they are able to write thoughtful, insightful responses. Their first responses may, in fact, seem more like summaries. On the other hand, I am often struck by the depth of students' responses.

I always collect the students' written responses and comment on them in some way. At times, I write comments or ask questions about what students have written. I

also evaluate the responses by assigning them from 0 – 3 points depending on how much thoughtfulness and thoroughness have gone into them.

### **Activity III: Directed Responses**

**Level** Intermediate—Advanced

**Time** 20 minutes

#### **Rationale**

In this activity, students are asked to follow a directed or guided prompt to write a response to a reading. Directed responses help students to look deeper into ideas, themes and characters.

#### **Preparation**

1. Select a narrative or factual reading passage that has a good chance of evoking a response. Have students read the passage, completing any appropriate pre- or during-reading activities.
2. Prepare a handout with instructions for the activity along with a response prompt that will help students discover and analyze ideas from the reading. Let the text suggest the kind of prompt that will draw out meaningful responses from the students. There are numerous ways in which students can respond. The following are a few suggestions:

- Use details from the reading to analyze a concept, character, item or event
- Respond to a concept, character, item or event
- Relate the reading to other works or to their own experience
- Look at the reading from a different point of view
- Extend the reading
- Ask questions

Examples of directed prompts can be found in Appendix B.

### **Procedure**

Follow the same procedure as for Activity II, on page 28.

### **Variations**

1. Ask students to choose a short passage from the reading either because they like it, think it is important, or find it confusing. Tell students to copy the passage at the top of a piece of paper exactly as it appears in the text. Then, on the same paper, have students write about why they chose the passage.
2. Have students select their favorite, or what they see as the most significant, word, phrase or sentence from a reading. Ask students to copy the passage onto a card or piece of paper. As in Variation 1, ask the students to write why they chose the words. Tell students to form small groups in which they read aloud their quotes and responses. Other members of the group share why they feel the quote is significant. The student whose writing is being discussed gives the final response. In that response, students may include new points from the discussion or may change their original response in some way. Ask students to write new responses in which they include any insights they got through sharing.

### **Comments**

This activity is useful in order to guide students toward constructing meaning from a reading passage. Writing from a directed response broadens students' interpretation and reflection, and helps them go beyond summary in their responses. It

encourages students to think, to gather evidence, and to form hypotheses. Completed responses can be saved and may form the basis for a more formal writing assignment.

## **Activity IV: Summarizing**

**Level** High Intermediate—Advanced

**Time** 90 minutes

### **Rationale**

In this activity, students identify the main ideas in a reading and use that information to write a summary.

### **Preparation**

1. Select a narrative or factual reading passage and have students read the passage, completing any appropriate pre- or during-reading activities.
2. Prepare a list of guidelines for writing a summary. These guidelines could be put in a handout, on the board, or on a large piece of chart paper. Examples of possible guidelines are found in Appendix C.
3. (optional) Select a few examples of model summaries for students to read and evaluate. Reading and writing textbooks are good sources for these.

### **Procedure**

1. Have students take notes on or highlight the major ideas in a reading passage, either while they read or after reading.
2. Monitor the students' understanding of the reading by asking them to retell in their own words what they can remember from the reading, first in pairs and then with the whole class. Clarify any misconceptions or areas of confusion.
3. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to agree on a list of the main ideas from the reading. Have them refer to their notes or to their annotations in the text.

4. As a class, ask students to share their lists. Write their ideas on the board or on a large piece of chart paper.
5. Discuss with students which ideas are the most important. Invite them to suggest any details on the list that don't contribute to the overall understanding of the text and could be eliminated.
6. When the list of main ideas seems complete, have students work in pairs to put the ideas in a logical order. Then, come back together as a class to organize the ideas written on the board or chart paper in step 4.
7. Go over the guidelines for writing a summary. You may also wish to have students work with model summaries at this point.
8. Ask students to put aside the text and to use the ideas they listed and organized to write a paragraph summarizing the reading.

### **Variations**

1. In a more guided activity, students can write answers to questions related to the main ideas in a reading. They can use the answers to build a summary of the reading.
2. Have students build a summary from their written retelling of a reading (Activity I, pages 24-26). Ask students to identify the main points and any irrelevant details they find in their retelling. Then have them rewrite it, eliminating minor details and clearly organizing the information.

### **Comments**

Summarizing is different from retelling in that, in summarizing, the information from a reading is distilled into its essential elements. Retelling is a more complete, less

precise recounting of a text. Condensing a text requires a great deal of skill in using the language. It is a challenging activity for language learners. Thus, students benefit when the activity is carefully scaffolded and modeled, and when they have many opportunities for practice. To begin with, students can move from writing guided summaries of short, simple texts, to writing independently from longer, more complex readings.

Summarizing is an important skill to learn for students who will use English in an academic setting. In university classes, students are expected to be able to summarize information in their own words from other sources as well as from their own experience. In addition, they will be asked to incorporate that information into essays and longer papers. I give students opportunities to practice those skills by having them use material from their summaries to write essays about themes, ideas, or events that relate to their readings.

## **CONCLUSION**

As teachers, we honor our students' ability to think critically and creatively when we ask them to engage in challenging activities in which they can be active participants in their own learning. In my experience, we don't need to have our students answer questions about a text in order to get evidence of their understanding. Instead, we can have our students work with texts by exploring them from different angles. Giving students tasks in which they are asked to organize, summarize, or analyze information is a much more meaningful activity than answering preconceived comprehension questions. Those kinds of activities also allow teachers to check students' literal comprehension of what they've read. Students need to be given the opportunity to look at texts through the lens of their own experience, to grapple with and create meaning for themselves. In this way, they become independent in their learning and gain confidence in themselves as readers, writers, and thinkers.

The possibilities for connecting reading and writing are numerous. This project is meant to give teachers some ideas of how to integrate those skills in their classrooms and to provide a starting point from which they can further explore the possibilities. The activities presented can be used for any classes in which reading and writing are part of the curriculum. They may also be adapted for various levels.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **OPEN-ENDED-RESPONSE PROMPTS**

#### **Statements**

- Describe what you thought or felt as you read.
- Explore what you like or what interests you.
- Explore what you find significant.
- Explore what you agree or disagree with.
- Relate your own experience to the reading.
- Explore questions you have about what you read.
- Explore what you found confusing or did not understand.

#### **Questions**

- How does it make you feel?
- What do you like?
- What do you find interesting?
- What do you notice?
- What does it remind you of?
- Is it similar to your own experience? Is it different? How?

#### **Unfinished Sentences**

- I liked/didn't like the part about...
- I understood...
- This reminded me of...
- I'm confused about...

## **APPENDIX B**

### **DIRECTED-RESPONSE PROMPTS**

There are many possible variations in the kinds of responses that can be elicited.

Depending on the nature of the reading and who your students are, you could choose from among the following ideas.

- Choose one incident, object or character from the text and describe it in detail.
- Describe an event and explain why it is important.
- Write a list of words or phrases from the reading that describes a character, event or idea.
- Write about a picture or illustration that accompanies the reading.
- Explain how something in the text is similar or different from something in your own experience.
- Look for and find similarities and differences between ideas, events or characters in two readings. Explain how those things are similar or different.
- Ask questions about the reading to get more information about things that are puzzling or confusing.
- Write a letter to the author of the text. Ask questions or make comments on the reading.
- Write a letter to one of the characters.
- Write a dialogue or paragraph using the style of the author. (Note: This works if the author's style of writing is distinctive in some way. For example, some authors use repetition of words, structures or phrases to achieve a particular effect.)
- Rewrite the story from a different point of view.

- Rewrite the ending.
- Add an episode or episodes to the reading.
- Write about what would have happened if...
- Write about how to solve a problem.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A SUMMARY**

- Identify the title and author of the reading in the first sentence.
- State the main topic or theme.
- Include only the most important ideas.
- Leave out minor or unnecessary details.
- Present information in the correct order.
- Restate information from the reading in your own words.
- Be brief.

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