

SELECTED COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITIES TO TRY

- ❖ **Class Minutes.** Assign different students to keep minutes for every class meeting. Outside of class, assign one student to write up minutes for a class meeting and submit them to his or her group for discussion and revision. Then, have the group make copies and distribute the minutes to every member of the class. Great for lecture classes.

- ❖ **Minute or End-of-Class Papers.** For the final 10 minutes of class, assign students to write an explanation of the most significant thing that they learned in class that day AND to end with their most important question related to that topic. OR have them describe the most difficult point of that day's class lecture or discussion or reading and suggest reasons why that point is difficult. Insist that they write these minute papers in complete sentences. Excellent for lecture or discussion classes.

- ❖ **Class Listserv.** Set up an electronic discussion list or listserv for the class. Require student to join the listserv and then to use their email accounts to discuss course material online. Assign a student or small group of students to submit short discussions or minute papers for each class period or for each week. Ask the rest of the class to respond to those discussions or papers. You might also have students submit course paper proposals to the list and have the rest of the class provide feedback on the list. Good for any kind of course.

- ❖ **Problem-solving Groups.** Divide students into small groups and assign each group different problems related to topics being covered in the class. Each group is to come up with a solution. Group problem solving does not have to involve objective questions. Subjective problems can sometimes yield the most interesting results. Groups must not only develop solutions but also come to consensus on a solution put forward. Group problem solving fosters creative thinking, oral communication skills, and skills in interpersonal dynamics. Good for any kind of course.

- ❖ **Summarizing and Synthesis.** The ability to summarize facts and ideas for others is an important cognitive task. Assign students to write summaries of readings done for the course. Begin by assigning single readings to be summarized separately, but as soon as you see that the students are accomplishing this task, begin assigning them to summarize ideas/topics from multiple readings. Students tend to attach ideas to singular sources and have little experience synthesizing source material. Particularly good for courses involving discussion of readings and/or courses where students encounter contrary theories, movements, ideas.

- ❖ **Double-Entry Notebook.** Assign students to write a journal entry for each reading or set of readings. They are to draw a line down the middle of each journal entry page. On the left side of the page, they are to take “objective” notes on the reading, outlining the text or summarizing the important aspects of it. These notes are meant to be a record of meaningful information derived from the reading. On the right side of the page, they are to respond “subjectively” to the reading. Their subjective responses can include questions about difficult passages, disagreements with the author(s) of the text, personal experiences that relate to a topic or subtopic of the reading, connections to other readings, etc. Great for virtually any course but especially courses involving experiential learning assignments (e.g., internships) and courses with significant readings and discussion.

- ❖ **Freewriting.** A free association technique, freewriting can help students determine where they stand in relation to subject matter. Consider having students freewrite in class fairly regularly in order for them to become comfortable with this activity. To freewrite, you set a time limit (say, 10 minutes); then, you write manually without ever lifting your pen or pencil, without stopping to think about what you are writing, without stopping to shake out the cramp in your hand. If you can't think of something to say, then you simply write something like “nothing nothing nothing” and so on until you do think of something. To focus student freewrites, have them write a sentence at the top of the page and then begin freewriting with that sentence in mind. You should not worry that you get off topic. It's inevitable sometimes. Once the freewrite is done, students should read through it and then begin another freewrite. Students should continue doing freewrites until they feel that they have come up with several good ideas. Good for introductory courses where students need to find ways to relate to new knowledge.

- ❖ **Microtheme.** The microtheme is an increasingly popular writing assignment that bridges informal and formal writing. Assign a paper topic but require students to write the paper on a 5" x 8" notecard or on a single sheet of paper. They are to ignore introductions and conclusions. Just put down the main points. Make sure they understand that they are to write in complete sentences. Especially good in courses where students are asked to find positions on issues, to argue and support positions issues. But microthemes can involve all kinds of writing. For example, *the data-provided microtheme* asks students to develop generalizations/conclusions based on data provided by the instructor (e.g., a graph or statistical data). The microtheme also makes for excellent preparation for writing longer pieces of discourse on the same topic, where they will need to provide background information, expand their support for their claims, and write introductions and conclusions, taking audience into consideration.