

## Low Stakes Writing: From Activities To Assignments

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### Abstract

The primary purpose of low stakes writing is to increase the extent of how much students consider, understand, and learn the material they are being taught, and this process is left either ungraded or graded informally. This article explores some activities to be used in this type of teaching writing, and implementation of some of those activities in practice. Besides, in the article there are given several sample assignments intended for university students involving low stakes writing.

**Key words:** low stakes writing, academic writing, in-class writing, writing across the curriculum (WAC)

As a tool, writing can assist students gaining success in their learning environments. When assigned writing tasks students are often converted from passive learners into active ones, this means, while they are completing a writing assignment even the most passive students start thinking critically, gathering data, analyzing and categorizing it, preparing hypotheses and formulating arguments for their essays. There exist high stakes writing and low stakes writing assignments in the process of teaching writing to students at any level or course.

Low stakes writing or “writing-to-learn”, exploratory writing activities provide students with a chance to specify their concerns about their written assignments, and their worries about writing skills such as grammar, or structure. In these types of writing tasks, the only evaluation will go to engagement in the activity. There exist myriad positive points when it comes to low stakes writing. For instance, this type of writing can stimulate open class discussions very easily, encourage students to respond to and keep up with course readings, assist students in understanding some key concepts of the course, and require limited amount of time to complete. Furthermore, these types of activities can be expanded into more serious, formal and more complicated tasks, such as formal responsive essays and research papers. Since instructors need not grade, comment or even read every piece of low stakes writing, this approach to writing is quite convenient to implement into practice. Low-stakes writing also creates less stress for students and instructors, because it usually counts for a small portion (if any) of the total grade and tends to be quicker to mark than essays, lab reports, and writing portfolios.

In order to make low stakes writing work in your classrooms you can follow some useful guidelines in your practice. First, these types of writings should be assigned throughout the whole term, because students should be accustomed to writing such kinds of pieces. Secondly, your low stakes writing assignments should have a set time limit for in-class writings. The reason for this is that students should learn to focus on the things they write in classrooms, and you should not forget that time limit for low stakes writing tasks should be quite small. Last but not least, it is essential to be clear how students’ writings will be responded, how it will contribute to the overall progress in the course, etc. Following these points could bring you to successful and effective use of this approach to writing.

As the next point, I would like to focus on some very good sample activities that could be used in low stakes writing. The most commonly used activity is in-class writing – this type of activity

can be done in order to summarize a class discussion or a lecture on a particular concept. This activity is mostly free writing activity, that's why it can be used in any type of a class, for any purpose. The next common activity I personally prefer is online discussions or blogs. In this activity, students discuss a concept or an issue using some online tools such as blogs, telegram groups, discussion forums, messengers or social media. I find this activity effective because with our modern youth it is better to have "their type" of activities more often: first, they feel comfortable; second, Internet is one of the first things they are good at using.

There are a lot more example activities to be used in low stakes writing such as writing journals, explanation letters, micro themes, progress or final statements, class dictionary or encyclopedia, thesis statements and 50-word assignments. However, it does not depend on what type of activity you use with your students, it is significant that you follow low stakes writing guidelines and let students feel free and independent with such types of writings, and then you will succeed in achieving your goal.

When surveyed, a lot of students find low stakes writing very beneficial and effective. As advantages of low stakes writing students mention some very relevant points. For instance, low stakes writing makes lectures less tiring and more interesting, this type of writing encourages deeper participation in class discussions, encourages student engagement in class activities, gives students sense of being heard even when they did not share their ideas in the classroom, etc. These answers demonstrate that this approach to teaching writing is approved not only from teachers' but also from students' perspectives.

Low stakes writing is a pedagogically sound teaching practice that can easily be integrated into all content courses at the university level. This type of writing should not be understood as a writing assignment of only language classes specifically. Low stakes writing is a very effective tool in teaching different content courses, and students in practice find this approach very useful in comprehending some key concepts of the course.

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