

# Module

# 4

## Writing Effectively in the Content Areas

**Estimated Time: 1 hour**

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The goal of this module is to introduce participants to four instructional practices that use writing to engage students with the content of the disciplines. Participants will be asked to look differently at two common practices: bell ringer questions/answers and learning logs. They will also experience the power of Read/Think/Respond and Talk Back to involve students with the content and encourage them to think critically and learn deeply.

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### Materials You Will Need:

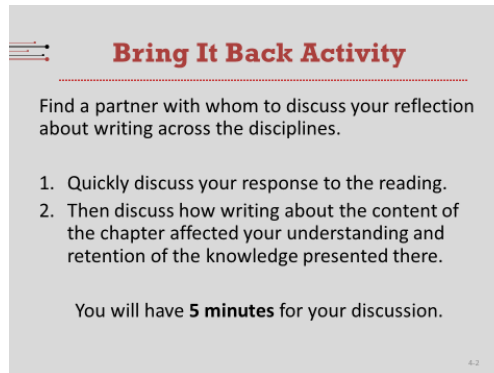
- Chart paper
- Markers
- PowerPoint Slides **4.1-4.15**
- A piece of chart paper with the heading *Writing about what we're learning...*
- A piece of chart paper with the heading *Response is...*
- A computer and projector to project images in Segments 4 and 5
- **Handout 1:** Sample Questions for Bell-Ringer Writing—1 for each participant
- **Handout 2:** How to “Talk Back” to a Text—1 for each participant
- **Handout 3:** What Goes Into a Learning Log—1 for each participant
- Paper and pens/pencils for participants (optional)
- Highlighters for participants (optional)

## Overview of the Session: All times are approximate.

- SEGMENT 1: Reflecting on the Bring It Back Activity (Approximately 10 minutes)
- SEGMENT 2: Establishing the Purpose of the Session (Approximately 5 minutes)
- SEGMENT 3: Bell-Ringer Questions/Answers (Approximately 10 minutes)
- SEGMENT 4: Read/Think/Respond (Approximately 10 minutes)
- SEGMENT 5: Talk Back (Approximately 10 minutes)
- SEGMENT 6: Differentiated Learning Logs (Approximately 10 minutes)
- BRING IT BACK ASSIGNMENT (Approximately 5 minutes)

### ➤ **SEGMENT 1: Approximately 10 minutes** **Reflecting on the Bring It Back Activity**

- A.** Project PowerPoint Slide 4.2 about 5 minutes before the scheduled start time.



**Bring It Back Activity**

Find a partner with whom to discuss your reflection about writing across the disciplines.

1. Quickly discuss your response to the reading.
2. Then discuss how writing about the content of the chapter affected your understanding and retention of the knowledge presented there.

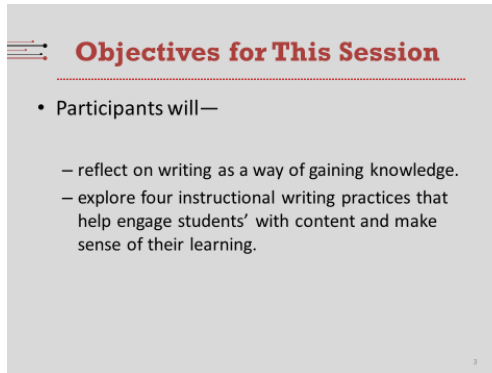
You will have **5 minutes** for your discussion.

4.2

- B.** Post the chart paper headed *Writing about what we're learning...*
- C.** Prompt participants to begin their conversations at the scheduled start time.
- D.** Walk through the room during the discussions, answering questions and coaching as needed.
- E.** After 5 minutes, ask participants to bring their thoughts to a close.
- F.** Direct participants' attention to the chart paper and ask volunteers to offer ideas on how writing about the learning aids in acquiring knowledge.

➤ **SEGMENT 2: Approximately 5 minutes**  
**Establishing the Purpose of the Session**

**A.** Project **PowerPoint Slide 4.2.**

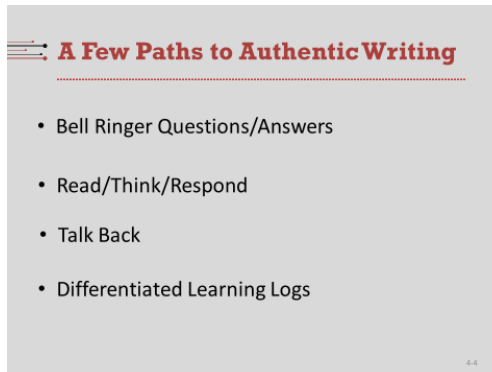


A PowerPoint slide with a grey background. The title is "Objectives for This Session" in red, underlined. Below the title is a bulleted list of objectives.

- Participants will—
  - reflect on writing as a way of gaining knowledge.
  - explore four instructional writing practices that help engage students' with content and make sense of their learning.

**B.** Go over the objectives for the session.

**C.** Display **Animated PowerPoint Slide 4.3.**



A PowerPoint slide with a grey background. The title is "A Few Paths to Authentic Writing" in red, underlined. Below the title is a bulleted list of writing practices.

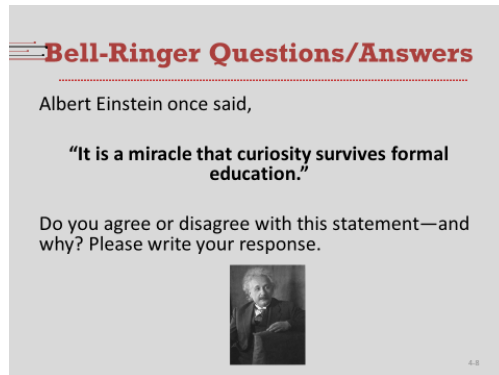
- Bell Ringer Questions/Answers
- Read/Think/Respond
- Talk Back
- Differentiated Learning Logs

**D.** On a mouse click, four of Lent's practices for writing will appear. This slide is introductory—the rest of the session will go over the four activities in more depth.

**E.** Explain that the section they will read for the Bring It Back activity will actually discuss **seven** recommended practices for disciplinary writing, but we are only going to examine the first four of them in this session due to time constraints.

➤ **SEGMENT 3: Approximately 10 minutes**  
**Bell Ringer Questions/Answers**

A. Project **PowerPoint Slide 4.5.**




**Bell-Ringer Questions/Answers**

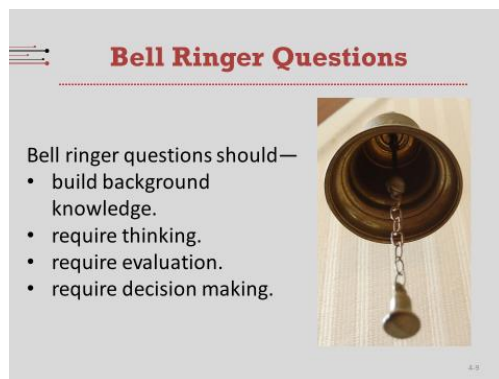
Albert Einstein once said,

**“It is a miracle that curiosity survives formal education.”**

Do you agree or disagree with this statement—and why? Please write your response.




- B. Give participants 2-3 minutes to respond to the quotation.
- C. At the end of 3 minutes, ask participants to share their responses with a partner. Give them another 2-3 minutes to discuss.
- D. Discuss the reality that many teachers use bell-ringer activities just to settle the students in and give the teacher a chance to take care of management chores. *This* activity was not just a time-filler, however. This quotation asks the participants to consider whether or not formal education fosters curiosity. The writing tasks we are talking about today *will* make students curious about the subject matter presented in the various disciplines—and this curiosity is essential as a prelude to effective inquiry. So, this quotation ties in with what we are doing the rest of the sessions and prepares participants to think about what they can do in their classrooms to foster curiosity about their disciplines.
- E. Project **PowerPoint Slide 4.6.**



**Bell Ringer Questions**

Bell ringer questions should—

- build background knowledge.
- require thinking.
- require evaluation.
- require decision making.



- F. Stress the fact that bell ringer questions should force students to *think*, not just regurgitate content previously covered in class. It should make them curious about the learning that will take place that day. The Einstein quote was designed to make

participants consider whether or not the way we are currently teaching actually kills the natural curiosity that students bring to the table. New ways of utilizing writing can stimulate that curiosity.

- G. Distribute copies of **Handout #1: Sample Questions for Bell-Ringer Questions** to each participant. Give participants a minute or two to look over the questions.
- H. Ask participants to volunteer any similar questions to spark student thinking.

## ➤ **SEGMENT 4: Approximately 10 minutes** **Read/Think/Respond**

- A. Project animated **PowerPoint Slide 4.7**.

**Read/Think/Respond**

At your tables, discuss this question:

**What does it mean to respond?**

“A response differs from an analysis in that writers interpret the text through a subjective stance, making connections and bringing background knowledge as they seek to interpret the author’s message.”

--Releah Lent

4.7

Initially, only the question will appear. Give participants 1-2 minutes to discuss it at their tables.

- B. While the participants discuss, **post the chart paper headed *Response is...***
- C. Ask volunteers to share their group’s or their own personal definition of response.
- D. After discussing this whole group, click the mouse to show ReLeah Lent’s explanation of *response*. Stress the point that responses are **subjective** and offer students opportunities to make connections and use background knowledge to make sense of their learning. Responses personally connect students to the content.
- E. Project **PowerPoint Slide 4.8**.

**Read, Think, Respond**

- Students read a short piece of complex text related to your discipline.
- They think for a few moments about the text
- They write a response to the text.

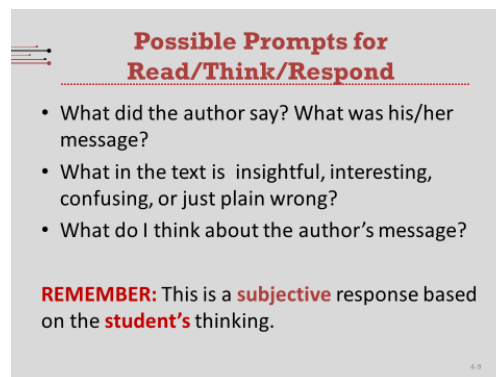
--Releah Lent

4.8

- F. While going through the points on the slide, stress the fact that the text must be one which will cause the students to think deeply. *Complex* doesn't mean the text is necessarily difficult to read—it means the text has many layers. (For example, William Carlos Williams's poem "The Red Wheelbarrow" [accessible here: <http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/red-wheelbarrow>] is simple to read but has many layers of meaning.)
- G. Explain that before students are asked to read/think/respond, it would probably be helpful for the teacher to model his/her own response to a complex text.
- H. Project a graphic of your choice that ties into the idea of curiosity. Here are a few suggestions:
- The Evolution of Education  
[http://media.cagle.com/158/2012/02/16/106501\\_600.jpg](http://media.cagle.com/158/2012/02/16/106501_600.jpg)
  - Skills and Attributes of Today's Learner  
[https://usergeneratededucation.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/2013-05-22\\_1603.png?w=700](https://usergeneratededucation.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/2013-05-22_1603.png?w=700)
  - Grey Area of Motivation on intrinsic motivation  
[http://www.squareone-learning.com/exploration\\_images/greyareamotivation.jpg](http://www.squareone-learning.com/exploration_images/greyareamotivation.jpg)

Any graphic you choose should be fairly complex so that participants will need to pull several pieces of background knowledge together to make sense of it.

- I. Ask participants to read and **think** about the graphic a minute.
- J. Now ask them to write a quick response to what they've seen, remembering that their reaction should be subjective and based on their own background knowledge and the connections they made to the content of the cartoon.
- K. Give participants 2-3 minutes to respond.
- L. Have volunteers share out their responses.
- M. Caution that students may at first be unsure what to write in response. Project **PowerPoint Slide 4.9** to show examples of prompts that can help spur student thinking.



**Possible Prompts for  
Read/Think/Respond**

- What did the author say? What was his/her message?
- What in the text is insightful, interesting, confusing, or just plain wrong?
- What do I think about the author's message?

**REMEMBER:** This is a **subjective** response based on the **student's** thinking.

4.9

N. Ask volunteers to share how they think read/think/respond might be beneficial in the classroom.

➤ **SEGMENT 5: Approximately 10 minutes**

**Talk Back**

A. Choose a somewhat controversial text for participants that will prompt some “talking back.” Sir Ken Robinson has done a great deal of work trying to reform education and has some very provocative thoughts on the subject. You could even use an excerpt from his Ted Talk on creativity which can be found here:

[http://www.ted.com/talks/ken\\_robinson\\_says\\_schools\\_kill\\_creativity/transcript?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity/transcript?language=en)

(NOTE: This particular link includes a full transcript of his talk so that a segment chosen by the presenter could be projected to use with this activity.)

Here are links to some of his written comments (again, the presenter would project only a portion of these articles):

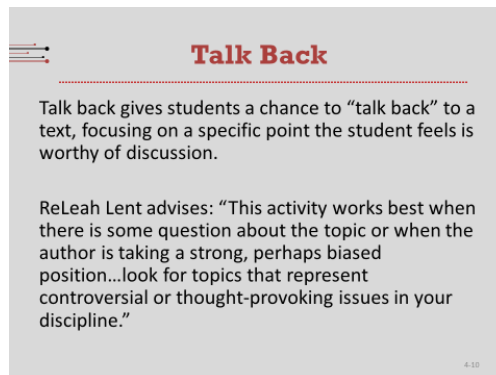
- Sir Ken Robinson Has a Lot to Say about US School Reform (It Isn't Good)  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2015/04/21/sir-ken-robinson-has-a-lot-to-say-about-u-s-school-reform-it-isnt-good/>
- Every Child Is an Artist: A Conversation Between Ann Sweeney (of Disney) and Sir Ken Robinson  
<http://www.fastcompany.com/3014819/disney-anne-sweeney-sir-ken-robinson>
- Fertile Minds Need Feeding  
<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2009/feb/10/teaching-sats>

Pulitzer-prize-winning columnist Leonard Pitts often has controversial columns. You can access them here:

<http://www.miamiherald.com/opinion/opn-columns-blogs/leonard-pitts-jr/>

Articles on controversial subjects from recent newspapers or magazines would be very appropriate here.

B. Project **PowerPoint Slide 4.10.**



**Talk Back**

Talk back gives students a chance to “talk back” to a text, focusing on a specific point the student feels is worthy of discussion.

ReLeah Lent advises: “This activity works best when there is some question about the topic or when the author is taking a strong, perhaps biased position...look for topics that represent controversial or thought-provoking issues in your discipline.”

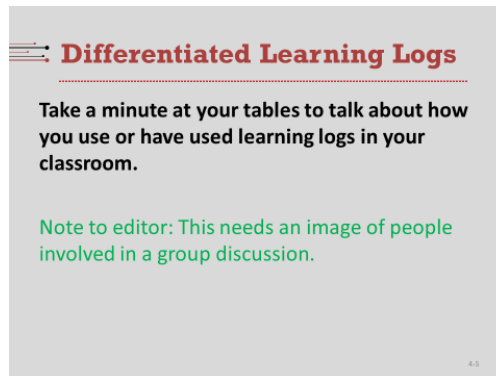
4-10

C. Go over the points on the slide, stressing that the choice of text is critical because it should spur a strong reaction from the students.

- D. Distribute **Handout 2: How to “Talk Back” to a Text.**
- E. Quickly go over the procedure for talking back to a text.
- F. **Project the chosen text** and read it aloud.
- G. Ask participants to follow the Talk Back procedure and write something to the author: questioning, disagreeing, probing. Stress that this is a *written* argument—the room should be silent.
- H. Give participants 4-5 minutes to respond to the text.
- I. Ask volunteers to share how this activity engaged them with the subject and made them curious to learn more about it.

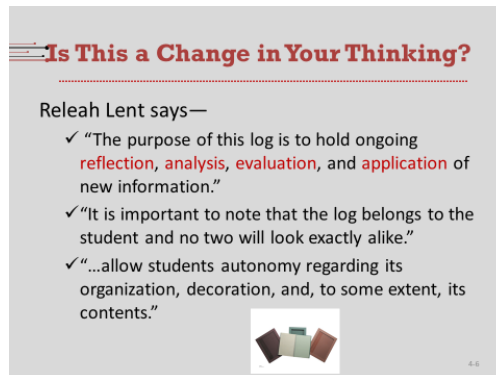
➤ **SEGMENT 6: Approximately 10 minutes**  
**Differentiated Learning Logs**

- A. Project **PowerPoint Slide 4.11.**



Please replace with new slide when image has been added!!

- B. Give participants a minute or so to share ideas on how learning logs have been used in the past.
- C. Project **PowerPoint Slide 4.12.**



- D. Read the quotations to the participants, stressing that the learning log is to help the students *learn* the information, not copy exactly what the teacher writes on the white board. Its purpose is not to hold copied information, but to hold thinking and learning.
- E. Distribute **Handout 3: What Goes into a Learning Log?** to each participant.



- F. Give participants 2-3 minutes to go over the information on the handout.
- G. Project **PowerPoint Slide 4.13.**

**Remember....**

“If the teacher takes control of the ‘notebook,’ the motivation for learning diminishes.”

“This learning tool...starts where all individualized instruction must start: with the learner.”

--ReLeah Lent

4.7

- H. Stress once again that the learning log is most effective when the *student* is in charge of its contents.
- I. Ask participants to discuss at their tables how these ideas change their view of the use of learning logs.
- J. Invite volunteers to share their reactions, aha’s, or concerns. Discuss as needed.

➤ **Bring It Back Task: Approximately 5 minutes**

- A. Project **PowerPoint Slide 4.14.**

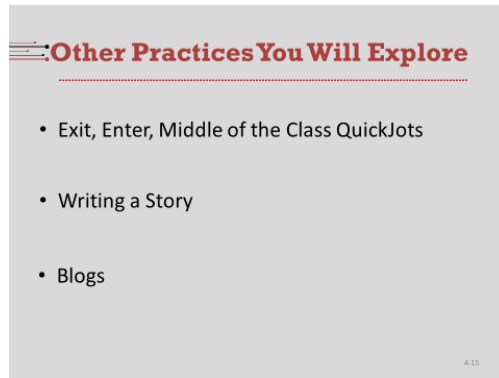
**Bring It Back Task**

- Read **from the beginning of How to Get Students Writing in the Disciplines to the end of the chapter.**
- Choose **ONE** of the ideas explained in the chapter and include it in a lesson between now and the next time we meet.
- Be prepared to talk with a partner about the celebrations and challenges of your experience.

4.14

- B. Explain the assignment to the participants. Highlight the fact that besides the four writing practices highlighted today, they will read about three more possibilities for use in their classrooms.

**C. Project PowerPoint 4.15.**



**D. Explain that all the practices are equally valuable.**