

How can a well-designed R.A.F.T.S. prompt promote focus and excitement from a student writer?

R.A.F.T.S. are assignments to assign when you've planned larger amounts of time in class to let students compose and talk to each other about what they're composing. R.A.F.T.S. are assignments that should challenge students to explore the depth of thinking they have about your content.

The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges notes, "If students are to make knowledge their own, they must struggle with the details, wrestle with the facts, and rework raw information and dimly understood concepts into language they can communicate to someone else. In short, if students are to learn, they must write." (Shellard & Protheroe, 2004). R.A.F.T.S. do this by challenging students to write to an audience (imaginary or real) other than their teacher and from a perspective (imaginary or real) other than their own.

When writing to a R.A.F.T.S. prompt in any content area, students must access higher level thinking in order to respond. This process, if the assignment is designed well, will not allow the regurgitated information that other types of assigned writing often do. While most writing assignments ask students to simply report on information they've learned, R.A.F.T.S. ask students to shift perspective in order to show their knowledge on a topic.

Let's contrast a traditional writing assignment with a R.A.F.T.S. assignment. Let's say you are taking a college class and the professor asks *you* (your Role) to write a traditional paper about *effective group work strategies for ELL students* (your Topic), you would most likely write a *standard report* (your Format) that *explained* (your Strong verb) to your *professor* (your Audience) situations from your current classroom, your past experiences, and any research you have looked over.

But imagine the assignment was as follows:

Here's your writing assignment:

You are an English Language Learner in a classroom at the school where you work. You have been inspired to (with an aide's assistance, if necessary) compose a letter to the editor of the local paper. The letter must convince the literate public that traditional group work doesn't always help ELLs feel safe in a classroom. Before writing a draft, go through this quick re-cap:

What's your **Role**: _____

What's your **Audience**: _____

What's your **Format**: _____

What's your **Topic**: _____

What's your **Strong verb**: _____

What do you do as a student to even write to this prompt? What would you have to know to get started? Why would the professor want students to write in this way rather than a traditional report? Wouldn't taking a quiz be just as indicative of learning? Is writing in this format (as opposed to a traditional report) more or less likely to generate student discussion?

Our students often feel confused about a teacher's expectations when it comes to writing assignments. R.A.F.T.S. prompts help clarify a writing assignment's expectations and gets your students engaged in a completely different way.

Objective assessments are definitely a faster and easier way to find out what students know, and they have their place. However, when students are assessed in a more meaningful way, the learning that takes place has staying power. Students will remember what they wrote, how they expressed their understanding, the purpose of the assignment, and where they might use this knowledge in the “real world.” Using R.A.F.T.S. prompts *and* the writing generated by them will give your students the keys to accessing the door to higher thinking.

What important topics are you teaching in the next month that might be enhanced by requiring a R.A.F.T.S. writing assignment from your students?