

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 recap:

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.

This document comes from The Writing Across the Curriculum Page at <http://writingfix.com>.
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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?

R.A.F.T.S. Assignment:

Teacher Name: _____

Student Name: _____

Criteria:	4 – Amazing job	3 – Pretty good	2 – Needs work	1 – Not yet
Role: How well did you sound like the person whose voice you were writing in?				
Audience: How well did you acknowledge the group or person the writing was intended for?				
Format: How well did the writing take the shape of what was originally expected?				
Topic: How well did you prove you've learned the content expected by the assignment?				
Strong verb: How well did you utilize the verb that was originally expected?				
Other: Optional				

Connect Instruction to the Writing Traits: R.A.F.T.S.

Up the ante! Build better student writing skills by challenging them with writing trait language as you explain your expectations to your R.A.F.T.S. assignments:

Which rows from the following Traits rubric would you feel comfortable including on a rubric for a R.A.F.T.S. assignment used in your classroom?

This RAFTS/Traits rubric was made online at:
<http://rubistar.4teachers.org/>

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Accuracy of Facts (Idea Development)	All supportive facts are reported accurately.	Almost all supportive facts are reported accurately.	Most supportive facts are reported accurately.	NO facts are reported OR most are inaccurately reported.
Support for Topic (Idea Development)	Relevant, telling, quality details give the reader important information that goes beyond the obvious or predictable.	Supporting details and information are relevant, but one key issue or portion of the storyline is unsupported.	Supporting details and information are relevant, but several key issues or portions of the storyline are unsupported.	Supporting details and information are typically unclear or not related to the topic.
Introduction (Organization)	The introduction is inviting, states the main topic and previews the structure of the paper.	The introduction clearly states the main topic and previews the structure of the paper, but is not particularly inviting to the reader.	The introduction states the main topic, but does not adequately preview the structure of the paper nor is it particularly inviting to the reader.	There is no clear introduction of the main topic or structure of the paper.
Transitions (Organization)	A variety of thoughtful transitions are used. They clearly show how ideas are connected.	Transitions clearly show how ideas are connected, but there is little variety.	Some transitions work well; but connections between other ideas are fuzzy.	The transitions between ideas are unclear or nonexistent.
Adding Personality (Voice)	The writer seems to be writing from knowledge or experience. The author has taken the ideas and made them "his own."	The writer seems to be drawing on knowledge or experience, but there is some lack of ownership of the topic.	The writer relates some of his own knowledge or experience, but it adds nothing to the discussion of the topic.	The writer has not tried to transform the information in a personal way. The ideas and the way they are expressed seem to belong to someone else.

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<http://rubistar.4teachers.org/>

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Recognition of Reader (Voice)	The reader's questions are anticipated and answered thoroughly and completely.	The reader's questions are anticipated and answered to some extent.	The reader is left with one or two questions. More information is needed to "fill in the blanks".	The reader is left with several questions.
Sentence Length (Sentence Fluency)	Every paragraph has sentences that vary in length.	Almost all paragraphs have sentences that vary in length.	Some sentences vary in length.	Sentences rarely vary in length.
Word Choice	Writer uses vivid words and phrases that linger or draw pictures in the reader's mind, and the choice and placement of the words seems accurate, natural and not forced.	Writer uses vivid words and phrases that linger or draw pictures in the reader's mind, but occasionally the words are used inaccurately or seem overdone.	Writer uses words that communicate clearly, but the writing lacks variety, punch or flair.	Writer uses a limited vocabulary that does not communicate strongly or capture the reader's interest. Jargon or cliches may be present and detract from the meaning.
Grammar & Spelling (Conventions)	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Writer makes 3-4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Writer makes more than 4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.
Capitalization & Punctuation (Conventions)	Writer makes no errors in capitalization or punctuation, so the paper is exceptionally easy to read.	Writer makes 1 or 2 errors in capitalization or punctuation, but the paper is still easy to read.	Writer makes a few errors in capitalization and/or punctuation that catch the reader's attention and interrupt the flow.	Writer makes several errors in capitalization and/or punctuation that catch the reader's attention and greatly interrupt the flow.
Other?				