

5 Prompts to Engage Any Student

1. **Problem-solving:** Take a concept from class and apply it to a real or imagined problem. How does the concept help to solve the problem?
 - a. *Biology:* Imagine that toxic cyanobacteria blooms are occurring in the water running through our campus. Why might these blooms be occurring, and what is one solution for preventing their reoccurrence?
 - b. *Engineering:* Describe a structural issue that could result from ignoring weight distribution and balance, and how this problem could be resolved.
2. **Get Published:**
 - a. *Step 1:* Find an article written in a style that you would like to attempt from a magazine or trade publication in the field.
 - b. *Step 2:* Write a brief analysis of the article concerning how the article is written in terms of purpose, content, and style. Include a hyperlink to the article.
 - c. *Step 3:* Write a similar article in terms of purpose, content, and style of the original [magazine or trade publication] article concerning one of the concepts from the class.
3. **Write from an Image:** React, relate, and respond to an image. Here is an example.
 - a. *React:* What do you think about when you see this image?
 - b. *Relate:* How does this image use each rhetorical appeal (ethos, logos, and pathos)?
 - c. *Respond:* Is this image using those concepts effectively? Why or why not?
 - d. *Variation on the prompt:* Ask students to share an image that relates to a course concept, and have them react, relate, and respond to it.
4. **Genre Shifting:**
 - a. **Formal:** Students will take an academic/scholarly article or text and rewrite the ideas in the article/text in a different genre, such as a news article or blog post. Rewriting in a new genre gives students experience reading and summarizing scholarly texts and capturing ideas in a way that is engaging. Students will learn to take something that is written for a scholarly audience and rewrite it for a popular audience, understanding the relationship between language choices and audience. It's also a great opportunity to scaffold a larger research project, where students can closely read one article on their topic.
 - b. **Informal:** Students will read something you've assigned (scholarly or not) and will capture the main ideas of the reading in a text thread or tweet. This activity asks students to summarize in a fun and engaging way. It works really well as a discussion board activity on D2L.
5. **Assignment Menu:** Students are writing an argumentative/informative/narrative/analytical piece. They will choose a genre (blog, website, podcast, PowerPoint, meme, infographic, YouTube video, etc.) in which to present their piece. They will begin by finding an example of that genre and discuss how they would use its features to present their piece. A menu like this

gives students choice and allows them to choose a genre that is engaging and best meets their goals for the assignment.

6. **“Ladder of Abstraction”**: Students will write about an issue using a mixture of **concrete** and **abstract** evidence. **Concrete evidence** is evidence—such as personal narratives, case studies, vignettes—about individuals who have experienced an issue (Joe who lost his job). **Abstract evidence** is evidence (statistics, facts) about groups of people or populations related to this issue (the number of people in the US who are currently unemployed). Using a combination of concrete and abstract evidence usually makes for more engaging writing for both the writer and reader and is common in many genres of writing.

7. Prompt Designing Tips and Tricks

- a. Tip: Decide on if you want their writing to be Open (exploratory) or Closed (specific answer).
 - i. Open: When you think of Gothic Literature, what comes to mind?
 - ii. Closed: Based on our reading, what are the characteristics or features of Gothic Literature?
- b. Trick: Steps can build complexity and keep students writing for longer.
- c. Trick: Combine open and closed questions in a prompt.
- d. Any other tips/tricks with time?