

**COLLIN COLLEGE**

**ENGLISH  
DEPARTMENT  
SOURCE  
BOOK**

**Invention**

2018-19

## *Introduction*

Invention activities—often referred to as prewriting—serve as useful starting points for student writing in the classroom. Focused invention activities allow students to develop one or more starting points for an assignment. Instructors should at this stage allow writers to explore the topic widely, letting students think imaginatively and creatively on the topic. Usually even if writers think they know what their approach might be for a given assignment, this kind of prewriting helps them explore the topic further and allows early insights into directions within that basic topic.

There are two basic types of invention students can work on: in-class activities and homework assignments. In-class invention strategies guarantee that students will leave with writing accomplished. Invention activities also showcase for students the process of writing—that is, taking a rough sketch from an in-class writing and turning into a polished essay.

## **Out-of-Class Invention Strategies**

All class writing assignments begin with a reading assignment. Students are responsible for posting their response to the reading assignment on their edublog account. Students are also responsible for reading and commenting on their team members' blogs. I suggest four areas for critical reflection: Practical content, characters, artistic qualities, and ideas.

Students are also instructed in the use of comparison/contrast and journalistic inquiry (who, what, when, why, where, and how) as methods of exposition. In addition to text, students are encouraged to post images and links to relevant articles and information on their blogs. After reviewing the blogs, I suggest exemplary posts to the class via Canvas.

- You have a tape recorder, talk to the tape recorder for 15 minutes on the subject of your choice and see what kind of topic you come up with.
- Take a walk in nature! After fifteen minutes, free write on topic.
- Meditate—think about your breath—present moment, etc. Find someplace relatively quiet and away from distractions. After ten or fifteen minutes, free write. (can also be done in class)

## **In-Class Invention Strategies**

### **Team Tactics**

In the classroom, the teams form small circles to discuss their posts and comments with one another and identify a topic they would like to lead the class in discussing. On other occasions, I will pose a question for the teams to discuss. For example, after reading Pericles' *Funeral Oration*, I ask the teams to identify the democratic core values articulated in the speech and rank them in order of importance.

### **Class Tactics**

Begin class with a writing prompt that requires an analysis or an evaluation of a reading assignment. Students write for approximately 10-15 minutes and then discuss their responses with their teams. After students have shared their written responses with their team members (10 minutes), the class forms a large circle where the teams share their refined ideas, comments, questions, and conclusions with the class (sometimes the class simply forms a large circle to discuss their responses—it depends on the complexity of the writing prompt).

I find that these out-of-class and in-class invention strategies provide abundant material and ideas for students to use when composing their formal essays.

### **Writing prompts**

Begin class with writing prompts to get students to write on topic/technique related to an upcoming essay. Students write for the first ten minutes of class. They may choose to use material generated in this manner in their essays or to rework/add to material they are already working on in their essays. Some of these may work better for 1301; they are first the first five. The others may work better for 1302.

- To get students to consider writing more interesting description, come up with an analogy/comparison using “like”—the more outlandish, the better—to develop

idea/topic and ask them to either explore the simile or to come up with their own. For example: Narcissism is like a seesaw.

- For an essay requiring description, try the “synesthesia” exercise: Use your sense of sight to describe a sound, your sense of touch to describe what you see, your sense of hearing to describe a smell, etc. For example: The pain in her stomach was not a dull, throbbing purple, but a sharp, searing yellow.
- Use music. To get students to think about the relationship between form and function (or style and content), put on a song that has lyrics related to a topic students are working on. After the students listen, have them write a response, paying attention to the ways the lyrics and music augment each other (or not). This can also be done at home. Another possibility is to play music that creates a particular emotional feeling/story (best not to have lyrics) and have students write what they feel or create a story using descriptive details and metaphors. A good example would be one or two of the movements from Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* (these are fairly short).
- Have students describe something in their draft without telling what it is. Have them read out their descriptions to see if others can guess what they are describing.
- Ask direct questions about a topic to help students come up with their own ideas. For example, if students are writing an essay answering the question “Who are the Millennials?” use the following topics: If you had to choose one quality that is commonly shared by Millennials, what would it be and why? Or, what is a stereotype about Millennials that you think is unfair and why?
- Use the idea of the reporter’s questions (who, what, when, why, where) but with a twist: Pretend you are being interviewed by someone (from the past, the future, another country, another planet) about a topic you are considering or already writing about for your essay. What kind of questions would this being ask? How would you communicate with them?
- To get students to go beyond standard solutions to an issue, come up with “What if questions” (can be somewhat wacky hypotheticals) related to a topic and have students respond. For example, if your topic is violence on campus: What if specially-trained dogs were used to protect students and faculty from violence on campus?

## **Drafting**

Diagram major points—trees, matrices, columns, traditional outlines, or something more creative, such as a story board of your essay (similar to a graphic novel).

Lifeline (Ideal for 1301 literacy narratives)

1. Draw a life-line. Mark off the important years or segments of your life. On a piece of paper turned sideways, draw a horizontal line across the page—this line symbolizes your lifetime. Put your birth at one end, and “today” at the other. Mark the big events that had an impact on you and your education—such as movements through school and other milestones that have to do with reading/writing/education.
2. Note the people who were involved in those situations. Draw lines to the major eras of your life and note the people you associate with each.
3. Note the places involved in the milestones. Where were you? (school, home, other family, friends, etc.)
4. Think about the specific activities involved in each milestone.
5. Note the stories that are involved with each milestone.

Think about objects involved with each milestone. Do you have an award, a text, or a book that is associated with these educational/literacy moments? Have students choose a few of these milestones and use them as places to write from in class. Students should leave the class with one to three ideas for the literacy narrative.