

## **a** Structured Quick Writes

Quick Writes is an informal writing activity that takes little time (3–5 minutes) and provides students an opportunity to think about and then express what they know about a particular topic. For those students who write proficiently and think quickly, the activity can be an effective way to activate students’ prior knowledge. However, for some English learners and other students who struggle academically, a “quick” write can be anything but quick, and by the time the other students have finished writing, these students have barely begun. Frustrated and embarrassed, especially if the Quick Writes are shared with partners, these students may be lost for the rest of the lesson because the opening activity was inappropriate for their language development needs.

Structured Quick Writes provide these English learners and struggling students with a template that scaffolds their writing, enabling them to recall and articulate previous lessons’ content concepts. Note that this activity differentiates for your students’ needs—some students do a typical Quick Write, while those who need the scaffolding complete the Structured Quick Write. If you simply distribute a handout to each student, with the Quick Write question(s) on one handout and the template on another, each student can accomplish the goal of connecting his or her past learning to today’s lesson concepts.

**SIOP Feature 8:** Links explicitly made between past learning and new concepts

**Additional SIOP Features:** 6, 14, 22, 25, 28

**Grade Level:** 3–12

**Materials:** Two handouts: one with a prompt or guiding question; the second with a template.

**Objectives:** Note that it’s not really necessary to have separate objectives for activating students’ prior knowledge unless you’re introducing to your students the importance of making connections between what they’ve learned and what you’re teaching. If you’re introducing this concept for the first time, you might have objectives such as:

- *Content:* Students will explain three main points about (the content topic).
- *Language:* Students will write what they remember about (the topic) from yesterday’s lesson.

**Directions:**

1. Remind students that it’s important for them to remember that what they learned in a previous lesson is usually connected to what will be taught in the following lesson.
2. If you have never had students complete a Quick Write, explain that this is a technique for helping them remember and use what they have learned previously.
3. Introduce a writing prompt or question that activates students’ prior knowledge.
4. Introduce the structured template for the students who need additional scaffolding. The template includes sentence frames that provide the language students need to express their recollections of what they’ve learned before. It will be helpful if you include key vocabulary to trigger students’ memories. These can be withdrawn as students become more proficient with English and more capable of completing Quick Writes on their own. You might want to have several versions of a template so they can be re-used depending on your content and language objectives for a lesson. Figure 3.1 provides an example of a Structured Quick Write Template.

5. The first time you have students do a Structured Quick Write, explain and model how to complete the sentence frames, and do several of them together with your students. The ultimate goal is to remove the scaffolds when students can do a Quick Write independently.

**Figure 3.1** Structured Quick Write Template

**Topic:** Character Analysis

**Directions:** Think about and remember what you learned yesterday in class about the characters in the short story we began reading. Then fill in the blanks and complete at least three sentences.

1. Something I remember about a *descriptive adjective* is \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Something I remember about a *character trait* is \_\_\_\_\_.
3. While I read, I need to *infer*. I think that means I need to \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Something I remember about the *dialogue* in the story is \_\_\_\_\_.
5. A *trait* I saw in a *character* in our story, "Everyday Use: For Your Grandmama,"<sup>1</sup> is \_\_\_\_\_.
6. This *trait* is familiar, because \_\_\_\_\_ also has it. (write a friend or family member's name)
7. I also remember \_\_\_\_\_ about the story.

<sup>1</sup>"Everyday Use: For Your Grandmama" is a short story written by Alice Walker.