

## Writing Analytical Prompts: Playing ‘Teacher’

For this assignment, after reading the assigned article for class, you will develop one-two analytical writing prompts related to that reading.

An analytical writing prompt is a question or directive given to a student, which is designed to elicit critical thinking and analysis.

For example, you will read an article by Cathy Davidson for homework. As you read this article and take notes, keep track of important moments in the text, or any questions you have while reading. When you are finished reading, think about the most interesting or important things about the article (write these down). Then, it's time write questions or directives that you can give to your classmates to encourage critical thinking and analysis of the article.

It might help to imagine that you are the teacher for a moment, and that you want the class to move beyond just identifying the ideas in the article into analyzing important portions of the article.

Writing these prompts is sometimes formulaic—you can follow this format if you'd like to.

First, identify a moment, quote, specific idea, reference, or feature of the text. Next, raise a multiple-part question about it (see the attached handout on thinking levels):

- One part that asks about specific interpretation of that moment, but also pushes the student to consider alternative interpretations of that moment
- A second part that encourages the thinker to generalize or search for the overall meaning in their answers (overall meaning for society, for a large population, for a large space, etc.)
- How and why questions, or questions that push the student to be more specific in justifying their answers

*A professor of mine once said, “You usually have to ask a dozen bad questions to get one good one.” Treat these questions seriously – instead of asking a one-line question, brainstorm a cluster of them around one thought. Revise this cluster until you are really being clear with what you are asking. Revise until you know we’ll understand you exactly, and that the question will really get us thinking. Don’t settle for the first idea that pops into your head.*

**Please email me your prompts by Monday morning at 9 AM. I will select the BEST prompts to use in class that day.**

## Creating questions for discussion

There are two basic levels of thinking: Lower-order and higher-order thinking. Knowing this will help you to structure your discussion questions. It's often good to write a brief question or context for your question that starts with a lower-order thinking skill to get us thinking of something we know from the text, something concrete. Then, you can introduce follow-up questions that really get us into the critical matters at hand. Avoid asking questions that cause us to have to think beyond the text.

Identifying a context for your question allows you to ask it in a way that makes more sense to you and to the class. On a basic level, clear questions will inform the listener of their context immediately. For example, you might repeat a specific detail from your reading:

“In Amitava Kumar’s ‘Language,’ he shares an example of a white American entering a shop and criticizing the way that a Korean clerk pronounces words in English. Kumar suggests that the white American doesn’t realize that the U.S. is ‘not his country alone, it is also not his language anymore. (That should be obvious to the ordinary American viewer, except that it *wasn’t* obvious to everyone. And it isn’t.)’ (Kumar 413).”

Then, you might follow that up with a question of interpretation:

“What does Kumar mean when he suggests that English is not the white American’s language ‘anymore’? Why should that be ‘obvious to the ordinary American viewer’?”

### Beyond the text

#### Higher-order thinking skills:

#### Lower-order thinking skills:

identifying  
reviewing  
reciting



defining  
describing  
analyzing  
interpreting  
synthesizing  
questioning  
evaluating  
hypothesizing

**things we can't define without more research, hypothetical scenarios**