

STUDENT VOICE IN THE CLASSROOM: INPUT AND FEEDBACK

Focus: Curriculum; Tool Type: Creative

LETTER TO FUTURE SELF

IDENTIFY WHAT YOUR STUDENTS HOPE TO LEARN BY THE END OF YOUR UNIT OR CLASS.

DESCRIPTION

Students are asked to write a letter to themselves reflecting on what they hope they will have learned and how they will feel about themselves at the end of the unit or the end of your class. Their letters can help teachers learn what content knowledge and which skills students are most interested in developing and what they hope they will have accomplished by the end of your class or unit. This letter writing activity can be a creative way of soliciting student voice into the curriculum, while also encouraging students to set goals and stretch themselves as learners. For example, they might want to collaborate with a new classmate, use a new technology tool, or improve their presentation skills.

PREP TIME

10-15 minutes

ACTIVITY TIME

30 mins activity,
1-2 hrs analysis,
2-5 hrs curricular
planning time

GROUP SIZE

Individual activity
for whole class

MATERIALS

Pen and paper or
online document
that can be
shared with
teacher

STEPS

1. *Create instructions for students.* Identify a learning objective for them, such as “Students will be able to name the skills, ideas, and topics they want to learn about in this class/unit.” Specify how long the letter should be and any formatting and style requirements. Include a specific prompt for students to respond to, like: “Write a letter to your future self in which you describe what you hope you will have learned in this [class/unit], what skills you developed, how hard you worked, and how your new knowledge and skills can be useful to you in the future.”
2. *Assign the letter.* The letter may be assigned as an in-class activity or as homework. Be sure to set aside some time to answer any questions they may have about it. Explain how you intend to use their letters to shape the curriculum.
3. *Read and analyze students’ letters.* Identify common topics that emerge across the letters. Note how many students name particular skills or topics. Create a running list that you can turn into a visual for students.
4. *Identify curricular materials.* Use the resources to which you have access to find readings or materials that reflect the desires students expressed in their letters. Make up your own assignments to incorporate students’ interests and goals for themselves. This may take time, but can be done as part of your ongoing curriculum planning.
5. *Share the results with your students.* Thank students for their letters. Tell them which skills and topics were identified most commonly. Explain how you will design the curriculum and activities moving forward to honor the desires and hopes for themselves they articulated in their letters.

TIPS

1. When introducing this assignment, you may want to share an example letter or offer some sentence starters. “Dear XXX, I hope when you read this letter, you feel XXX about the work you did in class this unit learning about XXX. You had a goal of developing your knowledge of XXX in particular, and I’m sure you have achieved it because you XXX. You really stretched yourself by XXX, and I know this effort paid off, because you can now XXX...When you look back on who you were when you wrote this letter and how you have grown in your understanding of XXX and ability to XXX, I bet you will feel XXX.”
2. If there will be opportunities in your class for students to pursue topics or skills that were not named commonly, mention those to your students and encourage them to use these assignments as a way to pursue the learning that matters to them.
3. When you share the results in step 4, you may want to share a list, bar chart, or word cloud to make the patterns of most common responses evident to students.
4. When you share the results in step 4, you may want to link the most common responses to district or school curricular frameworks, state standards, or AP/IB learning objectives. This will show them how what they have identified as worth learning reflects (or diverges from) what adults have decided is important for them to learn.
5. As a follow-up at the end of the unit or year, you may return the letters and ask students to write a new letter, reflecting on what they did learn that they wanted to, what they learned that they didn’t expect to, and how they might pursue what they still (or now) want to learn. Consider framing this letter as a response to their past selves.

REFLECTION

Reflecting together after the activity can help students internalize intended outcomes. You can use these three prompts to guide your discussion and articulate what you’ve learned:

What? *Describe what happened.* What did you discover about yourself by writing this letter? What did you discover about our class by seeing the results?

So what? *Talk about what it means.* Why is it important to imagine what your future self will have learned? Why is it important for me, your teacher, to know what you all want to learn?

Now what? *Discover the implications.* While there are things that I, the teacher, can do differently based on what you shared in your letters, what are things you can do to ensure that what we do in this class is meeting your goals for yourself as a learner?