

# Dry-Erase Boards

Using dry-erase boards has been a standard strategy in classrooms where teachers encourage consistent student engagement. However, there are many classrooms where dry-erase boards sit on shelves or in closets gathering dust, remnants of a forgotten, or underused, technique for energizing classrooms. Let me share an important reason for digging them out and dusting them off.

Assessment is immediate with the use of a dry-erase board. When students raise their boards during class to offer responses to a question or problem, you get on-the-spot information. You can see if students are incorporating new knowledge, and which areas, if any, are presenting confusion. Depending upon your assessment of student understanding, you can instantly change the direction of your lesson or reteach a part of it.



## Step-by-Step

1. If you have a class set of dry-erase boards, have two students pass one out to each classmate. This assigned job can rotate and can include collecting them at the end of the day and, occasionally, cleaning them of any remaining ink.

2. As students record and illustrate on the boards, pass among the desks, assessing student understanding. You might carry a clipboard to make notes about misconceptions or different ideas for sharing with students at the end of the activity.

## Applications

Dry-erase boards can be used for any subject. They are, however, particularly useful for math, language arts, and foreign-language review, practice, and enrichment. See page 14 for a sample lesson in language arts.

The dry-erase board is flexible and ideal for use in a differentiated classroom. Among the myriad tasks you can design for dry-erase boards are answering questions, solving math problems, illustrating concepts, generating lists, composing sketches, and creating graphic organizers.

Whenever you feel the need to reengage your learners, you can create a brief activity with the dry-erase boards. You can use them from time to time

throughout the day, for short practice, or for reflection. They can be used for warm-ups, homework review, or guided practice. They can be used by individual students, partners, or small groups. Visual learners are aided by the use of images and colors. Tactile-kinesesthetic learners are supported by the physicality of writing or drawing, raising the boards, and the interactive environment they create.

You can use the boards as “Entrance Cards,” on which students write or draw something that makes a connection to the previous day’s lesson. This practice is effective in activating prior knowledge, and I’ve found it to be highly motivating as well.

### Language Arts: EXPANDING SENTENCES

This activity will encourage students to write fuller, richer sentences.

- First, have students write a simple sentence on their board—for example, “Damien runs” or “Mary studies.”
- Then, pull one card at a time from a set of cards with the following words written on them: *How? Where? When? With whom? Why?*
- As you pull one card at a time from the box, direct students to erase and rewrite their sentence to include the new information.
- Have two or three students share their sentences after each rewriting.

### TechConnect

The makers of SMART Board technology have created a new gadget that allows for on-the-spot assessment. These interactive clickers, or Senteos, allow the teacher to prepare an “Ask the Audience” portion of a lesson to instantly measure and view graphs of student understanding.

For more info: [www.smarttech.com](http://www.smarttech.com) (search: Senteo).

Using the free Web tool SurveyMonkey to assess students is another option. Unlike the handheld devices, SurveyMonkey doesn’t provide instant access to information. However, the results can be retrieved from the Web site or stored for later use.

A tutorial for SurveyMonkey can be found at [http://www.surveymonkey.com/Home\\_Videos.aspx](http://www.surveymonkey.com/Home_Videos.aspx).

### Tips for Making Your Own Dry-Erase Boards!

There are many teacher stores and online distributors that sell class sets of individual dry-erase boards or paddle dry-erase boards (with handles for easier student use). Do an Internet search for “dry-erase boards” and you’ll find thousands.

Most teachers, however, have budgetary constraints and find that class sets are too expensive for them to purchase (up to \$100 per set). Instead, they make their own. It’s easy. Go to a home improvement store and purchase one sheet of shower board—this is the material that is placed behind the tiles in a shower. It comes in 8’ x 4’ sheets and is white and shiny. One board costs around ten dollars. Many teachers have reported in online blogs that if you tell the salesperson that you are a teacher, he or she will accommodate you by cutting the board into 12” x 12” individual boards.

After having the board cut into the smaller size, cover the edges with duct tape. Ask your students to bring in old clean socks to serve as erasers. You will have to supply dry-erase pens, which can last the year, if properly taken care of (remind students to replace caps immediately when not in use).

After a while, the ink leaves marks that are hard to remove from the shower board. I found an excellent idea online from a teacher who suggested treating the boards with car wax before using them to help keep marks from becoming permanent. There are many products that can be used every once in a while to completely clean the boards. The savings incurred by making the boards yourself is worth the occasional time you or your students will need to clean them thoroughly.

# QuickWrite

**A** QuickWrite is a brief, timed writing activity. Giving students two or three minutes to reflect on and summarize their learning in

writing allows them to make sense of what they have been studying.

## Step-by-Step

1. Either midway through a lesson or at the end, provide students with a large sticky note, an index card, or a half-sheet of paper.
2. Advise students that they will have two (or three) minutes to reflect on what they have just learned and write about it.
3. State the prompt you want students to respond to. You may pose a question, ask for a summary

of the content, require a list of steps, ask for an analysis of the work, or request the use of specific content-area vocabulary in a wrap-up of the topic under study. The more specific the prompt, the better the response.

4. Have a few students share their reflections with the class. Alternatively, you can collect the QuickWrites as Exit Cards.

## Applications

**A** series of QuickWrites can be kept in a journal, allowing students to revisit what they have learned

over time. You can collect the journals periodically and provide written feedback to your students.

## TechConnect

Have students create a “TalkAbout” instead of a QuickWrite. Using a microphone connected to a computer and the free audio-capturing software that comes with Windows (Start/Programs/Accessories/Entertainment/Sound Recorder), students will record their responses to the prompts instead of writing them. For students in

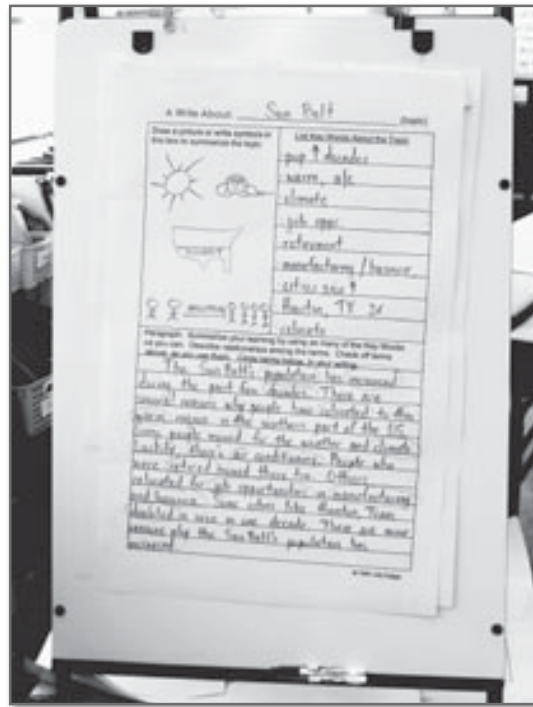
a differentiated classroom who would find it easier to speak than to write, this option would provide an appropriate alternative assessment.

- For about \$50, teachers can purchase a Webcam to attach to the computer so students can videotape themselves providing the summary.

# WriteAbout

**R**esearch has shown that summarization yields some of the greatest leaps in comprehension and long-term retention of information (Wormeli, 2005). A WriteAbout is a concrete tool for summarization in which students use key vocabulary terms (the language of the content area) to synthesize their understanding in a paragraph as well as represent key ideas graphically. Combining both verbal-linguistic and spatial intelligences, this assessment tool is a favorite of many students.

Debra Steinroder models a WriteAbout for her fifth-grade students using a poster-size version of a WriteAbout.



## Step-by-Step

1. At the end of your lesson, provide a WriteAbout sheet to students (page 18).  
(TIP: If you photocopy these pages on colored paper, they will be easy to find later when needed for studying.)
2. Model for the class how you would complete a WriteAbout. Depending upon the grade of your students, you may need to model several times. Brainstorm key words and draw a picture to represent the main idea.
3. Demonstrate how to write a summary using the key words on the list. Show students how you check off the terms as you use them and circle them in your writing.
4. Let partners talk and complete a WriteAbout together.
5. After a few practice opportunities with a partner, students should be ready to complete a WriteAbout on their own.
6. Collect this assessment and provide feedback to students. Provide a simple check or check-plus to indicate the individual's level of mastery. Share with your class what a check or check-plus means. (*A check means that you understand most of the terms and ideas, but still have to master others. Please notice any circles, question marks, or questions that I have written on your paper to help guide your next steps in learning.*)
7. Plan your instruction for the next day so that it fills any gaps in class understanding and/or includes flexible grouping for a follow-up tiered activity.

## Applications

The WriteAbout is also a useful tool for homework. It provides an opportunity for students to synthesize the key understandings of the day's lesson.

Keep in mind, however, that this assessment is designed for a single concept within a larger unit. Don't use it, for example, to see what students have learned about the Civil War. Use it to see what they have learned about the Underground Railroad, the advantages held by the North or South, or Reconstruction after the war.

Teachers have used the WriteAbout paragraphs successfully with their "Expert Groups" in a Jigsaw review activity (See Dodge, 2005 for a more detailed

explanation about the Jigsaw Activity.) Briefly, students are assigned a Home Base Group and each is given a different subtopic, question, reading, or problem to complete. They then move into Expert Groups to work with others given the same assignment. There, each student completes his own Write-About. When he/she returns to the original Home Base Group, each Expert contributes his/her piece to the group's poster on the whole topic. This poster or product represents a group assessment. To check for individual understanding, follow up with several short-response questions.

## TechConnect


Using a software program like Kid Pix or the free paint tool that comes with Windows, students can draw the pictures, symbols, or steps. Then, using the paint tool found in either program, they can write their paragraph.

## Tips for Tiering!

In addition to the ideas on page 9, consider the following.

**To support struggling learners:** Duplicate the Write-About template with the vocabulary terms already printed on it. (Provide definitions, if you feel they are necessary)

A WriteAbout: Animal Adaptations (Topic)

<p>Draw a picture or write symbols in this box to summarize the topic.</p> 	<p>List Key Words About the Topic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>adaptations ✓</li> <li>survive ✓</li> <li>environment ✓</li> <li>finding food ✓</li> <li>brown bear ✓</li> <li>penguin ✓</li> <li>having shelter ✓</li> <li>pocket gopher ✓</li> </ul>
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Paragraph: Summarize your learning by using the terms above. Be sure to check off items above, as you use them. Circle terms below, in your writing.

(Adaptation) are a part of behavior and the ways animals (survive) in their environment like for finding food. Brown bears adaptation for finding food is their sharp claws, and big teeth. For a penguin it's the big flippers. Another adaptation is having shelter. A pocket gopher gets shelter by using its claws to dig holes.

Students use A WriteAbout to help them process the information they have been learning in a unit on animal adaptations. They check off the vocabulary terms and circle them in their writing as they use the key words in context. (This template is available on the CD.)

# Write About

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Topic** \_\_\_\_\_

<p><b>Draw</b> a picture or write symbols in this box to summarize the topic</p>	<p><b>List Key Words</b> about the topic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li></ul>
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**Paragraph:** Summarize your learning by using the terms above in a paragraph about the topic. Check off the terms as you use them. Then circle the terms in your paragraph.

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# S-O-S Summary

**A**n S-O-S Summary is an assessment that can be used at any point in a lesson. The teacher presents a *statement* (S), asks the student's *opinion* (O) (whether the student agrees or disagrees with the statement), and asks the student to *support* (S) his or her opinion with evidence. This summary can be used before or during a unit to assess student attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge about a topic. It can be used at points throughout a unit or lesson to assess what students are coming to understand about the topic. And it can be used at the end of a unit to see if attitudes and beliefs have been influenced or changed as a result of new learning.

## S-O-S

- Read the following statement: \_\_\_\_\_  
What does it mean?
- What's your opinion?  
Circle one: I agree I disagree
- Support your opinion with evidence (facts, data, reasons, examples, etc.).

S-O-S Summary

Given this statement: Cara Landry is a truthful reporter.

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What does it mean? Cara Landry only reports the truth.

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What's your opinion? Circle one: I agree I disagree

Support your opinion with evidence (facts, reasons, examples, etc.)

- she investigated on the topics before she puts it in her newspaper
- if she knew information wasn't true she wouldn't publish it
- her newspapers never told a lie

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S-O-S Summary

Given this statement: Mr. Larson is hard working.

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What does it mean? Mr. Larson works hard.

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What's your opinion? Circle one: I agree I disagree

Support your opinion with evidence (facts, reasons, examples, etc.)

- he didn't teach
- he drinks coffee and sits at his desk
- doesn't care what the kids in his class are doing

This fifth grade student is using the S-O-S Summary to practice writing an English Language Arts essay on characterization—without all of the writing. Reacting to the given statement, she provides her opinion with brief, bulleted responses, supporting her opinion with evidence. (This template is available on the CD.)

## Step-by-Step

1. Provide students with an S-O-S Summary sheet (page 21).
2. Write a statement (not a question!) on the board for students to copy. This activity works best when the statement is one which can be argued from two points of view (see sample statements in box below).
3. Give students five minutes to agree or disagree with the statement by listing facts, data, reasons,

examples, and so on that they have learned from class discussion, reading, or media presentations.

4. Collect the S-O-S Summary sheet to assess student understanding.
5. Make decisions about the next day's instruction.

## Applications

The S-O-S Summary is excellent practice for essay writing without all of the writing. It helps students choose a point of view and support it with evidence presented in brief bulleted points. Teachers can use it frequently because it requires much less time than an essay—both to write and to assess.

The S-O-S Summary is also good practice for students who are required to complete DBQs (document-based questions) in social studies, write critical-lens essays in English Language Arts, or ponder ethical dilemmas in science. Each of these tasks requires students to take a stand on a particular issue and support their point of view with evidence, facts, and examples.

### Sample Statements

- The main character is a hero.
- Recycling is not necessary in our community.
- If you are young, it's not important to have good health habits.
- The city is the best place to live.
- The Industrial Revolution produced only positive effects on society.
- You don't need to know math to live comfortably in the world.

## Tips for Tiering!

In addition to the ideas on page 9, consider the following.

**To challenge advanced learners:** If you have a mature class, capable of independent, critical thinking, you can make this activity more complex. Ask half of the class to agree with the statement and the other half to disagree with it; have students complete an S-O-S Summary from their assigned viewpoint. Then hold a debate. Have the two groups stand on

opposite sides of the room with their S-O-S Summary in hand and encourage the two sides to defend their opinions orally by using all of the facts, data, and examples they have written. Then, ask students to return to their seats and write the very best argument they can for the opposite viewpoint. This is an excellent exercise for developing listening skills; arguing from a particular viewpoint; and deconstructing conflicts in literature, history, and everyday life.



# S-O-S Summary

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Read the following statement: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What does it mean? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What's your opinion? Circle one: I agree I disagree

Support your opinion with evidence (facts, reasons, examples, etc.).

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Read the following statement: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What does it mean? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What's your opinion? Circle one: I agree I disagree

Support your opinion with evidence (facts, reasons, examples, etc.).

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