Building writing into the texture of your class:
Connecting writing to reading

Double-entry reading logs

How
• Have students do a divided reading log or journal. On the left side they copy down interesting, confusing, or controversial statements from readings. On the right side, they discuss the copied material freely, with no constraints on form, style, content, etc.
• You can occasionally provide the material for the left side, perhaps to prepare a discussion for the next class.
• You should collect logs occasionally to check and perhaps respond briefly to them.

Why
• The logs encourage active, critical reading, integrate reading and writing, encourage personal reactions to texts, facilitate follow-up discussions, and provide you with insights into students’ thinking, interests, and problems.

Discussion questions on readings

How
• Ask students to generate interesting discussion questions about the readings at home. Give examples of good questions.
• Students bring in their questions and divide into small groups. Students exchange questions (possibly discussing them briefly for clarification) and then spend 5-10 minutes writing an answer to another’s questions.
• After students have finished writing, you might have them turn in their answers or ask some to read their answers as a lead-in to a class discussion. You might instead have small groups discuss the questions and answers for a short time and then ask them to report their discussion to the class. Alternately, small groups may discuss the questions and answers while one student keeps minutes to be turned in.
• Do not grade this activity or focus on “error.” Otherwise, students may manage their risk by selecting “easy” questions, a form of collaboration certainly, but not one to encourage.

Why
• This activity encourages active reading, transfers some responsibility and power toward students, enhances student collaboration, facilitates discussion of readings, integrates reading and writing, and shows you how students are processing class materials.