

Two-Sided Notebooks

Overview:

On one side of the two-sided notebook, students record notes/new learning or “inputs” from the lesson. On the opposite page, students make meaning of that new learning by reflecting, analyzing, and synthesizing the information into their own words or visual expression.

Purpose:

Sometimes called an “interactive notebook”, two-sided notebooks provide a space for students to capture the most important “inputs” from a lesson on one side of the two-page spread, while the other side is reserved for students to process that learning. This shifts the straight notetaking activity into one in which students are provided opportunities to synthesize and make meaning of new information on a regular basis. The ultimate goal of using two-sided notebooks is to teach students to be independent thinkers and notetakers.

Application: When and where can I use it?

Two-sided notebooks can be used in any class where students are expected to take notes and collect artifacts of their learning. Students as young as 4th grade can be taught to use a two-sided notebook, provided the “input” portion of their notetaking is scaffolded to accommodate for their developing notetaking skills. (For example, providing students with “fill in the blank” notes where they are initially only responsible for recording key vocabulary words or short phrases.) Two-sided notebooks work best if they are part of an ongoing routine in your classroom.

Getting Started: What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

Getting started with two-sided notebooks takes some setup and modeling by the teacher. This can be done on chart paper, a white board, or by utilizing your document camera to show YOUR two-sided notebook to students. Students need to understand the purpose of each side, what kinds of things can go in each section of the notebook, and that there is not one “right” way to show their thinking.

A black-and-white composition notebook, or an 8 ½ x 11 spiral bound notebook, work well for two-sided notebooks.

In a two-sided notebook, students are responsible for recording content/notes (input) on one side of their notebook and thinking about that content (output) on other side of their notebook. Some teachers use “L” and “R” to represent the left side is for the learning content and the right side is for responses, reactions, and reflections. It doesn’t matter which side -right or left - you designate for which part of the process, so long as you are consistent and your students know the expectation.

In lieu of straight notetaking on the “input” side of the notebook, you may choose to provide students with handouts such as note sheets, timelines, vocabulary flaps, foldables and more which the students then glue onto the appropriate page in their notebook. This is also a place where you can provide appropriate scaffolding to students by, for example, giving some students graphic organizers that are partially filled in and other students the same organizer with less information already filled in.

The output side of the notebook is for students to share their thinking, reflections, and responses to the new learning. You may provide students with a written reflection prompt to complete, ask them to create visuals representing key vocabulary or concepts, draw diagrams, make connections to previous learning or their own lives, etc. It is important to keep in mind that this is the time when students are integrating the new information (the inputs from the lesson) into their schema, synthesizing concepts, and generally moving information from short term to long term memory. Providing students with some choice about how they process the information and express their understandings empowers them to take control over their learning.

Two-sided notebooks also provide a great study guide for students to use as they prepare for a summative assessment.

A word of warning: as you explore Two-Sided Notebooks, or Interactive Notebooks, on the internet, don't get caught up in the “cuteness” of the notebooks you will see online. Keep the focus on the thinking that is produced, the opportunity for meaningful student reflection and connection to real life/prior learning, and the ability for student to use their two-sided notebooks as an important resource to prepare for assessments.

See this Instructional Move in action:

[Interactive Notebooks in the Secondary Classroom - Bing video](#)

Read more about this Instructional Move:

[Using Interactive Notebooks to Teach Science \(kidsdiscover.com\)](#)

[Top benefits of using Interactive Notebooks - Creative Classroom Core](#)