



Lenses for Seeing and Making Tags

What you say about something depends on how you see it, of course—where the owner of a big dog might think of it as an adorable puppy, the mailman sees an entirely different animal.

Students can wear multiple “lenses” to slow-tag learning artifacts, and the simple act of drawing attention to specific lenses while tagging is one method of focusing student thought—and then talking about how that focus changes things.

Here are four simple tagging prompts that help students use a particular lens. These lenses are not exclusive of one another, and I like to mix them all up.

1: Object-Oriented Lenses: Look at a learning artifact like a found object.

Objects evoke memory and emotion. [Object-based writing](#) exercises provide a good way to concretize the abstract. Getting ideas out of the ether and into the form of real, tangible things offers students an alternative way to play with and grasp concepts.

Prompts for Tagging

- What are the concrete nouns you would use to describe what the artifact is?
- What are the concrete nouns represented by the content? What is it *about*?
- Can you translate each noun into a concrete thing you could hold in your hand?
- What objects, either specific or generic, come to mind in association with it?

2: Arts Lenses: Look at a learning artifact like a work of art.

Describing an evocative object is not unlike describing a work of art: you start by writing about what you notice, consider what others notice, and then work your way to associations, making connections and informed interpretations. [Visual thinking strategies are a good place to start.](#) When what you’re writing about is something you created, the experience becomes [powerfully reflective](#). Art students explain their workflow and design process, how they developed new understandings, or how they worked through questions and challenges.

Prompts for Tagging

- What was the process of making it?
- What decisions were made in making it the way it is?
- What influences in your life inspired you?
- What do you notice about it visually?
- What is the overall message of the work?
- What do others say?

3: Narrative Lenses: Write the true or fictional story of the artifact.

We write things down (taking notes, for example) in real time to remember better, as a way of recording experience. But when we write in retrospect, we may encounter things we might not have noticed at the time. Simply put, writing the story of our experience can help us gain clarity. This is more than review: it's reflection.

Prompts for Tagging

- What is the story of this artifact?
- Where were you when you made it?
- How did you feel?
- Who else was involved?
- What were you trying to do?
- What is the history of the learning or skills in it?
- What influences or inspirations were involved?

4: Teacher Lenses: Look at learning artifacts like a teacher.

Teachers spend a lot of time looking at student work, whether fully developed learning products/summative assessments (presentations, essays, tests, lab reports), or traces of learning/formative assessments (journals, notes, lab work, sketches). To a teacher so often engrossed in assessment, almost all student work is evocative, usually implying a much richer story than meets the eye.

Prompts for Tagging

- What was the objective of the work?
- What skills were involved?
- What are you learning about or expressing understanding of?
- Is there evidence of knowledge or understanding?
- How could this serve as a model through which to teach someone else?
- Can you identify any elements of it that need further work or improvement?