



Brainstorming as a Means of Prewriting

In Six Easy Steps

Brainstorming is a form of prewriting, which is the earliest stage of the writing process. Brainstorming can be useful to you as a writer because it helps you to generate ideas and questions about a topic. You can use these ideas and questions to develop information and content for your essay. You can also use these ideas to plan the way information is organized in your essay.

- 1) Brainstorming is easy. It involves thinking about a topic and writing down everything that pops into your head about that topic as you are thinking. If your essay assignment is about a topic you aren't familiar with, you should read a general article or two about the topic (from a textbook or encyclopedia) a couple of days before you do your brainstorming. Then spend some time thinking about the topic. As you think, ask yourself these two questions: "What do I *already* know about this topic?" and "What do I *need* to know about this topic?"
- 2) When you are ready to brainstorm, get rid of all distractions. Then concentrate on the topic. Think again about the things you already know and the things you need to know about the topic. Then get ready to write. For 15 minutes, write down on the Brainstorming Zone page everything that pops into your head as it appears. Don't reject any ideas.
- 3) You can write down the ideas randomly on the page, or, if you detect a common focus or theme for some of your ideas, you can group the ideas into clusters according to the specific theme. (If you write down ideas randomly, you will group them later, after you have finished brainstorming.) Try to fill all of the circles on the Brainstorming Zone page with ideas and information about the topic. If you have any empty circles left when you have finished brainstorming, fill them with additional questions you have about the topic. You can answer these questions later, when you research the topic.
- 4) When you have finished writing down all of your ideas and questions, read through them and look for ways they might be connected or related to one another. Group these related ideas into clusters by circling related ideas with colored markers, highlighting the related ideas in each cluster with different colors, or labeling the related ideas in each cluster with a different number or symbol (such as a star, circle, square or triangle). Think of each cluster as a potential paragraph in your essay; each idea has the potential to be a separate sentence within the paragraph. Try to identify at least four clusters. If an idea doesn't seem to fit in any of the clusters, set it aside. You may find a use for it later.
- 5) The next step in the brainstorming process is to identify and describe the theme of each cluster. Select a cluster, read all of the ideas in it, and identify the common focus or theme that ties the ideas together. Do the same for each remaining cluster. In the list below, write a simple sentence to describe each cluster's theme. These themes, and your sentences, will form the basis of the topic sentences in your essay paragraphs.
- 6) Finally, read through your list of sentences. Look for relationships and patterns in the themes you've identified. Is one theme greater or more important than the others? Is there a chronological (time-related) pattern? Are some themes causes, and other themes effects? Are the themes parts or subdivisions of a whole? Do the themes refer to different locations? Are they related alphabetically? Number each theme 1, 2, 3 and 4 according to its chronological significance, degree of importance or size, cause-and-effect relationship, spatial or location significance, or alphabetical order. These numbers signify the order of your essay paragraphs. Now you are ready to move on to the next stage: drafting your essay.

___ Cluster ___ Theme: _____

___ Cluster ___ Theme: _____

___ Cluster ___ Theme: _____

___ Cluster ___ Theme: _____



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Brainstorming Zone

As you brainstorm, ask yourself these two questions: “What do I already know about this topic?” and “What do I *need* to know about this topic?” Brainstorm for 15 minutes. Write down everything that comes to mind. Do not reject any ideas. Try to fill all the circles. If there are any empty circles left when you have finished brainstorming, fill them with additional questions you have about the topic.

main topic