

Brainstorming Methods

When beginning an essay or writing assignment, figuring out where to start can be difficult and maybe even scary. Brainstorming can help you gather your ideas, thoughts, and opinions about your assignment. We each have a different writing process, so it's important to figure out what method works best for you!

Freewriting

One way to brainstorm is by simply writing down your thoughts as they come to you. To start, set a five-minute timer and write for the full five minutes without taking a break or reviewing what you've written. Whatever comes to mind is free game. Don't worry about whether or not what you're writing feels helpful or "good." This is a great way to break writer's block and get some ideas down on the page. Once you've written out everything for five minutes, take a look at your work. Does anything that you've written seem like it could be useful as you begin your rough draft? You might walk away feeling like you wrote a lot of things that you won't use, but the goal is simply to just start writing and see what happens!

Listing

Another way to brainstorm is to start listing ideas, which is similar to freewriting. You can list what comes to mind when you think of the prompt or your topic. Once you have several written down, you can start grouping various thoughts into paragraph ideas or sections of your essay. You can list your questions about the topic, or the prompt, and then search for answers. You might need to reach out to a tutor or your professor! You can also list things you still need to do. Perhaps you need to do more research or find quotes. Using a list can help you to start gathering ideas to support your thesis as well as show you what you still need to accomplish.

Questions

Sometimes, we can get stuck when brainstorming or feel unsure of where to start. Here are some questions that you can ask yourself to help:

- What thoughts instantly come to mind after reading the prompt?
- Do any ideas from the course materials connect to the prompt? Could/should I use any of the materials?
- Why am I writing this piece?
- What am I looking for?
- What is my main idea?
- What should my thesis statement be?
- How can I support this thesis?
- Where should I get my information from?

- What do I already know about the topic?
- What do I want to know about the topic?
- How do I feel about the topic? What's my opinion about the topic? Am I for or against it?

Discussion and Community

Brainstorming doesn't have to be something you do by yourself! If you are finding it difficult to work on your own or simply want to do it with other people, you can try connecting with some of your classmates. Tutors and professors are also great resources that you can use when brainstorming.

This can be a verbal form of brainstorming where you talk out your ideas, having someone take notes so that you can refer back to them later. Often, we have tons of ideas in our heads but can get stuck when trying to put them on paper. By discussing your ideas with someone, you might find that ideas flow more easily. You'll likely find that you have a lot to say about a certain point!

Mind Mapping

Making a mind map is another way to visually gather and organize your thoughts. You can put your main idea, big question, or thesis in the middle of your paper. From there, you can put your supporting ideas or connected pieces of information around this central point, drawing lines to show how ideas are related. This visual form of brainstorming can be a fun, different way to generate and group ideas. If you're feeling lost, there is a "Brainstorming Mind Map" on the following page!

