

# Brainstorming Techniques



Brainstorming is a great first step in writing your paper, and can help you gain clarity. Whether you have too many ideas and need clarity, or not enough and need inspiration, the techniques below can be used to both conceptualize ideas for a topic and explore those ideas further.

## Listing

Decide what you are trying to accomplish by listing. Are you looking for a potential paper topic? support for your argument? a more creative title?

The key to listing is to refrain from self-censorship. Let your ideas flow. Write down any and every idea. Don't cross anything out.

When you're really out of ideas, go back over your list. Cross out ideas that won't work for you. Circle ideas you like. If you've just discovered a paper topic, a good next step is to put it in the middle of a cluster.

TEXTS YOU NEVER SEE

- RUNNING 5 MINS EARLY
- I'M JUST GONNA CALL YOU TO COORDINATE; THAT'LL BE WAY MORE EFFICIENT
- THIS IS YOUR UBER DRIVER; I'M IN FRONT OF THE WRONG BUILDING 3 BLOCKS AWAY
- SAW YOUR TEXT LITERALLY THE SECOND YOU SENT IT + JUST CHOSE NOT TO RESPOND

Adapted from Nicholas Kraft

## Clustering

Get out a blank piece of paper, write your paper topic in the middle, and draw an oval around it.

Draw lines out from the center and fill in new ovals with subtopics. You could also write questions.

Keep branching off of these ovals as new ideas come to you.

Again, try not to hold back. Just let your ideas flow onto the page.



## Journalistic Questions (the W's)

This method provides you with the tools necessary to research your topic by using the questions often used in journalism: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

Write each of these questions on a sheet of paper, leaving a few lines in between. Examine your topic critically and answer each of the questions as thoroughly as possible.

Once you are finished, review your answers. Do you have more information about some of the questions, but are lacking information in others? Are your answers fairly balanced? Armed with these new insights, how might you move forward? Use your answers to help clarify your thesis or create an outline.



## Outlining

I. Introduce your project to a reader.

- A. Begin with relevant background info.
- C. Consider justifications for your work.
- B. End your introduction with your thesis.

II. Map out a **possible** structure for the body of your paper.

- A. Don't feel locked into the order.
  - 1. Outlines are tools for organizing **and** rearranging your thoughts.
  - 2. It's easier to edit the structure of your outline than the structure of your paper.
- B. Also, it's okay to leave out parts and fill them in later.
  - 1.
  - 2.
- C. Arrange your paragraphs for maximum impact.

III. Conclude your project.

- A. Imagine an average reader finishing the body of your paper and saying, "So what?" How would you respond?
- B. Implications for the field and/or future research?

## Freewriting

Now, you likely have a better idea of your paper's direction. Pick an area to focus on, such as a body paragraph. Get out a piece of paper and a pen, set a timer for five to ten minutes, and start writing.

This is not the time to be perfect. Instead, you need to keep your pen moving as fast as you can. Don't stop! Even if you have nothing to say, write "Blah, blah, blah" or something until a new idea comes to you. The act of writing will help you to come up with ideas!

When you're done, read over what you wrote and type up what has potential. You're on your way!

