

Brainstorming

Brainstorming can help you prepare to start writing a paper and overcome the intimidating nature of the blank page. You can turn to brainstorming to help select a topic, arrive at a thesis, or develop an outline for a paper. Try any one of the following to end your writer's block:

1. Freewriting – Consider your assignment and topic and start jotting down ideas without worrying about whether they belong in your paper or not. Try setting a time or page limit for yourself before you allow your stream-of-consciousness to take over. When you're finished freewriting, read what you have, collect your best insights, and attempt to expand on these ideas.
2. Listing – Make a list based on your topic or thesis. Don't worry about using full sentences or going into detail. You'll fill in the rest later. Turn these lists into tables, charts, and graphs if you're a visual learner.
3. Perspectives – Look at your topic from different perspectives to make sure that you're seeing the possibilities from every angle.
 - Try describing the subject
 - Attempt to trace its history
 - Map out its influences and how others have approached it in the past
 - Consider your purpose and audience
4. Cubing – Respond to the following six prompts about your topic:
 - Describe
 - Compare
 - Associate
 - Analyze
 - Apply
 - Argue for and against
5. Simile – Choose one of the central concepts of your paper and set up a simile: *my subject* is/was like _____. Fill in the blank with whatever comes to mind and attempt to explain the relationship.
6. Clustering – Make a word web that you can use to develop an idea for your thesis or to outline your paper once you've decided on your topic. Start by writing one of your main subjects in the center of a blank sheet of paper. Circle the word or phrase and extend lines from the center. Connect these lines to other words and ideas that you associate with the central theme. From here draw more lines out from the secondary level of the word web and connect these words to other terms that you feel are related. Continue the process until your paper is full of clusters.
7. Asking questions – Before journalists start a story, they set out to answer the “big six” questions. Try doing the same with your topic, asking who?, what?, when?, where?, why?, and how?
8. References – Visit the library or the World Wide Web for more information on your topic that might lead you down a new path for your paper. Make sure you're consulting a reputable source, such as an encyclopedia, guidebook, or critical essay.