

# Brainstorming

Brainstorming is an essential part of the writing process. Everyone’s brainstorming process is unique, but in this worksheet, you will find some common brainstorming methods, helpful tips, and tricks.

Before you start brainstorming, read and annotate the prompt. It is important that you understand what the prompt and your instructor are asking you to do before you begin brainstorming.

- What question is the prompt asking me to answer?

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- What is my answer to that question?

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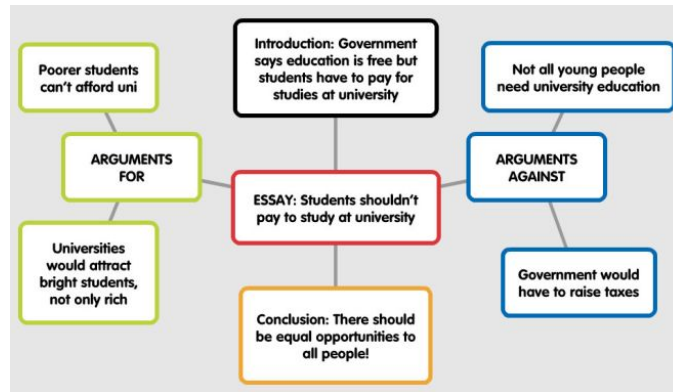
- What resources do I need to consult to write this paper?

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Now that you have collected some thoughts, choose a brainstorming method and try it out.

- **Idea Map:** In the center of the map, write your topic and draw a circle around it. When you come up with a new idea, write it down, draw a circle around it, and draw a line to show how it connects to the topic in the center and/or the other ideas you’ve written down. Below, you will see an example.

- **Example**



- **Idea List:** Rather than draw a map, some people prefer to brainstorm by simply listing their ideas. This is a fairly straightforward method of brainstorming ideas. Though not as visual as an idea map, lists are a great way of finding and recording your ideas. Idea lists help you “mine” your ideas so that you have many to choose from and also help you find a main idea and supporting points, which will be useful as you plan your essay.
- **Free Writing:** When you free write, you let your thoughts flow as they will, putting pen to paper and writing down whatever comes into your mind. You don’t judge the quality of what you write and you don’t worry about style or any surface-level issues, like spelling, grammar, or punctuation. If you can’t think of what to say, you write that down—really. The advantage of this technique is that you free up your internal critic and allow yourself to write things you might not write if you were being too self-conscious.
- **3 Perspectives:** Looking at something from different perspectives helps you see it more completely—or at least in a completely different way, sort of like laying on the floor makes your desk look very different to you. To use this strategy, answer the questions for each of the three perspectives, then look for interesting relationships or mismatches you can explore:
  - Describe it: Describe your subject in detail. What is your topic? What are its components? What are its interesting and distinguishing features? What are its puzzles? Distinguish your subject from those that are similar to it. How is your subject unlike others?

- Trace it: What is the history of your subject? How has it changed over time? Why? What are the significant events that have influenced your subject?
- Map it: What is your subject related to? What is it influenced by? How? What does it influence? How? Who has a stake in your topic? Why? What fields do you draw on for the study of your subject? Why? How has your subject been approached by others? How is their work related to yours?
- **Journalistic Questions:** In this technique you would use the “big six” questions that journalists rely on to thoroughly research a story. The six are: Who?, What?, When?, Where?, Why?, and How?. Write each question word on a sheet of paper, leaving space between them. Then, write out some sentences or phrases in answer, as they fit your particular topic. You might also record yourself or use speech-to-text if you’d rather talk out your ideas.
  - Now look over your batch of responses. Do you see that you have more to say about one or two of the questions? Or, are your answers for each question pretty well balanced in depth and content? Was there one question that you had absolutely no answer for? How might this awareness help you to decide how to frame your thesis claim or to organize your paper? Or, how might it reveal what you must work on further, doing library research or interviews or further note-taking?
- **Looping:** Looping takes freewriting a step further with the aim of zeroing in on raw ideas and insights buried deep in your subconscious mind.
  - Move in loops between one free writing exercise of between five and 10 minutes and another until you have a sequence of several freewriting pieces. Make sure you adhere to the rules of freewriting in this exercise so that each result is more specific than the other.
  - Read through what you have produced in all the freewriting looping cycles and analyze all interesting sentences, ideas or phrases. You will likely discover a recurrent topic idea or theme you are unconsciously thinking about has taken precedence. You can develop this topic idea or theme and use it in your next writing project.
- **Cubing:** This technique looks at the topic from six different points of view, just as a cube has six sides.

- Describe it: what is it?
  - Compare it: what is it like/unlike?
  - Associate it: what does it make you think of?
  - Analyze it: what parts make it up?
  - Apply it: how do you use it?
  - Argue it: how are you in favor of it or agree with it? How do you oppose it or disagree with it?
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- **Chat-It-Out-Write-It-Out:** This technique required the help of another person. In this technique, you chat with another person about the prompt. The other person can help you by asking follow-up questions. In the process of talking with another person, you may find yourself articulating your thoughts in a way that gets your ideas flowing. While your ideas are flowing, take a moment to write down your ideas.