



# Brainstorming Methods

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## What is Brainstorming?

Brainstorming is the creative act of formulating and organizing ideas and thoughts for a paper. This process should always be the writer's first step when writing. Pick the method that works best for you!

## Brainstorming Methods

### Free-writing

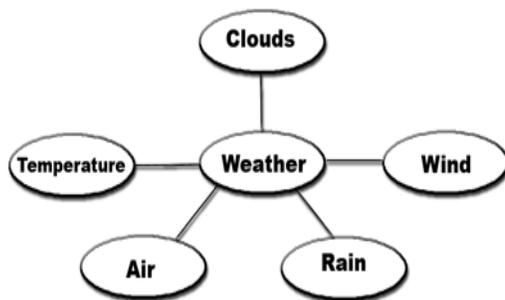
- **Definition:** A free-write allows the writer release their raw thoughts and ideas without expectations.
- **Method:** To start, become familiar with the prompt and develop an idea for your topic. Write down ideas with no grammar, spelling, or organizational expectations; just let the ideas flow in whichever format or order they appear. Next, begin to read through your free-write, and filter through the evidence and commentary to find your focus. Identify the most useful ideas and begin to organize them by topic or paragraph.
- **Example:** For a paper about climate change and its impact on the environment:  
Climate change is a terrible manmade occurrence that is brought forth by greenhouse gases that cause the greenhouse, effect greenhouse gases include carbon dioxide and water vapor and methane, but climate change impacts the environment by catalyzing rising CO2 levels, melting of the ice caps, sea-level rising. And unsafe water for generations to come. We need to prevent global warming by using renewable energy and decreasing our carbon footprint.

### Lists and Bullets

- **Definition:** The list or bullet brainstorming method focuses on jotting down key words or phrases under a specific topic.
- **Method:** First, become familiar with your prompt, and then write down words or phrases that come to mind on your topic. The list should be brief but very focused. Once complete, it is best to circle or highlight the items that you would like to focus on in your paper. Find patterns of words or phrases that link together and group them. Finally, choose the groups that fit best with your topic.
- **Example:** For a paper on bacteria in the environment:  
Bacteria: decomposes complex organic materials, develop organic topsoil, recycles nutrients, nitrogen fixation, and photosynthesis for production of oxygen

## Mapping, Clustering, and Webbing

- **Definition:** The brainstorming method of mapping, clustering, and webbing is a visual representation breaking down different aspects of a certain topic. It will identify links between ideas.
- **Method:** Understand the paper prompt, then write your main topic in the center of the paper and surround it with various ideas, terms, and phrases in a random fashion. Once complete, link the words and ideas that flow best together into a sort of “map” or “web” that forms groups from the separate parts. It will look chaotic at first, but you can organize the terms later. The chaos will make more sense once you connect the ideas together and analyze the connections.
- **Example:** A bubble map of a paper discussing the effects of pollution on weather patterns. This student needs to go further into depth on the types of effects added to each weather branch, though this is a respectable start to their mapping.



## Cubing

- **Definition:** Using the cubing brainstorming method, you consider the topic or thesis from six different directions by answering six questions.
- **Method:** Respond to these six categories:
  - **Describe it.** Describe your subject in detail by including physical, contextual, and internal details. What are its components? What are its distinguishing features?
  - **Compare it.** Distinguish your subject from those that are similar to it. How is your subject unlike others? Compare and contrast its major characteristics, attributes, and qualities.
  - **Associate it.** Form a link between your subject and others. What is your subject related to? What is it influenced by? What effects does it have on its surroundings?
  - **Analyze it.** Close read parts of the subject to understand the whole. How do the parts relate to the whole? How can understanding parts teach you about the whole?
  - **Apply it.** 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?
  - **Argue it.** Explain your position for supporting or not supporting your subject or topic.

Once finished, be sure to analyze what you have found. Do you see a theme or pattern? Is something new suggested about your topic?