



## Ways to Generate Ideas for Writing

The following are possible methods for generating ideas for your paper. They can be used in combo or alone. There are many ways to get to a first draft.

### Brainstorm

Pick a topic and write a list of as many things as you can think of that relate to that topic. You should try to write quickly, without any worry about spelling, grammar or neatness. Remember, this is just for you to get ideas. Set a timer and time yourself for five or ten minutes. Once you are done, go back over your list and see what ideas you could include in your essay. Then try using one of the techniques below to continue developing your idea(s).

### Clustering or Mind Map

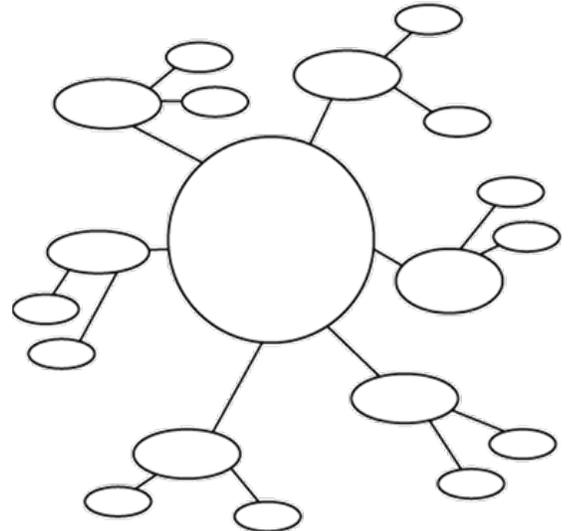
Start with a circle in the center of the page and write the topic of your paper inside it. Then draw smaller circles for main points.

For each main point, draw another circle or bubble that connects to it, and fill them in with examples or ideas to expand on each main point.

Look at each of the smaller clusters as the possible beginning of a body paragraph.

Next: try to free write about one or more of the smaller clusters to develop those potential body paragraphs.

### Mind Map



### Free Write

Try to write as fast as you can for 5 or 10 minutes. Don't worry about spelling, grammar or even complete sentences – just write! Get your ideas flowing onto the page. The only rule is to keep your pen moving forward – don't stop or erase anything. Even if you don't know what to write, then just keep writing "I don't know" until a new thought comes along. The act of writing helps to generate ideas. This can help if you are hitting a block and can't think of anything to write.

### Looping

Pick a topic for a free write and write for about five minutes. This is the first "loop." Then go back over what you have written and pick out the best idea(s) and use that as your topic for your next free write (your second "loop"). Continue with this process. Your aim is to explore ideas, not to have a finished essay. Allow yourself to write as much as you want on each topic.

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### Answer the “Journalistic” Questions: 5 W’s & 1 H

These questions are limitless, but the questions themselves can help you brainstorm on a topic once you’ve chosen it. Frame the questions below based on the topic you’ve selected. Here are some examples of the *kinds* of questions you could ask (do not try to answer every one!):

- **Who** is/are the main focus / author / characters / is affected / is the “actor”?
- **What** is/are the rhetorical situation / its appeals / purpose of the text / its context?
- **When** did this happen? When did I find out about it?
- **Where** did this happen? Where did I find this? (website, newspaper, art gallery, book, in person, YouTube)
- **Why** did this happen? Why did I select this topic? Why is it relevant?
- **How** is this made? How did this come to be? How is this interpreted? Does it affect specific groups?

### Where to Go From Here

Once you’ve done some exploratory writing, settle on your topic; don’t be afraid to pick one and start outlining your paper. If you hit a wall, start over with another one of your ideas from any of the previous exercises.

Once you’re settled on your topic, see our General Academic Essay Outline handout to continue outlining and writing your paper.

### Remember to save often!

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