

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is actively generating ideas for a specific purpose. Effective brainstorming enables writers to go beyond their first thoughts about a subject and consider other avenues of reflection.

When to brainstorm

Brainstorming is helpful with several steps of the writing process:

When narrowing down the topic

- Asking questions about a general subject is one of the best ways of transforming it into a topic that is narrow enough to be manageable in the scope of a paper.
- Questions invite the writer to think about ideas and aspects that might not have been considered otherwise.

When developing a thesis

- Brainstorming is useful to generate possible ideas, contradictory viewpoints, and any important questions that could be explored in the paper.
- These ideas, viewpoints and important questions can then evolve into a possible thesis.

When conducting the research

- Brainstorming for keywords related to a specific topic and thesis statement facilitates the research, and ensures that all relevant material is found.

When creating the outline

- Brainstorming is useful to find arguments, ideas and examples to support the thesis statement.
- Gathering ideas found during a brainstorming session and organizing them visually to find links (illustrated brainstorming) can be the first step towards creating a final outline for the paper.

How to brainstorm

There are three main strategies for brainstorming:

Starting with a central idea

- Ensures that the ideas produced are relevant to the assignment.
- It can change later on – what is important at this point is to use have a central point from which ideas can branch off.

Asking questions

- About the central idea, then about the ideas that are generated, to produce more ideas.
- Example questions:
Who is involved? / Who is responsible? / Who is affected? / Who is interested?
What is the purpose? / What is (or what are) the cause(s)? / What are the effects or consequences? / What does this mean? / What is the context? / What is most important?
Why is this important? / Why is it this way? / Why is this true?
How does this occur? / How can this be resolved or improved? / How did this situation come about?

Recording

- Writing down everything that comes to mind is important, as ideas that appear insignificant might prove useful later on.

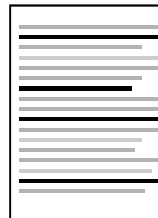
Grouping ideas generated in a brainstorming session

Most often, the ideas that generate from a brainstorming session serve as the basis for an outline. To make the transition between a brainstorming session and an outline, the first step is to think of connection between these ideas, and to group related ideas. This can be done in several different ways:



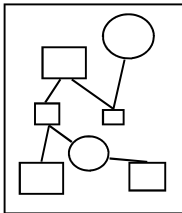
Bulleted lists:

Write down headings and make lists of related ideas under each one. Scratch things out or erase them if necessary.



Highlighting:

Write down all the ideas in any order, and highlight them in different colours according to the groups you create.



Mindmapping:

Draw bubbles or shapes around ideas and draw lines to connect ideas and groups. Use symbols to illustrate what relationships between bubbles are.



Jigsaw puzzle:

Write down ideas on individual pieces of paper or on cue cards and move them around into groups, switching them or rewriting them as necessary.

- Fill in the gaps by asking more questions: ***Is there a question that has not been asked? Do the ideas in a group suggest something else – a conclusion or a consequence?***
- Stay flexible at this point; it might be necessary to move ideas around and see if they work better in different groups, or to change ideas to make them fit into other groups.

Grouping ideas – an example

Assignment instructions: *Pangea is a country bordering the Okeanos region. Turmoil in the area has recently culminated in a forced occupation of Okeanos by Pangean troops. Discuss the Pangean occupation of Okeanos.*

Narrowed down topic: *The effect of the Pangean occupation on the Okeanos people.*

1. Oppression

- *Lack of rights*
 - *Pangeans feel Okeanos people are inferior*
- *Brutal force*
- *International condemnation*

2. Past occupation

- *Distrust of foreigners*
 - *Tendency to violence*
 - *Justification of oppression*
 - *Racism*
 - *Internalized social structure*

3. Poverty

- *Bad conditions*
 - *Increased hatred of Pangeans by Okeanians*
- *Decaying social structure*
- *Perceived helplessness*
 - *Lack of self confidence*
 - *Creation of self-fulfilling prophecies.*
 - *Creates poor family environments*
 - *Violence in children*
 - *Possible resistance in future generations*

More questions?

Remember that you can always write or go speak to your professor or your TA about your assignment, either to obtain clarifications, or to confirm that you are on the right track.

You can also come to the AWHC and make an appointment with one of our writing advisors to discuss any question you might have about the different steps of the writing process:

- Understanding the assignment instructions;
- Narrowing down the topic;
- Brainstorming;
- Establishing a preliminary thesis;
- Research;
- Creating the outline;
- Writing;
- Revision.