

Pre-Writing and Brainstorming

The prewriting stage is when you begin generating ideas on your topic without focusing too much on organization and correctness. It allows you to begin creatively and to truly explore the scope and potential of your topic. Also, breaking the writing process down into stages makes it less stressful and more manageable and gives you time to figure out exactly what you want to develop and explore in your paper.

How to Get Started

Refer to the assignment from your instructor to determine the purpose of your paper. Ask yourself, “What is the assignment?” and “What is the purpose of my paper?” A paper can serve any number of purposes:

- To analyze
- To evaluate
- To report
- To argue
- To interpret
- To self-express
- To discuss or examine
- To persuade
- To summarize

Identify the Audience

Identify your audience and determine how the paper should be written for that audience. Ask yourself,

- Who will read my paper? A paper would be written very differently for a teacher than it would be for a classmate or a business.
- What does my audience already know? What information will I not need to explain?
- What does my audience not already know? Do I need to provide background information, define technical terms, or give a context for my topic?
- What topics, details, or approaches will interest my audience?

- What level of language should I use? Should I write in a formal or informal style? Should I use simple or complex words and sentences?

Determine the Tone

Your tone is your overall attitude toward the topic and reader. In determining your tone, consider the following points:

- Papers can vary dramatically in tone, but for most college papers, you should use a knowledgeable, somewhat serious tone. Avoid sounding artificial, however.
- Look at the tone of other writing in your field to help determine what tone to use.

Several techniques can help you generate materials:

1. Freewriting

Write down a specific topic or question, and using it as inspiration, write every word or phrase that comes to mind. Work quickly, and do not stop writing until your ideas run out. After writing for several minutes, pick out the ideas that are the most interesting, complex, or original to develop further.

2. Ask Questions

Your assignment may pose some questions, but it is often useful to develop more specific or probing questions as you generate ideas. Continue questioning throughout the writing process.

3. Look for Patterns

Identifying patterns of repetition and contrast in a source or topic can help you find areas of emphasis, conflict, or interest. Pointing out and analyzing these patterns can comprise significant portions of some papers.

4. Narrowing a Topic

When choosing a topic, remember that it is better in the long run to choose a strong, narrow topic than a big, general topic. By redefining the topic to something more

specific, it helps your research go smoother, rather than having to search through pages and pages of research. Also, if you try to tackle a larger topic, it will come off as trying to “save the whales,” meaning that you are trying to change something that is too complex to address in one paper. Take what you can handle.

5. Research

After choosing the general topic, you must engage in research to narrow the topic and gather additional information for support material. The intricacies of research are beyond the scope of this paper.

Research should also be ongoing, done intermittently throughout the writing process. As you craft your thesis statements and develop your points of discussion, you may need additional material to flesh out their works.

6. Webbing/Mapping

- Create a visual representation of your thoughts and the connections between them.
- Put the main idea in the middle, or at the top, and draw other, smaller bubbles (or squares, or whatever) connected to it, each representing a supporting idea/detail.

