

Pre-Writing Strategies

Pre-writing is an informal process that allows you to explore ideas as they occur to you. As you go, you don't have to relate them to anything else or worry about organization or mechanics.

There are four main strategies for getting started on any writing assignment:

1. Freewriting
2. Focused Freewriting
3. Brainstorming
4. Clustering

Freewriting

Freewriting all by itself, is writing freely to meet a set parameter, usually a time length (ex. 15 minutes) or a page length (ex. one page). Even if what is written seems unrelated, disorganized, or incomplete, jot down any ideas that come to mind in what is called a **stream of consciousness**. Very importantly, you do not stop for any reason; just keep writing. **This is most useful when you are writing creatively and are looking to get started.**

Focused Freewriting

Focused freewriting, just as with freewriting, is writing for a specific length of time or a particular page length, paying no attention to spelling, grammar, organization, etc. Keep writing until you meet the set parameter, except **this approach involves writing about a set topic**. Because there is a particular focus, **this method is much more helpful when there is a specific assignment that needs to be targeted**. Even if you think you know nothing about the topic or find it uninteresting, you can use this strategy to create ideas about what you think the topic means or involves, or even imagine a story about the topic to make it relevant to you.

How would I use it?

Try this: Think or write "I am..." then write as much as you can.

- I am a student (or fill in your occupation).
- I am a daughter/son/brother/sister/mom/dad/aunt/uncle/cousin/etc.
- I am an Eagle's fan.
- I am an animal lover.

Write down all of the things associated with that part of yourself. Allow your ideas to flow, even if they become unrelated to the original idea.

Apply this same concept to an assignment that you happen to be stuck on. Keep in mind that this is a first draft so if you feel like you are "getting off track," it is perfectly fine.

Revisions will come later down the line. The important part here is to get some ideas on the paper.

Brainstorming

What is it? Brainstorming is creating a list of ideas in response to a problem or question. Similar to freewriting, the ideas generated by brainstorming don't need to be related to each other; they only need to be related to the problem at hand. This technique can be done in a group or by yourself.

How would I use it? There are two main ways of brainstorming:

1. Posing and answering questions about a problem or topic:
Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?
2. Gathering a list of ideas related to the problem or topic.

For example, if you are brainstorming about your favorite food, you would make a list of all the sensory information about that food. What does it look, feel, taste, smell, and sound like? From there, you could list how it became your favorite food, the events with which it is associated, how you prepare it, etc. Soon enough, you'll have a robust amount of information, and you'll be able to indulge in that food as a reward for your excellent brainstorming!

For example, if the main topic is "apples":

My favorite type-Honey Crisp
See-pinkish red skin with some orangey yellow mixed in, it is shiny.
Feel- smooth skinned
Sound (when bitten)-there is a snap when teeth pierce the skin and then a crunch.
Etc...

Clustering

What is it? Clustering utilizes a visual map to shape ideas and explore how those ideas relate to each other.

Helpful tip: There are easy and free online tools for clustering that format your ideas as you go.

How would I use it? When you cluster, your topic goes in a bubble in the middle of the page. From there, your ideas expand to form a spider-web visual. See below for an example.

