How to Brainstorm Effectively

Do not be scared of the brainstorming process. It’s a useful way to get ideas flowing to write successfully. The steps before actually writing can be the most stressful, but it’s beneficial to lay down ideas as a foundation. Different brainstorming techniques can make the writing process more enjoyable and more organized.

First things first:

- If a topic is not provided, think of a topic that would be particularly interesting for you.
- Is it an argumentative writing assignment? Take a side on the issue. Do you agree or disagree?
- Once you have an opinion, think of reasons that can support your argument.
- Are you required to do research for this writing assignment? Think of key words that relate to the topic. Proceed to find sources related to those key words.
- Taking a side and finding sources helps the mind start rolling, and then your mind will begin to form ideas that can support your argument or research.

Useful techniques:

Listing/Bulleted:
This technique is writing down words, phrases, or sentences for a topic.

Topic: “Is social media becoming a necessity or detrimental to society?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A way to communicate on a broad level</td>
<td>Distracting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information on local and world events</td>
<td>Rely on it too heavily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Lack of privacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Cubing:
This technique helps you visualize your topic from six different angles, just like a six sided cube.

1. **Describe it**- appeal to the five senses (sight, taste, smell, touch, and sound)
   Example: social media uses videos and graphics for many purposes. It is a way for people to visually connect rather than physically....
2. **Compare it**- compare and contrast
   Example: How is social media similar to face-to-face conversations? How are they different?
3. **Associate it**- consider personal thoughts or memories about the topic
   Example: How do you connect with your friends? Do you relate to any specific social media accounts?
4. **Analyze it**- break ideas down, and how it can be used effectively in a paper
   Example: Considering most people are constantly on social media, advertisements are effective for drawing in customers. Because social media is so popular, more and more people are being exposed to private information.
5. **Apply it**- think about how the topic can be used
   Example: Would social media be helpful for teaching purposes?
6. **Argue for and against it**- look at both sides of the topic
Example:
Pros: a way to communicate on a broad level, information on local and world events, and useful for marketing.
Cons: It becomes distracting, people depend on it too much, and there is a lack of privacy.

**Clustering/mapping/webbing:**
This technique is used to link words into groups from separate parts into a visual.

This diagram is helpful for a compare/contrast paper because you can include the similarities and differences into one cohesive visual.

This web is useful for argumentative or research papers.
The six questions:
This technique uses words, phrases, and sentences to determine which questions can support a particular topic.

1. Who?
2. What?
3. When?
4. Where?
5. Why?
6. How?

After answering these questions, you will learn that some have no answer, some have more depth than others, or that all the questions have a balance of content. This will lead you into the direction of how to form your paper.

Consider purpose and audience:
This technique helps establish the point of the paper, and who the paper is directed towards.

What is your purpose? Are you persuading? Providing a stance on an argument? Being informative? What goal are you trying to reach with your paper?
Who is your audience? Are you focusing on specific demographic? What should they know first, second, third? What do they need to know about your paper?

This diagram is a nice visualization to see how to properly structure a paper.

**Remember: not ALL essays will have three paragraphs! Different types of essays will require different numbers of body paragraph and perhaps more complex organizational structures!
Outlining:
This technique is helpful to arrange important main ideas and support, so it can be followed as a formal guideline for the paper. Outlines can either be written with sentences or topics.

Thesis Statement: Social media is becoming depended on too heavily, and it is leading to a lack of privacy, extremely distracting, and is failing to communicate the truth effectively.

I. Available around the world
   A. Access to personal information
   B. Once it’s on the internet, it stays forever

II. Distraction to everyday activities
   A. People are forgetting how to communicate face to face
   B. People are using social media while driving
   C. Students are refocusing their attention on social media than education

III. The truth is often not completely told or exaggerated
   A. Content is available to all, and it can be twisted
   B. There is a lack of expression and tone, which can alter the meaning of content.

(See our Outlining Handout for more detailed descriptions of several types of outlines!)

These are a few ways to brainstorm effectively. It’s important to find a technique you are fully comfortable with because that leads to a better flow of ideas. Once your ideas are thought out entirely then a paper becomes less scary and much easier. Have fun brainstorming! 😊