
GETTING STARTED

THE DILEMMA:

Novelist K.C. Sherwood says of writing, “The hardest part is getting started.” Most of us would agree. Even with a clear prompt, a grasp on the material, and lots of ideas, getting started on any paper can be a challenge.

THE SOLUTION:

First, realize you are not alone. All writers have, at one time or another, faced a blank computer screen or an empty piece of paper and struggled to translate his or her thoughts into a coherent and carefully articulated essay.

Second, understand that writing is a process. Well-crafted essays do not flow from a writer’s mind, through the arm, to the fingers and magically onto the page. Writing takes work. The writing process can, at times, feel like a long and tedious activity, but the end result is worth the effort.

Third, the best way to start writing is to start prewriting.

WHAT IS PREWRITING?

Prewriting, according to Roger Caswell and Brenda Mahler (2004), is a process that prepares “students for writing by allowing them to discover what they know and what else they need to know” (p. 7). The term prewriting, however, may seem misleading because prewriting often involves various types of writing. Prewriting is a thinking activity that may include one or more of the following activities:

- Brainstorming
- Free Writing
- Clustering

BRAINSTORMING:

To brainstorm, a writer simply jots down all of his or her stray thoughts about a specific topic. The ideas may or may not seem interconnected at first. Author Timothy R. Cory, in his book *Brainstorming: Techniques for New Ideas* (2003), states that, “Brainstorming is the process of free thinking and generating ideas without being bound by restraints such as ‘is this a good or bad idea?’”

If you want to try this technique, simply take a blank page, place your topic at the top and start writing everything you can think of about the topic.

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Additional online resources can be found at www.madonna.edu/owl

Here's a sample of one student's brainstorming:

Internet
admits
good for search resources
need update ^{global} news
learn english.
learn foreign language -
violent.
naked pics. easily
unhealthy info r.
~~games~~. Internet games.
meeting new people all over the world
meeting bad guys.
~~but no good~~ bad for you eyes.
waste time.
~~is~~ helpful for ~~do~~ how
bid things online.
~~Go Good for search~~

FREEWITING:

Similar to brainstorming, freewriting gets all your thoughts out onto paper. However, where brainstorming often looks more like a list of ideas, freewriting usually takes the shape of sentences. However, correct grammar and punctuation concerns should be far from your mind. Like brainstorming, you should follow the flow of your ideas, and you shouldn't pressure yourself to fully tease out every idea.

CLUSTERING:

Some writers feel the need to connect ideas. Clustering works well to serve that purpose. Clustering focuses on a central word (usually something that embodies a theme or topic) and then associates other words, thoughts, and ideas to that central word. Clustering may be a very useful technique for visual learners.



Adapted from: 1. K.C. Sherwood Personal Interview

2. Caswell, R. & Mahler, B. (2004). *Strategies for Teaching Writing*. Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

3. Cory, T., & Slater, T. (2003). *Brainstorming: Techniques for New Ideas*. New York: IUniverse .