

HOW TO BRAINSTORM

Lesson Objective

In this lesson, you will learn some useful pre-writing skills for generating ideas and narrowing down a topic. You'll practice brainstorming in a variety of ways.

Did you know...

Brainstorming individually is often *more* effective than brainstorming in a group. When brainstorming in a group, some of your best ideas may be lost while you're waiting for a turn to speak. You may also hold back your best or most creative ideas because you fear what others may think of them.

Writing Warm-Up

Get a blank piece of paper and divide it into two columns. At the top of one column write: "Topics I'm Interested In". At the top of the other column write: "Topics I'm NOT Interested in". When your teacher says "Go!" write as many words or phrases in each column as you can. Don't think. Just write! Then discuss these questions with a partner or your classmates.

1. How many topics did you write in each column?
2. Are there any similarities in your list of topics that you're interested in? Are there similarities in the topics you're not interested in?
3. What topics do teachers typically ask you to write about? Which ones interest you? Which ones bore you? Share these with your teacher!

Vocabulary Preview

Match these words to their correct definitions.

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| _____ 1. brainstorm | a) a closely related group |
| _____ 2. freewrite | b) to write without a format and without thinking too hard |
| _____ 3. mind map | c) to come up with, to make |
| _____ 4. random | d) a way of organizing ideas into thought bubbles |
| _____ 5. generate | e) to find and focus on the most important details or ideas |
| _____ 6. cluster | f) not organized or planned |
| _____ 7. Venn diagram | g) wide, not detailed |
| _____ 8. rolestorm | h) to think of a lot of ideas related to a topic or problem |
| _____ 9. broad | i) to think of ideas from another person's perspective |
| _____ 10. narrow down | j) a graph of intersecting circles, used to compare two or three ideas |

Brainstorming Techniques

1. Freewriting

When you freewrite, you write for “quantity”, not “quality”. When you start, you may have a broad topic in mind, such as “Cities I Might Write About”. You may also have something more specific in mind, such as “Things to do in New York City”.

As you freewrite, remember that you are the only reader of this piece. This pre-writing stage is for generating as many ideas as you can.

TASK:

Get a blank piece of paper. Freewrite for five minutes about any city that you know a lot about.

Ready, set, write!

2. Mind Maps (Webbing)

A mind map or web is the most common form of brainstorming. A mind map has a large circle in the center for the main idea, topic, or problem. As random ideas and examples come to mind, you draw branches (lines) and smaller circles or bubbles to place your thoughts. Your random thoughts can be organized into clusters of related ideas.

TASK:

Get a blank piece of paper. Create a mind map called “Reasons To Visit _____” (the city you chose in #1 Freewriting).

EXAMPLE: *Reasons to Visit New York City*



Brainstorming Techniques, continued

3. Lists

Making a bulleted list is another form of brainstorming. You may decide to use one or more columns. After you make your list(s), you can place details and examples in brackets beside some of the items.

EXAMPLE: *How to Visit NYC on a Budget*

- Broadway shows (last-minute tickets, search for discount codes online, go solo, try Off-Broadway shows at small theaters)
- Transportation (walk instead of taking taxis, plan ahead to avoid extra subway, Staten Island Ferry)
- Hotel (find off-season deals, book early, travel Sundays and Mondays)
- Food (ask locals where to eat, buy snacks at a grocer and eat one good meal out, find coupons, eat NYC pizza)
- Attractions (libraries, museums, Central Park, window-shopping)

TASK:

Brainstorm a list based on your own travel topic, such as "How to Visit London with a Child".

5. Rolestorming

A fun way to generate unique ideas is to imagine yourself as someone else. What ideas would a famous celebrity generate on the topic of New York City? What would a homeless person write about?

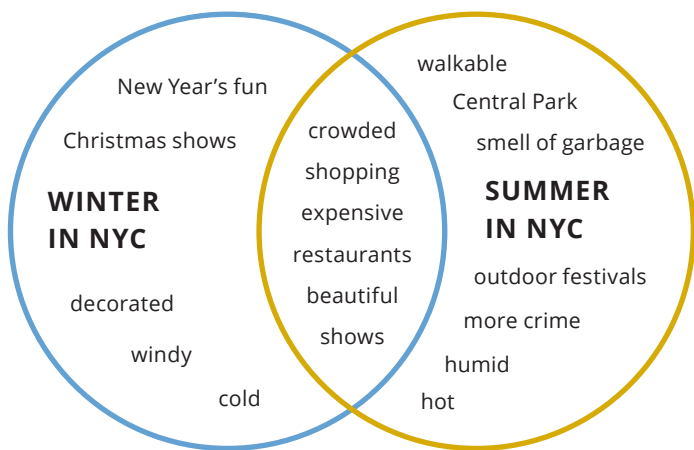
TASK:

Find a partner and choose a travel topic together. Then choose two different people (celebrity, classmate, teacher, family member) to rolestorm ideas. Sit back-to-back as you brainstorm for five minutes. Then share your results. Pretend you are the other person as you share your ideas. Here are some topics to choose from. If you prefer, you can also choose your own!

Traveling with Kids Honeymoons Adventure Travel Flying Vs. Driving

4. Venn Diagrams

Venn diagrams are useful for comparing two things or ideas. You can use these types of diagrams to prepare for a comparative essay or to help you choose between two topics. Here is an example of a Venn Diagram.



TASK:

Create your own Venn diagram using the city you chose in #1. You can compare your city to another city, or choose any other related topic for comparison.

Narrowing Down a Topic

Now that you've explored five ways to generate ideas, it's time to narrow down a topic for a writing assignment. Here are three different methods for choosing your best ideas from your brainstorming work.

1. Turn Your Ideas into Questions

As you look at your ideas, put yourself in your readers' shoes. What would they want to know? Here are some examples of questions based on the sample Venn Diagram.

EXAMPLES:

1. What's your preferred method of transportation?
2. What type of weather do you prefer?
3. Why do you want to travel to New York?
4. What does your perfect day in New York look like?
5. If you could only do one thing in New York City, what would it be?
6. What types of experiences can ruin a trip?
7. How much time and money are you planning on spending in New York City?
8. Will you be returning to New York City anytime soon?
9. What advice would you give a friend who was trying to decide when to visit New York City?
10. What do you NOT want to do in New York City?

TASK:

Look at your freewriting from page 2. Write at least ten questions related to your ideas. Now choose the most interesting question. Can you base a writing assignment on this question?

2. Find Your Weak Ideas

After you brainstorm about a topic, look through your ideas to find weak or uninteresting points. Put yourself in your readers' shoes. What seems uninteresting or obvious? Cross out anything that doesn't jump out at you. (Don't use a black marker in case you change your mind.)

TASK:

Go through the list you made on page 3. Cross off any ideas and details that you don't think are your best ones. Try to leave yourself with at least three main points and a few great examples. Do you think you could write a good paragraph or essay with these points?

3. Isolate Your Best Ideas

If you spent enough time brainstorming, you probably came up with some really interesting ideas. Which ones are the best? Which ones would your reader want to know more about?

TASK:

Look through the ideas on your mind map again, and find the ones that jump out at you. These ideas should make you want to write more! Which ideas have the most details? Which ones interest you? Which ones can you think of specific examples for? **Circle** them, **highlight** them, or **underline** them. Use a different color pen to draw attention to the best ideas.

Give Your Brain a Break

Brainstorming is hard work. Before you move on to the next pre-writing stage (writing an outline), you should take a little break from your writing. If possible, come back to your writing the next day. Even though you are giving your brain a

break, you may want to have a notebook handy! Don't be surprised if ideas start to come to you when you're in the shower or before you get out of bed in the morning. Capture the best ideas before they escape.

Comprehension Check-In

Work with a partner and answer the following questions based on the lesson so far.

1. What are five types of brainstorming that you can use?
2. Why is it effective to brainstorm as an individual rather than as a group?
3. What step should you take after generating a lot of ideas for a writing piece?
4. What type of writing would work well with Venn diagrams?
5. What is the main goal of freewriting?
6. Why would rolestorming provide different ideas than freewriting?
7. Why does this lesson mention taking a shower?

Writing Challenge – Pair or Group Activity

A NEW WAY OF BRAINSTORMING

Work with a partner or small group to create your own brainstorming technique! After you come up with an idea, challenge another pair or group to try your brainstorming method.

Answer Key

LESSON DESCRIPTION:

In this lesson students will learn some fun pre-writing techniques for generating ideas for writing assignments.

LEVEL: Intermediate

TAGS: writing, brainstorming, pre-writing

Lesson Objective

Review the lesson objective with your students. Ask them what they think brainstorming is. Ask them why they think “storm” is used in this word.

Writing Warm-Up

Ask your students to do the warm-up on a blank piece of paper. Place students in pairs to discuss the post-task questions (or discuss as a class).

Vocabulary Preview

Print copies of page 7 and cut out the strips, or have students do the matching exercise provided on page 1.

- | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1. h | 3. d | 5. c | 7. j | 9. g |
| 2. b | 4. f | 6. a | 8. i | 10. e |

Brainstorming Techniques

Give your students time to try each brainstorming technique. They will need a few blank pieces of paper to complete the tasks. If they don't like the suggested travel topics, use different ones!

Narrowing Down a Topic

Now that your students have learned a few different ways of brainstorming, they need to be able to sift through all of their ideas. Which ones are too weak? Which ones are the best? (The next writing stage will be writing an outline. Try our lesson plan!)

Brain Break

If you want a fun way to take a brain break before the comprehension check-in, have your students take out a blank sheet of paper and draw what a “brainstorm” (storm in the brain) would look like. Have them close their eyes while they draw. After they open their eyes, they can compare their drawings.

Comprehension Check-In

1. The five types of brainstorming used in this lesson are freewriting, lists, mind maps, Venn Diagrams, and rolestorming.
2. It is effective to brainstorm as an individual rather than as a group because you don't have to wait to share your idea. You also don't have to censor your ideas or worry about what others may think.
3. After generating a lot of ideas for a writing piece, the next step is choosing the best ones and eliminating the weakest ones.
4. A comparative writing piece would work well with Venn diagrams.
5. The main goal of freewriting is to write as much as you can and not worry about the quality of the writing.
6. Rolestorming would provide different ideas than freewriting because you try to get into another person's mind.
7. This lesson mentions taking a shower because people tend to have a lot of ideas in the shower!

Writing Challenge – Pair or Group Activity

Optional. If you have time to do this activity, it is a fun way to end the lesson! What kinds of brainstorming tasks can your students come up with and challenge each other to try?

SPELLING NOTES:

This lesson shows the American spelling of the words *Theaters*, *Traveling*, *Color*, and *Practice*. Most other English-speaking countries spell these words this way: *Theatres*, *Travelling*, *Colour*, and *Practise* (when used as a verb, *Practice* when used as a noun). Make it a challenge for your students to find these words in the lesson and see if they know the alternate spellings.

Extra Vocabulary Practice (Optional)

Write definitions in your own words. Cut up these vocabulary strips.
Challenge a partner to match the vocabulary to your definition.

brainstorm

freewrite

mind map

random

generate

cluster

Venn diagram

rolestorm

broad

narrow down