



Stuck on Start? Try one of these BRAINSTORMING strategies:

1. Mapping/Clustering

Take a blank sheet of paper and in the middle of it write a crucial question about your subject or write a word or phrase that seems important to your topic. Draw a circle around what you've written. Then draw a line out from that circle and write an idea or a question or a phrase related to your central idea and circle that. Spiraling out from the second circle, add and circle any further associations or ideas. Continue drawing lines from your central idea, like spokes radiating from a wheel, recording other ideas or questions that relate to the central idea. If you have trouble reeling out material, try another main idea. If you produce too much, take one of the secondary circles and concentrate just on that one.

2. Listing

If you have a specific topic, write down anything and everything that the topic brings to mind. Force yourself to write for at least ten minutes, putting down any word or phrase that occurs to you. Recognize that you're simply free associating, so let words and images trigger other words and images. You may end up with a substantial number of ideas, and you can then select one to focus on or group several related ones together.

3. Focused Freewriting

Think of a question that is relevant to the assignment and use it as a jumping off place to start writing about the subject. Put down everything that comes to mind and avoid editing what you are writing. When you run out of ideas, say "what else?" and see if there's more there. Then go back and read over what you've written, underlining or circling anything that seems interesting or even puzzling and worth pursuing. Consider how what you've highlighted might become a possible focus for your paper.

4. Problem Solving

Figure out what it is about the assigned writing that creates a problem for you. Write down the problem as a statement at the top of a piece of paper. Then write an explanation or answer to this statement. For example, you might be unable to start writing because you can't think of a topic. At the top of the paper you would write: "I can't think of a topic." Then you would try to explore why coming up with an idea seems to be difficult. Sometimes examining why a problem exists helps you to work past the problem.

5. Letter Writing

Pick someone who you know will like your ideas and simply write a letter to him or her about your subject or topic. Consider your letter a conversation with this friend about your topic.

6. Questioning/Rhetorical Strategy

Sometimes answering the questions below can help you focus your writing:

1. What story can I tell to develop my topic?
2. What examples can I provide?
3. What can I describe?
4. What can I explain?
5. What can I compare or contrast?
6. What can I argue?

7. Musing

Go on a drive or take a walk without any kind of added stimuli (no music, no other person to talk to, etc.) and simply let your mind wander over your subject. Do something active so you won't get sleepy, but force your mind to stay on the subject.