

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a strategy for working through your thoughts when you are having a hard time narrowing down your ideas. It is useful when you are trying to choose a topic to write about, develop an approach for your research, or decide the many possible routes that your ideas can take.

If you can hear yourself saying the following phrases, then brainstorming may be able to help you:

- *I have too many ideas and no idea which one to choose!*
- *I have no idea what to write about!*

Sometimes you have too many ideas and sometimes you have no idea where to start. Brainstorming can get you started in the writing process by getting you to think about various ideas and pick your thoughts out of the chaos.

Brainstorming Techniques

There are many different ways in which you can begin to brainstorm. Below are some tips. Try one or more to see which is the best strategy for you.

Free Writing

Often times when we are writing and get writer's block, it is because we are evaluating our ideas as they come out. Free writing requires you to just write your ideas without evaluating them. Write the ideas as they come to you. Once you are finished with your free writing, take a break and come back later to look at them. This will give your brain a fresh perspective and allow you to evaluate your ideas after they are all written out.

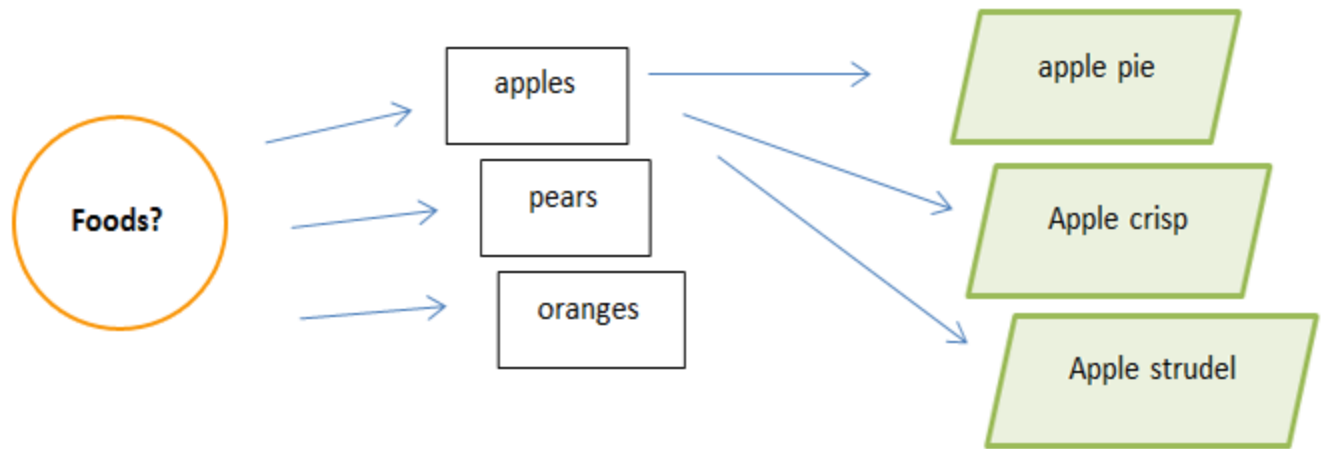
Note Taking

This is similar to free writing, but you can simply make lists of ideas as they come to you. This can be as simple as one word notes to full sentences. To get started, think about "what do I really think is important about this topic." Once you start listing items, you will see that you already have ideas about the topic and can begin to write more focused sentences and paragraphs later.

Diagramming/Mapping

One way to begin to think about your topic in a more visual sense is to create word maps. This involves writing one word or concept and seeing how much you can write about it in detail.

Let's say that you are writing a paper on different foods and their uses. Start by breaking down the topic into small pieces. What are some foods that you can think of?



You can add as many ideas as you wish. Once you complete the exercise, you will be able to evaluate which areas you have more information for and which you would be able to use in your writing. If you only have one or two items for a specific topic, this might not be the best to write about. You can try to add more to these topics, or just choose the ones that have the most ideas.

Making Charts

Some people prefer to see items listed out rather than diagrams/word maps. This method requires that you create tables and list main topics in the table heading. Under the headings, you can write out different ideas that come to your mind.

For example, if you wish to write a paper about the most influential people in history, start by listing several people and what they contributed to the world.

Most Influential People In History			
Martin Luther King Jr.	Charles de Gaulle	Nelson Mandela	Adolf Hitler
Non-violent struggle for civil rights in the USA	Led the fight to regain French territory lost in WWII	Fought to end apartheid in South Africa	Mass exterminated millions during WWII
Championed rights of African Americans in the USA	Became the first president of France after the end of WWII	Served as the first black president of South Africa	Attacked European countries and took over many of them

Question Forming

Rather than thinking of answers for your paper, you could start by asking questions. This helps you to think about ideas that you might be able to address. You can simply ask yourself about the topic and why it is important.

For example, if you are writing a paper on Amelia Earhart, you could begin by asking yourself several questions about her life and her achievements.

- Why is Amelia famous?
- What did she contribute to women's independence in her time?
- Is she still an influence on women today?

Brainstorming Exercises

- [Writing Lab Tips Brainstorming -Brainstorming Exercises](#)
- [Writing Lab Tips Brainstorming -Brainstorming Word Bubbles](#)
- [Writing Lab Tips Brainstorming -Brainstorming Writing about a Subject](#)
- [Writing Lab Tips Brainstorming -Brainstorming List Making](#)