Prewriting Techniques

Prewriting is an essential step of the writing process. Thinking about and organizing your ideas before you write will save you a lot of time later on when you’re writing and editing your paper. Your learning style may determine which prewriting technique works best for you and different papers will favor different techniques. Try a few of these until you find the ones you like best.

Freewriting

Great ideas can arise when your mind is unrestrained. After reading and understanding your assignment, try these tips for freewriting:

- Start with a blank paper, a pencil/pen, and a location free from distractions
- Set a timer for 5-10 minutes
- Write whatever comes to your mind about the topic, write continuously, and don’t worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar
- Stop, reread your assignment, and highlight anything that helps answer the prompt and can be included in your paper

List

Another way to start generating ideas for your essay is by making a list of concepts and key words related to the assignment, topic, or readings. When making your list:

- Prepare a couple blank sheets of paper
- Start with items related directly to the assignment
- Ask yourself who, what, when, where, why, and how
- Don’t worry about organization while you’re writing
- When you’re done making your lists try reorganizing them into groups to see what topics and connections are strongest

Talk

To a friend: Talking to a friend about your paper is a good way for you to expand your ideas and start forming an argument. Their feedback can inspire further questions and signal to you what works and what doesn’t work.

To yourself: Even without another person, talking out loud gives you the freedom to work through your ideas without feeling restrained by writing conventions.

To a tape recorder: Though it may feel awkward at first, using a tape recorder is a good way of processing and documenting your ideas. We think faster than we can write, so even using the recorder on your phone can be useful when inspiration strikes.
Cluster

Clustering helps organize ideas and is particularly good for visual learners. Start with your main topic, argument, or question in the middle, then branch out into sub-topics and examples.

Matrix

A matrix is an organizational grid that allows you to see relationships within general categories. When you have ideas you have to compare or contrast, using a matrix is a simple way of organizing the ideas and possible body paragraph topics for your paper.

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<td>girl</td>
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Outline

Outlining is a more structured prewriting technique used for organizing the structure and flow of your paper. Though you can start with outlining, this also works well after using one of the other techniques to brainstorm content.

1. Gendered baby clothes take advantage of gender stereotypes and further reinforce those stereotypes.
   a. Styles change over time
      i. babies used to wear the same clothes
      ii. child psychology changed
   b. Industry took advantage of changing views
      i. parents buy more because siblings can’t share

c. Gender stereotypes were reinforced
   i. boys are strong, like trucks
   ii. girls are delicate, like dolls

d. Stereotypes affect how we treat babies
   i. boys get more freedom
   ii. girls need to be protected

2. If we want to change gender stereotypes, we need to change how we treat (and dress) babies.