

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 drafting and editing your paper. Some prewriting strategies will feel more or less natural to 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. Try to write continuously for at least the full time you set. If you hit a wall, jump to a new angle or idea.
- Write whatever comes to your mind that is related to the prompt, even if it's silly or obvious. Write without censoring yourself, and don't worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar.
- When you run out of steam, stop writing, reread your assignment, and highlight anything you wrote 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. You can even list possible thesis ideas.

- Prepare a couple blank sheets of paper or a blank word processing document.
- Start with listing concepts related directly to the assignment, and don't worry about organization yet. Focus on those that are most interesting to you already.
- Ask yourself *who, what, when, where, why, and how*.
- When you're done making your lists, try reorganizing them into groups to see what topics and connections are strongest.
- If you listed ideas for a thesis, try listing or freewriting a few main points for each to see which is the easiest or most interesting to write about.

Talk

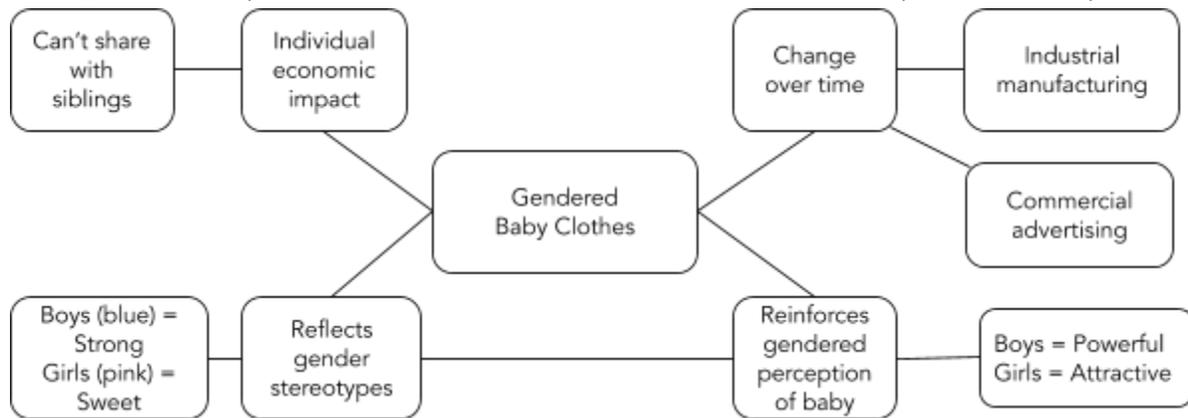
To a friend or tutor: Talking to someone about your paper is a good way for you to expand your ideas and start forming an argument. Their feedback can inspire further questions and signal to you what works and what doesn't work, what is compelling and what is less interesting.

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 voice recorder: Though it may feel awkward at first, using a voice 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 benefits visual processing. 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.

Baby Clothing

	1800-1850	1851-1900	1901-1950	1951-2000
boy				
girl				

Outline

Outlining is a more structured prewriting technique used for organizing the framework and flow of your paper. Though you can start with outlining, this also works well to organize ideas 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.