

Prewriting Strategies

Preparing to write, or prewriting, strategies are activities that help you explore a subject and generate ideas about it. Your mission at this stage is to stimulate your thinking before and during the act of writing. Whenever you generate new material throughout the writing process, you are prewriting. The most popular and effective prewriting activities are brainstorming, clustering/mapping, discussing, freewriting, informal outlining, questioning, quickwrites, and scanning. The more ideas you generate now and throughout the entire writing process, the more you have to work with as you draft your essay.

Brainstorming: A list of related words and phrases based on free association.

Clustering/Mapping: The process of mapping any ideas that come to mind on a specific topic.

Note: This activity involves writing a key word or phrase at the center of a page and drawing a circle around it, then writing and circling any related ideas that come to mind and drawing lines to the ideas that prompted the new words.

Discussing: The act of talking with another person about one's subject matter and grappling aggressively with the ideas in the process.

Freewriting: The strategy of writing for a brief period of time about anything that comes to mind.

Note: Based on free association, this strategy is connected prose rather than a list.

Informal Outlining: A list of the main ideas and details related to the specified topic in the order in which they will likely be addressed.

Questioning: The process of asking questions that will generate new ideas and topics.

Note: This process is often based on the five Ws and one H: Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How?

Quickwrites: Brief, informal reactions to specific queries or statements.

Scanning: The process of skimming and spot reading to generate ideas and form opinions.