Invention Strategies

Freewriting/Association:
Start writing and keep writing. Keep your pen moving steadily across the paper. Try to connect the flow of your thoughts with the flow of the ink. When stuck, repeat something you have just written, or write, “I don’t know what to write” until your next idea comes. Trust yourself! New ideas will come!

Cubing:
Look at your topic from six different points of view:
- Describe it. What do you see, hear, feel, smell, taste?
- Compare it. What is it like? What is it different from?
- Apply it. What can you do with it? How can you use it?
- Associate it. What connections between this and something else come to mind?
- Analyze it. What parts does it have? How do they work (or not work) together?
- Argue for it or against it (seriously or humorously).

The Journalist’s Questions:
Who, Where, What, When, Why, and How?

Burke’s Dramatic Pentad:

Action: What happened or is happening? What will happen? What could happen?
Actor/Agent: Who did it? Who is doing it? What did it? What is causing it? What kind of agent is it?
Scene: Where did it happen? Where is it happening? Where will it happen?
When did it happen? What is the background?
Means: How did the agent do it? What means were used? How does it happen?
Purpose: Why did or does it happen?
Berke’s Twenty Questions for the Writer:

Imaginative
- How can X be described?  
  Description
- How did X happen?  
  Narration
- What kind of person is X?  
  Characterization
- What is my memory of X?  
  Reminiscence
- What is my personal response to X?  
  Response

Informative
- What are the facts about X?  
  Information
- How can X be summarized?  
  Summary

Analytical
- What does X mean?  
  Definition
- What is the essential function of X?  
  Functional Definition
- What are the component parts of X?  
  Simple Analysis
- How is X made or done?  
  Process Analysis
- How should X be made or done?  
  Directional Analysis
- What are the causes of X?  
  Causal Analysis
- What are the consequences of X?  
  Causal Analysis
- What are the types of X?  
  Classification
- How does X compare to Y?  
  Comparison
- What is the present status of X?  
  Comparison

Critical
- How should X be interpreted?  
  Interpretation
- What is the value of X?  
  Critical Evaluation
- What case can be made for or against X?  
  Argumentation

n.b. You can also ask the negative form of each question!