

Any writing involves a process and the time we spend on each section will be determined by our own strengths and weaknesses and by each specific project. Sometimes the novel almost writes itself. Other times it's a slow arduous climb. The advantage of brainstorm techniques is their ability to energize creative thinking no matter where in the sequence we need help.

Process Sequence: Prewriting-1st draft-response-revision-2nd/3rd drafts...editing-final draft-polish.

There are many ways to brainstorm but I've found for my students and myself that these five combine both quick feedback and bypass the inner critic that tends to restrict our thinking.

Pre-writing Brainstorms: cluster-list-freewrite-question-scratch outline

Cluster-is a good way to begin with general or large size concept and narrow down to the part that you are drawn to. It can be used with a topic, such as art, or for a word, such as sunrise, to draw out all facets possible.



Draw circles around each main category like a bubble and then bubble it down as far as you can go. For example, the music above can be circled into so many more categories but suppose you're interested in Italian operas then the next set of bubbles may become style or century or composers or themes or...there's no end to where the subject goes until you find inspiration or new ideas.

Laying it all out visually in these circles gives a new perspective to our subjects and, if you'd like, do in all in color and have fun.

Scratch outline-usually comes after the first four but can also evolve out of it, especially as you become more familiar with the process/ and or your topic. On the other hand, if you can't form a quick outline you probably need more pre-writing. This works best with a subject that you already know about. You're tapping into what you remember and then later the list will show you what you've forgotten or where you need research.

Example: *Special Occasion*

1. Planning: date, reservations, people, theme, ...?
2. Reservations: dinner, (prepared menu or choose then?) theater-deadline to buy tickets-how many-seating,
3. People: invitations-by phone, by mail (snail or email)
4.

Basically start with the large categories, then divide down, and divide down again the individual parts as needed. This helps you to see where your holes are and to focus your time. It is especially helpful with research and non-fiction.

List (brainstorm): “idea that one thought generates another”

Example: Worst interview I ever had. List the reasons why.

Freewrite: associate ideas freely-never stopping to edit. Write on your topic for ten minutes without stopping-ignore punctuation, spelling, exact words etc. “Mistakes do not count.” (Peter Elbow) Main purpose is to get past our ‘natural’ editor. Although this can be done on a computer try it out a few times just using a notepad and pen. Not only does it become a portable creative exercise but also a pleasurable time filler when unexpected delays hit your schedule.

Example: freewrite-what do I want to write next?

Questions: Generate ideas by asking a series of questions-who, what, when, why, where, how, in what way? This helps approach a topic from different angles

Example: using a job experience. “What did I love about this job? How was the work interesting? Why was pay unimportant? In what ways were working conditions good?”

Answering questions from your own emotional circumstances helps you to tap into a character’s heart, no matter how different the external framework is.

Feeding brainstorming comes through journal entries and reading. Jot down in your journal, or in a separate reading notebook, quotes and phrase and ideas that intrigue or interest you.

When you're starting a project it's helpful to brainstorm with two different styles to open up more ideas. Combine one you are most comfortable with one you'd rather not try.

Have fun being creative.

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