

The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University lists many other questions you can ask to generate ideas about a topic. You can access that list at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/673/02/>.

Make It Fun!

Prewriting does not have to be chore. In fact, it can be the most creative part of writing a paper, and it can lead you to very interesting ideas that you might not have thought of otherwise.

Accessing More Information

- The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>
- Raimes, Ann. *Keys for Writers*. 5th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008. You can find this book at the Hamline University Bookstore.

Acknowledgments

Information from this brochure was adapted from

“Prewriting (Invention).” The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University. 26 Jan. 2009 <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/673/01/>>.

Raimes, Ann. *Keys for Writers*. 5th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008.

Where to Find Help on Campus

Consultants at the **Hamline University Writing Center**, located in the basement of Bush Library, are eager to help you with all stages of your writing. We will work with you whether you have just received an assignment and have no idea how to begin or you have a finished draft and want help with revisions.

You can make appointments online at WC Online. Simply follow the instructions at:

<http://rich37.com/hamline>

We look forward to seeing you!



The Writing Center
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Prewriting



Facing the Blank Page or Screen

Most students do not enjoy the prospect of beginning a new paper. They ask themselves, “What should I write about? How should I begin?” These are common questions. The following information offers a whole new way of looking at the blank page or screen.

The Purpose of Prewriting

Prewriting can help you generate an idea for a topic if you don’t already have one or develop material for a topic you’ve already chosen. It can also help you understand your purpose in writing about the topic of your choice. For example, you may know you want to write about the emotional life of dogs, but prewriting can help you determine *why* you think that topic is important, or what you wish to communicate about it.

When to Prewrite

Prewriting can be useful before, during, and after your research. You may use prewriting techniques to determine what to research, or your research may introduce ideas that you want to prewrite about.

Be sure to keep all the pages and documents of your prewriting exercises. You’ll want all these ideas at your fingertips when you begin your first draft.

How to Generate Ideas for a Paper

Let’s assume that you have been told you can write about anything you want. How do you decide?

Think about issues that matter to you, or that have been in the news recently. Consider topics you discuss with your friends or family. Recall your own life experiences. Use Academic Search Premier to look for topics. For example, enter

“dogs” in CLICnet and see how many subcategories appear.

How to Make a Boring Topic Interesting

Sometimes you are assigned a topic that does not interest you. You can use several approaches to make this topic worth your while. Read about the subject until you find something that does catch your eye. Find an expert in the field with whom you disagree and argue against their point of view. If all else fails, write your paper on why the topic is uninteresting or overplayed.

Four Prewriting Strategies

Writers often use one or more of the following strategies. Try them all to see which is most helpful for you.

Freewriting

When you freewrite, you let one idea lead to another in free association. Do not edit or censor yourself. Your flow of ideas does not have to make sense, nor do you need to concern yourself with grammar and punctuation.

If you can’t remember a word or bit of information, use a symbol or brackets to remind yourself that something should be filled in later. The point of freewriting is to generate ideas, no matter how odd or out of place they may seem.

Try both writing by hand and typing on a keyboard when you freewrite. Discover which method works best for you.

Brainstorming

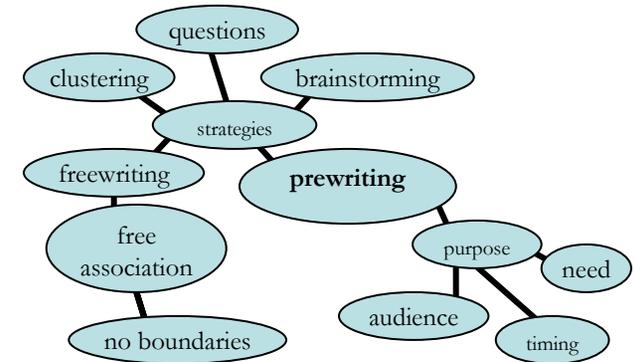
Brainstorming is like freewriting in that you are using free association, but instead of writing prose, you simply make a list. By yourself or in a group, write down words and phrases that come to mind as you consider a topic. When you are done, review the list. Organize the words and phrases

into subcategories. Delete words that don’t lead anywhere, and add new words that come to mind. You may find a solid direction for your paper.

Mapping or Clustering

Mapping, sometimes called clustering, uses the same principle as brainstorming, but it more clearly shows relationships among the concepts you are listing.

Begin with a word in the center of a page. Around that word, write other words that come to mind. Draw lines between them. Write more words that relate to the secondary words and connect those with lines as well. For example, let’s say you wanted to write about prewriting. Your map might look like this:



Journalists’ Questions

Journalists are instructed to answer the questions Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? You can generate ideas on a topic by asking these questions yourself. For example, on the topic of prewriting:

- Who needs to use prewriting?
- What is it?
- When is it used?
- Where is it used?
- Why is it necessary?
- How is it done?