

# BRAINSTORMING TECHNIQUES

## Thinking about the subject of your essay

### WHY IS BRAINSTORMING IMPORTANT?

- Brainstorming is a useful tool at any stage of the writing process: when deciding your **topic**, deciding which **sources** to research, and /or figuring out what **supporting points** to use. One way to begin is to answer the questions **who, what, where, when, why, and how**.
- **Listing, mind mapping, and freewriting** are three useful techniques.
- **Ensure that you understand the essay question thoroughly before you begin brainstorming.** Reread it multiple times. Put it in your own words if it is long and complicated.
- Set a timer for **15–20 minutes** to complete each exercise.

### LISTING:

- Write your topic or essay question on the top of your page.
- Quickly jot down or type a list of all the words and phrases that come to your mind.
- Do not stop to decide if they are good or bad, right or wrong. Write as many as possible.
- Use words, phrases, and short sentences.
- Once done, cross out ideas that are the same or do not fit.

Below is a list on the topic of **SUPERSTITIONS**.

sneezing on the left	the weather
honeymoon	opening an umbrella in the house
wedding day superstitions	unlucky 13
broken mirror	Friday, the 13th
throwing salt	number 4 - unlucky
seventh child	horse shoe
7 - lucky number	walking under a ladder
a red sky	

- After looking it over, you can see that **lucky or unlucky objects** and **lucky and unlucky numbers** have the most ideas. You can select the ideas that fall under the categories that are relevant and forget the others.
- Ask yourself if you are missing any ideas, and then complete the lists, researching new ideas.

<b>lucky and unlucky objects</b>	<b>lucky and unlucky numbers</b>
broken mirror	unlucky 13
throwing salt	seventh child
walking under a ladder	7 - lucky number
opening an umbrella in the house	Friday, the 13th
horse shoe	Number 4 - unlucky
evil eye	unlucky 17 in Italian culture

- Now the **essay on superstitions** can be written, with one body paragraph focused on lucky and/or unlucky numbers and the other on lucky and/or unlucky objects.
- Likewise, an **essay** could be written focusing only on **superstitious objects** with one paragraph on broken mirrors, followed by one on throwing salt over your shoulder, etc. Equally, an essay could focus on **superstitious numbers**, with one paragraph on the number thirteen, the other on the seventh child born in a family, etc.

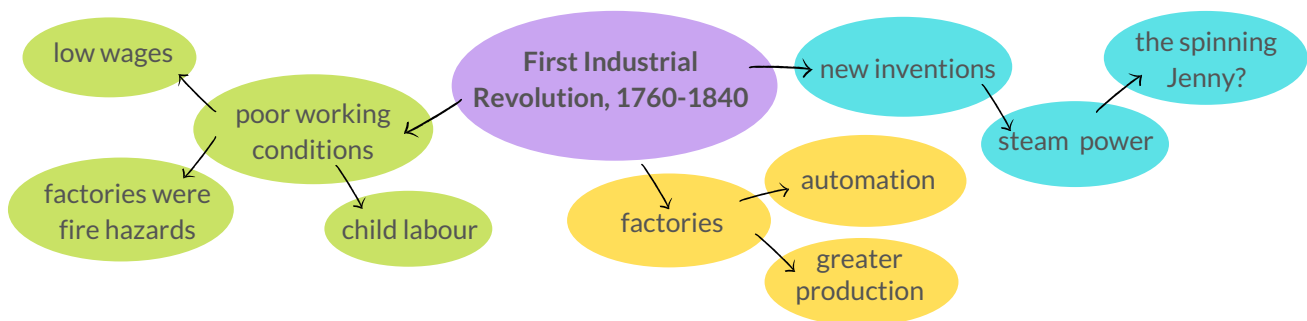
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# BRAINSTORMING TECHNIQUES

Continued

## MINDMAPPING:

- Write your topic or essay question on the top or in the middle of your page and circle it.
- Write whatever ideas come to mind in circles around the centre.
- Think about each idea and make more circles around them. Your best and most important ideas will have many circles connected to them.
- Draw arrows between the circles to show which ideas are connected.
- If you are uncertain, write an idea as a question. Write as many ideas as possible.
- Research the topic to add more ideas. Reorganize your circles as needed.
- Ask yourself what ideas seem to be missing. Add them or guess what they might be.



## FREEWRTING:

- Write your topic or essay question on the top of your page.
- Write as much as you can about the topic given your present knowledge.
- Use complete sentences, but do not worry about grammar, spelling, organization, or relevance.
- Write until you have run out of ideas.
- Read your freewriting and underline or **bold** the main idea(s).
- Choose your main idea(s) and brainstorm on them again to generate more ideas.
- Research your topic between freewriting sessions to acquire new information.

Below is a freewritten paragraph on "**What are the effects of pollution on the environment?**" The writer has bolded two main ideas: **Many birds and fish are dying because of polluted water** and **our forests are dying**.

There are many effects of pollution on the environment that I really don't know where to begin. Every day we hear something or other on the news. I remember last week I heard that some California beaches which were considered dangerous for swimming. It's not only bad for people but its bad for animals too. **Many birds and fish are dying because of polluted water**. Many fish are dying in the sea, others are getting contaminated. Fishermen catch contaminated fish which may be sold in markets and we may get sick form eating them. lakes and rivers are getting polluted too. Yes, and another problem is that our **forests are dying**. Many of the forests not in North America but in Europe too are dying from acid rain. This in turn is affecting the balance of nature.

You may repeat these exercises as often as you need until you can pick out the best ideas for your thesis statement and supporting points. You can also note what ideas you know less about so that you can research and brainstorm them further. Once you have a direction, you can move onto creating an outline.

- See handout: **The Outline**.

Source: Broukal, Milada. *Weaving it Together*. Book 3, Heinle & Heinle, 1994.

For more information, contact the Academic Skills Centre.