

# Helpful techniques for the writing process

## Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a creative technique that is aimed at generating new ideas or at collecting already existing knowledge. The technique of brainstorming can be applied in group work. Also it can be done individually.

Write down your topic or a keyword at the top of a sheet of paper. Set a time limit, e.g. 10 or 15 minutes. Take a look at your topic or keyword and write down everything that comes to your mind. Make a list of words, phrases or sentences. Do not stop writing. If nothing comes to your mind anymore before the time is up you write "What else?"

Do not judge your thoughts and ideas! Allow yourself to write down everything even the wildest and most curious ideas! Keep in mind: quantity counts and not quality! Use the ideas you get while writing to generate new ones! Do not look at the list! Do not cross any words or phrases!

## Freewriting

Free writing is a technique which you can use to write continuously for a fixed period of time regardless of spelling, grammar, or topic. It produces raw material that helps writers overcome blocks of self-criticism. Free writing is based on a presumption that writers may be blocked by self-criticism, resentment, and anxiety about deadlines, fear of failure or censure, or other forms of resistance. The rules of free writing enable a writer to overcome those barriers.

Some writers use the technique to collect initial thoughts and ideas on a topic, often as preliminary work to formal writing.

Here are the essential rules by Natalie Goldberg's "Rules for Free Writing":

- Set a time limit. Write for one or ten or twenty minutes, and then stop.
- Keep your hand moving until the time is up. Do not pause to stare into space or to read what you have written. Write quickly but not in a hurry.
- Pay no attention to grammar, spelling, punctuation, neatness, or style. Nobody else needs to read what you produce here. The correctness and quality of what you write do not matter; the act of writing does.
- If you lose track of your topic or run out of ideas keep writing anyway. If necessary, write nonsense or whatever comes into your head, or simply scribble: do anything to keep the hand moving.
- If you feel bored or uncomfortable as you're writing, ask yourself what's bothering you and write about that.
- When the time is up, look at the text you've written and mark passages that contain ideas or phrases that might be worth keeping or elaborating on in a subsequent free-writing session.



## Cluster

Clustering is a form of brainstorming. Imagine a picture of the sun. The main idea or topic is located at the center – like the center of the sun. From there words, phrases, sentences and images that in turn attract other words, phrases, sentences and images are being radiantly arranged – like sun rays.

- Draw a circle in the middle of a sheet of paper.
- Write down the research topic you are interested in in the circle. Follow your intuition and associations and write down words and phrases.
- Draw lines and circles to keep your hand & mind moving and to visualize connections.
- Cluster quickly.
- Set a time limit. For instance, cluster for five minutes. Set your mind free. Simply be curious to see what turns up.

## Mind Map

A mind map is a diagram used to represent words, ideas, tasks, or other items linked to and arranged around a central key word or idea. Mind maps are used to generate, visualize, structure, and classify ideas, and are used as an aid in study, organization, problem solving, decision making, and writing.

- Draw a circle in the middle of a sheet of paper.
- Into the circle you write down the topic of research you are interested in.
- Draw lines around the circle in the middle. These lines are so called branches.
- On the branches you write the most important keywords of the topic down.
- From the new keywords you draw more lines (little branches) and write words that belong to the keyword.
- In the end, you have a circle with some branches. These branches represent topics and subtopics of your research topic.

## Excerpt

An excerpt is a protocol of a text you have read for your paper. The text can be an article or a chapter of a book. Do not try to write an excerpt of a text that is too long. You read a text with a certain question in your mind and summarize this text in your own words and try to answer your question(s). That means writing an excerpt is neither writing a summary of a whole text nor taking only notes.

It is important that you write the excerpt using your own words and full sentences. You can also use some quotations from the original text.

- Think about what you like to know from the text before you start reading.
- Write this down as one or more questions at the top of a sheet of paper.
- Write all important facts of the text down: author, title, year of publication, page numbers etc.
- Read the text and write the important arguments, theses, keywords etc. down.
- Try to answer your question(s) using your own words and full sentences.

## Writing in columns

Writing in columns is a technique to give room to all your thoughts you may have while writing. This technique gives you the opportunity to write everything down that comes to your mind while you are writing.

If you write down all your thoughts you can be sure that you do not forget something important. Furthermore, you can also write down thoughts that have nothing to do with your writing but still bother you. This way you will be able to free yourself from those thoughts. This helps you to concentrate on your writing.

- Take a sheet of paper and divide it into three columns. The 2<sup>nd</sup> column (in the middle) is the biggest one.
- In the middle column you write your text e.g. the first draft of a chapter.
- In the left column you can write down all thoughts and ideas that belong to your text and topic e.g. an idea for your conclusion or an article you want to read.
- In the right column you have room for all other thoughts and ideas e.g. shopping list or a note to call a friend.
- If you write something in the left or right column you should keep in mind that you will need to go back to the column in the middle.

## Changing your point of view

Sometimes, it is helpful to change your point of view in order to distance yourself from your own topic and your own paper. In order to change your point of view you can become creative. For instance, you can let your paper speak for itself. Your paper could write you a letter and tell you what it likes and dislikes about itself. This could help to open up a new perspective on your paper.

Another technique to change the point of view is to “change” your reader. When you write a scientific paper then you think about your reader as a member of the scientific community. To change your reader, you think about a child or your grandmother as your reader. That means to explain a child or a grandmother your research topic. This can help to find new phrases, new argumentations, or new structures.

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