

Exercise: Prewrite and Plan

Generate as many ideas as you can. Ignore the impulse to edit your ideas, and don't worry about grammar and spelling. Try some of these exercises, writing continuously at your own pace, for 10 minutes each.

- ➔ **Freewriting**—A great way to get started on a topic, and getting the “ideas” part of your brain flowing. Write whatever comes to mind without pausing to plan or worry about quality. Remember, this is private writing, meant to get your ideas on paper.
- ➔ **Brainstorming**—Write in bullet form. Use phrases and incomplete sentences to jot down points you are considering about the topic.
 - What inspired you about the subject? What confused you? Made you mad?
- ➔ **Idea Webs**—Also called clustering or idea mapping, this can be a good strategy for visual learners. You will create a map or diagram of how concepts, ideas, or feelings exist in your head, and explore connections between subjects.
 - Write your topic, in a word or two, in the center of the paper.
 - Jot down all around it the concepts that you associate with the central word.
 - Write the more closely connected ideas close to the central word; less important words go further away.
 - Try to keep related words together on the page; you can also draw connecting lines between words that seem related.

Then, choose your best ideas.

- ➔ Grab a different color pen or highlighter.
- ➔ Circle your best ideas. Underline those ideas that hold the most opportunity, or that you could spend the most time answering.
- ➔ Cross out those ideas that are not as interesting.
- ➔ Eliminate the distracting arguments, or **red herrings**, from your list of ideas.
 - Which ideas will confuse your main point, or complicate your essay?
 - Which ideas will distract you from your thesis statement?

What is a red herring? In a suspenseful movie or mystery novel, a red herring is a misleading clue that distracts the audience from solving the mystery. It is a deliberate attempt to divert the process of inquiry by changing the subject.

- ➔ Number your ideas in the order you want to present them in your essay. You can then make an informal outline to present points in the body of your essay, or just highlight the biggest points you want to be sure and cover thoroughly as you write.

Form your thesis statement.

- ➔ A good way to start creating a thesis statement is to generate questions about your topic.
 - What interests you about this topic?
 - Of the information you have about this topic, is there something that doesn't fit, or seems to need more explanation?
- ➔ See the handout on Thesis Statements for more help.