

What is Prewriting?

Prewriting refers to all the ways you begin your writing project. It includes coming up with ideas, organizing those ideas, and planning your paper. Prewriting can help you think, save you time and produce better writing.

How do I do it?

You need to find the ways that work for you. You probably already use some prewriting techniques. For example, you might begin by thinking about your topic.

- **Talk about your topic.** Expressing your ideas can help you develop your thoughts even if your listener doesn't know anything about the subject. Getting your listener to ask you questions is especially helpful.
- **Write down your ideas.** Start to make point form notes or lists of your ideas. Carry a piece of paper around with you for several days and write down ideas as they occur to you.
- **Research and read.** Spend time reading and taking notes on the articles and books that you are using. Put brackets around your opinions and thoughts or use some other system to show which are your thoughts and which are the authors' ideas.
- **Use a formal strategy for exploring ideas.** There are a number of specific strategies for exploring ideas, and you may want to use several of them. Don't worry about whether or not you want them all to end up in your paper. You'll figure that out later.

What are some formal prewriting strategies or techniques?

Freewriting

What you will have at the end of several freewriting sessions may not be something that can be turned into a paragraph or an outline for your essay, but you are likely to have ideas to develop in your paper.

- Write your topic at the top of a page.
- Set a timer for 5 minutes and write. *
- Read over what you have written and underline any parts with interesting or useful ideas.
- Write these ideas in point form at the top of a new sheet of paper, and then freewrite again.

*Don't worry about spelling, grammar, or punctuation. If you can't think of anything, write your last thought over and over until you have something else to write.

Clustering, or mind-mapping

This strategy helps you explore your ideas and expand on them.

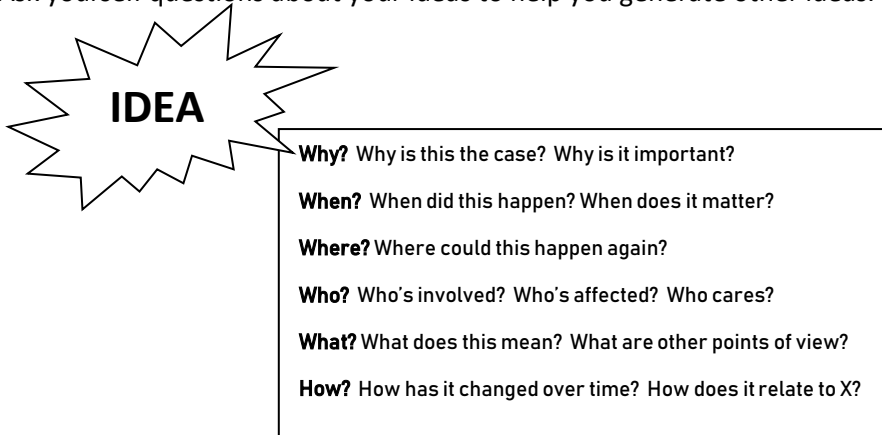
- Write your topic in one or a few words in the center of the page.
- Write all the words that you think of when you think about that topic.
- Write quickly, circling each word, grouping words around your central word, or connecting them to whatever word you associated them with.
- When some new idea occurs to you, radiate it from the center word or from any word or phrase that the new idea flowed from.

Often, writers find that clustering helps them narrow their topic. Consider using the narrowed topic to create a new cluster.

Listing

Listing as a strategy for exploring ideas simply means writing down everything you can think of about your topic.

- Don't write in sentences; that takes too long.
- Don't worry about the order of the ideas, or whether some ideas are general and others are details. You can sort that out later. Include questions you have about the topic.
- Don't worry about whether what you've written is sensible or worded correctly – that part comes later. If you get stuck, go back to one of your ideas and elaborate on it.
- Ask yourself questions about your ideas to help you generate other ideas.



IDEA

Why? Why is this the case? Why is it important?

When? When did this happen? When does it matter?

Where? Where could this happen again?

Who? Who's involved? Who's affected? Who cares?

What? What does this mean? What are other points of view?

How? How has it changed over time? How does it relate to X?

Categorizing

Categorizing is particularly useful for assignments in which some type of comparison is required and can also help you identify the views expressed by the authors of the articles and books you are reading, which may lead you to find the thesis for your own paper. Below is part of one example which shows how categorizing can be used to compare ideas and keep track of your own responses.

	Author A	Author B	My View & Ques.
Who Needs Aid?	Bottom billion of world's pop.	Needy countries should decide	Who/where are bottom billion?
Problem	- aid doesn't go to most needy - World Bank not consulting countries - WB demands on poor economies causing problems	- World Bank serves interests of donor countries trade for aid demands - restructuring demands ruin economies of receiving countries	- Would countries give aid if not attached to trade agreements? - What are the aid-trade agreements?
Solutions	- W. Bank should consult with the	- poor countries should create a	- Do poor countries trust

What comes next?

The purpose of all this is to help you think and get your ideas down on paper. Try to schedule your time so you can leave your ideas and come back to them later, the next day, if possible.

Now that you have explored your topic, you will be clearer on the direction of your paper. Once you have finished, read your ideas over and look for the concepts you can explain or defend -- the ideas that could be the focus of your paper. Try to write in one sentence the central idea you want to present to your reader. It helps if you come up with several of these sentences, expressed slightly differently each time, so you can select the one you feel is the clearest. This is your working thesis statement.