

# Prewriting

## What is Prewriting?

Prewriting is the process of devising ideas and direction for what you are about to write. Any essay requires prewriting; at some point you come up with ideas about the topic of your writing. The key is to make a conscious effort at prewriting so that your thoughts are creative, organized, and logical. Take a look at some of the following ideas designed to help minimize staring at blinking cursors and stark white ceilings while trying to come up with an idea!

## The Basics of Prewriting

**1. Think carefully about what you are going to write.** What is truly interesting? Is this subject overdone (if you are bored with your subject, your audience will probably sense that)? How can I explore an old subject with a new angle? Is my assignment very specific? What must I consider in light of this assignment? Will I be able to find support for the claims I want to make? What do I want people to know and why is it important or worth their while?

**2. Collect facts directly related to your paragraph or essay topic.** Try some research. Will you be able to prove your idea? Sometimes just “googling” a topic will give ideas that you did not think to consider.

**3. Find the main idea of your paragraph or essay.** If you can decide on this, you will be well on your way to having a thesis.

**4. Organize your facts and ideas in a way that develops your main idea.** What is your main idea? How can you best support that idea? What facts or ideas would you like to present? What is the most strategic way to present your evidence? Very often, the best way to visualize your organization is by drawing out a simple outline.

*\*Hint:* Compare writing an essay to presenting a court case. You must win your court case; do not leave holes in your evidence that the other lawyer will try to exploit. Try to think about what the other lawyer will try to say about your evidence and go ahead and make concessions for that. Make sure you begin your case in an interesting way and end your case with the most compelling information you have (this is what your jury will remember the most).

## If You Still Are Drawing a Blank: Prewriting Strategies

It is easy to say in step one: “Think carefully about what you are going to write.” However, this is often the most difficult part of prewriting. Here are some strategies to get you going:

### Free writing

**What is it?** Free writing is writing anything that comes to mind constantly for a set period of time. Many people try several free writing sessions to hit upon an idea or to identify recurring things that interest them.

**How to use it:** Sit down and just write for about five minutes. Write anything that comes to mind, even if that means you write “I don’t know” five times in a row. Then evaluate what you have written and see if you might be able to work with a concept.

### Brainstorming

**What is it?** Brainstorming involves collecting a large quantity of ideas and is often done in groups (but does not have to be). Brainstorming should be free of criticism: any idea, no matter how unusual, should be listed in evaluation.

**How to use it:** Define a problem and write down as many ideas that you can think of. Do not be afraid to combine ideas!

### Clustering/Mapping

**What is it?** Clustering is the official format of bunny trails! Main ideas are circled and then lines are drawn to smaller off-shooting ideas. Basically, concepts are circled and lines show relationships between ideas. How exactly you do that is irrelevant, but clustering can be a very valuable idea and organizational tool.

**How to use it:** Down several main concepts and then draw lines all around those ideas to related ideas. If a related idea has several concepts related to it, continue to write out the related ideas. Think about it like a family tree.



### **Making a List**

**What is it?** Have you ever started to make a grocery list and then realized all the things you had forgotten you needed? This also works in essay writing.

**How to use it:** Write down what you might be able to include in your paper. Do not worry about details; just bullet or number your way through until you run out of ideas. Then go back and see what you can use.

### **Chatting with Friends**

**What is it?** It may sound strange, but sometimes a talk with friends, family, or classmates can help you explore a topic in new ways.

**How to use it:** "Hey, I have to write this essay on the finer points of Shakespearean tragedy. Do you like Romeo and Juliet? Or should I write about something else?" Chances are good that somebody is going to have an opinion that you can bounce off of. The people that know you best also know what you are passionate about, so it is worth a try.

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### **Revision Strategies**

Revision is different than proofreading. Proofreading involves checking for small grammar errors or typos. Editing is also only a part of revision that involves rewording, avoiding repetition, and even rephrasing. However, when you revise you should ask: *Is it worth saying? Does it say what you want it to? Will readers understand it?*

#### ***Ideas to Get You Started:***

\*Print off your paper. Printing a paper helps you look at a paper the way that others will and you might be surprised at how many errors you will find!

\*Do not revise your paper immediately after writing it. Wait a day or three.

\*Try reading your paper out loud. If it sounds funny, you have probably made an error.

#### ***Things to Remember:***

\*Look at the big picture, past minor grammatical issues. Are your ideas clear? Does the paper run together well?

\*Did you follow the assignment? Does your thesis match your paper?