Prewriting Strategies

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Prewriting can be a useful way to organize thoughts, ideas, and questions to prepare for a writing task. Often used as the first step of the writing process, the prewriting stage allows the writer to jot down ideas about a topic rather than committing too much time to one topic and finding out three pages in that the topic isn’t a good fit. Because prewriting encourages creativity, there are many different strategies to choose from.

**Bubble/Brainstorm**

Brainstorming can be used to process what you already know about a topic. Start with the topic of your paper. What are some main questions, terms, and statements that relate back to the main topic? What are some supporting details, facts, and/or ideas that also help the overall argument of your paper? Whatever ideas come to your mind, write them down in a bubble. You can jot it down as messily or cleanly as you’d like; do whatever will help make your ideas more structured. This can be useful to see which ideas to keep and which to toss out.
Outline
An outline is great for writers who value a set structure and organization more than a doodled cluster. By using a combination of numbers, letters, and indentations, an outline allows you to write down main ideas and supporting details. Some writers may find it helpful to create a second outline to identify ideas to toss out ideas, to fill in gaps for providing supporting evidence, and to work on cohesion.

Freewrite
A freewrite, much like a brainstorm, is a way to write whatever comes to your mind. However, with a freewrite you can write paragraphs and allow your creativity to flow. By using a freewrite, you can explore the topic including identifying information you already know and generating questions. Allotting a certain amount of time to write, such as 10 minutes, helps manage time and sets a concrete goal.

Expansion
While these strategies can help in the beginning stages of the writing process, writers are encouraged to expand prewrite activities to narrow down topics and to focus writing on depth and not breadth. For example, if you choose to do the bubble prewrite, you can choose the information from a supporting detail bubble and make that your main topic, using the bubble or brainstorm process to generate more specific ideas and supporting evidence.

When using the freewrite strategy, writing one draft is beneficial; however, creating more than one helps with idea organization and with the expansion of ideas. A good way to expand on a freewrite is to choose one sentence and then write from that sentence. If you find you are stumped about what else to write about, continue to write about anything that could relate back to the topic.

Just as Emma Coats, Disney Pixar’s story artist, once said, “Discount the first thing that comes to mind. And the second, third, fourth, fifth—get the obvious out of the way. Surprise yourself.”