Preparing to Write

After you have undergone the process of working through the expectations of the assignment and selecting a topic, it is time to brainstorm. **Brainstorming** generates the ideas that will eventually become the thesis and supporting points. If you have writer’s block or do not know where to begin, brainstorming can be especially helpful.

Individual needs and the methods of brainstorming vary widely. Some writers find that **talking through ideas with others helps** to develop a thesis. Others find that **getting an overview of secondary sources** helps in refining the focus of the paper. Other writers find that they write themselves into a thesis; these writers create and narrow, re-create and narrow, as they write, culminating in a solid thesis that can then be used to start a rough draft. Find the technique that works for you.

One method of brainstorming involves **freewriting** (writing continuously for a period of time in paragraph or in list form). Marsen (2003) suggests **writing to the resistance** as a similar technique for some writers. This method, according to Marsen, helps when trying to overcome writer’s block as well as when a topic seems so overwhelmingly complex that it is difficult to define the thesis or to sort the evidence. “Writing to the resistance” involves writing about why the topic is creating an impasse or why you are frustrated. In addressing the difficulties that the material presents, writers often find that problems are resolved or that chaotic thoughts become more logical.

**Mind mapping** enables the writer to represent ideas visually, freeing the writer to focus on the creation of ideas rather than the form of the ideas or the sentencing. Begin by writing the topic in the middle of your paper. As subdivision of the topic occur to you, draw lines extending from the main topic to the subdivision. These subdivisions may provoke more ideas, which can then be added to your map.
A brainstorming technique useful in science fields is the **journalistic questions** approach, which uses the 5Ws and 1H. In writing a lab report, for example, the writer asks a series of questions in order to focus the discussion:

Who is my audience? A funding agency? An academic audience familiar with the subject or the methodology? What is the report about? What have previous researchers found in this area? What did my research yield? What
are the implications of this research? Why did this study need to be completed? When was the research conducted and where? How was the research done?

Brainstorming often produces more ideas than can be addressed in a single paper. The next stage of the writing process, the **planning stage**, helps in selecting information to present and in categorizing ideas.