**Getting Ideas**

**Freewriting**

Freewriting is a prewriting exercise that is meant to help you get ideas on paper; it is not intended to be a polished piece of writing. Rather, you might view freewriting as a vehicle for thinking. You need not worry about spelling, punctuation, or style with freewriting. Just let your ideas flow onto paper in whatever way feels most natural. Later you can work through the ideas from your freewriting to develop a more polished draft. Freewriting can be focused or unfocused. In unfocused freewriting, you write whatever happens to be floating in your head at the time. In focused freewriting, you pick a topic, and then freewrite on just that topic.

Freewriting guidelines

1. Write quickly.
2. Don’t stop to analyze or reread parts you’ve written.
3. Write honestly.
4. Write for yourself.

**Brainstorming to Get Ideas**

Brainstorming is a technique for generating ideas on a topic. Brainstorming is valuable because you record ideas quickly without stopping to organize them or to put them into sentences.

How do you brainstorm? Just put your writing topic at the top of a sheet of paper and start jotting down ideas as they come to you. Don’t exclude things because you think they are silly or may not fit the topic exactly. Do use words and short phrases instead of whole sentences, and do explore a promising vein in some detail when you hot one. The more detailed, exploratory, and varied you make the item and ideas on your list, the more you will have to work with later when you use the list in writing your paper.

When you brainstorm, you list the thoughts that come into your mind when you think about a topic, writing down ideas as fast as you get them.

1. Don’t worry about using whole sentences or about spelling correctly.
2. Let yourself explore any aspect of the topic—even those that seem crazy or impossible.
3. Don’t try to be neat and orderly: you might risk blocking some good ideas.
4. Use the probe questions if you run out of ideas.

**Clustering**

You do clustering by beginning with a nucleus word or phrase circled on a fresh piece of paper. Then you simply let go and begin to flow with any current of association and connections that come into your head. Write these connections down rapidly, each one in its own circle, moving out from the center in any direction which seems to work for that particular cluster. You may experience a feeling of randomness, but this is natural. When you feel you’ve exhausted the free associations, step back and see what you have. There may be an idea in your cluster that you now feel ready to write on.

Goals of Clustering

1. To help you discover and explore ideas.
2. To help you release the tension of writer’s block.

Guidelines for Clustering

1. Let your ideas flow naturally.
2. Don’t dwell on what goes where. Let each association find its own place.
3. There is no right or wrong way to cluster.

**Helpful Probe Questions**

1. Causes, reasons
2. Effects, results, by-products
3. Comparison, contrast
4. Definition of terms, constituent parts
5. Descriptive details, images, specific examples
6. Process, instructions
7. Problems, crisis
8. Solutions, alternatives
9. Arguments for and against
10. Past-present-future, before-during-after
11. Trends, changes, patterns, predictions
12. Who, what, when, why, where and how
13. Analyses: gender, race, economic, social, political, religious
14. Belief system
15. Myth versus reality
16. Generic individual vs. you
17. Significance of issue