

BRAINSTORMING AND TOPIC DEVELOPMENT

These are some techniques for brainstorming and topic development that you may find useful.

Preliminary Considerations

- Consider only topics that interest you. Begin by making a list of your academic and occupational interests, organizations you are a member of, hobbies, pet peeves, and other things you feel strongly about. When the list is complete, mark out any topics that your teacher has forbidden.
- Understand your assignment thoroughly before you begin to write. Pay attention to the options your teacher has laid out for you on the assignment sheet. Consider length requirements and research requirements. If you do not fully understand the assignment, talk with your teacher.
- Identify your audience. Avoid writing to a general audience. Try to visualize a person reading your paper. Your audience will determine what information you include in your paper and the style and tone.

Brainstorming Topics

- After you are sure that you thoroughly understand the assignment, allow your brain to generate as many different topics or approaches to the assignment as you can. Many people develop their best ideas while they are doing something else—for example, swimming, walking, or cleaning the house. Others focus exclusively on the task of topic development and jot down a list of as many topics as they can think of quickly. The goal in both cases is to generate as many alternatives as you can; don't edit.
- After you have identified all the possible alternative topics, then edit the list. Decide on what your topic will be and begin to sketch out your discussion. Use an outline or a more graphic representation to show how your ideas relate to each other.
- Select details and examples to support your discussion. Sometimes support materials can come from your head and your own experience; at other times you will need to return to an assigned reading or look for secondary sources in the library. You may also be asked to collect data—for example, observe the behavior of shoppers at the mall or conduct a survey or interview a fellow student or teacher.
- Unless your teacher objects, work collaboratively with a peer or an English Center consultant. Get a second opinion. Talk with someone about your ideas.