

Prewriting Exercises

Created by: Brandon Everett

The process of writing an essay can be a daunting task. How you approach the work will definitely influence the end result. Getting started can be the most challenging part. Sometimes, in order to get the creative juices flowing, **outlining** your paper can be extremely helpful. **Prewriting exercises** can provide **structure, organization, and significance** to your topic. They can also help you from becoming frustrated or stuck. Below are some basic examples of different prewriting strategies you can use when starting an essay.

Brainstorming

Give yourself a time limit to explore ideas, say ten minutes for example. Doing this will help you concentrate and keep you from feeling overwhelmed. This is especially helpful when you're still trying to narrow or focus your topic.

- Start with a blank page - write down as many ideas about your topic as you can think of.
- Ask yourself questions as you write: *Why am I doing this? Why do I like this? Why don't I like this? What is the most interesting thing about this topic or issue? How would my audience feel about this? What can we learn from this? How can we benefit from knowing more?*
- When time is up, read over your list, and add anything else that you think of.
- Are there patterns or ideas that keep coming up? These are often clues about what is most important about this topic or issue.



Freewriting

A time limit is also useful in this exercise. Using a blank piece of paper or your word-processing program, **summarize** your topic in a sentence and then **keep writing**. Write anything that comes to your mind and **don't stop**. Don't worry about grammar or spelling, and if you get stuck, just write whatever comes to mind. Continue until your time limit is up, and when it's time to stop, **read over what you've written and start underlining what you feel are the most important or relevant ideas**. You'll often be surprised by what you come up with.



Listing

In this exercise, you'll simply list all of your ideas, whatever comes to mind. Don't limit yourself with a time frame, just start listing. This will help you when you are mapping or outlining your ideas, because as you use an idea, you can cross it off your list. This type of visualization can not only be effective, but cathartic.



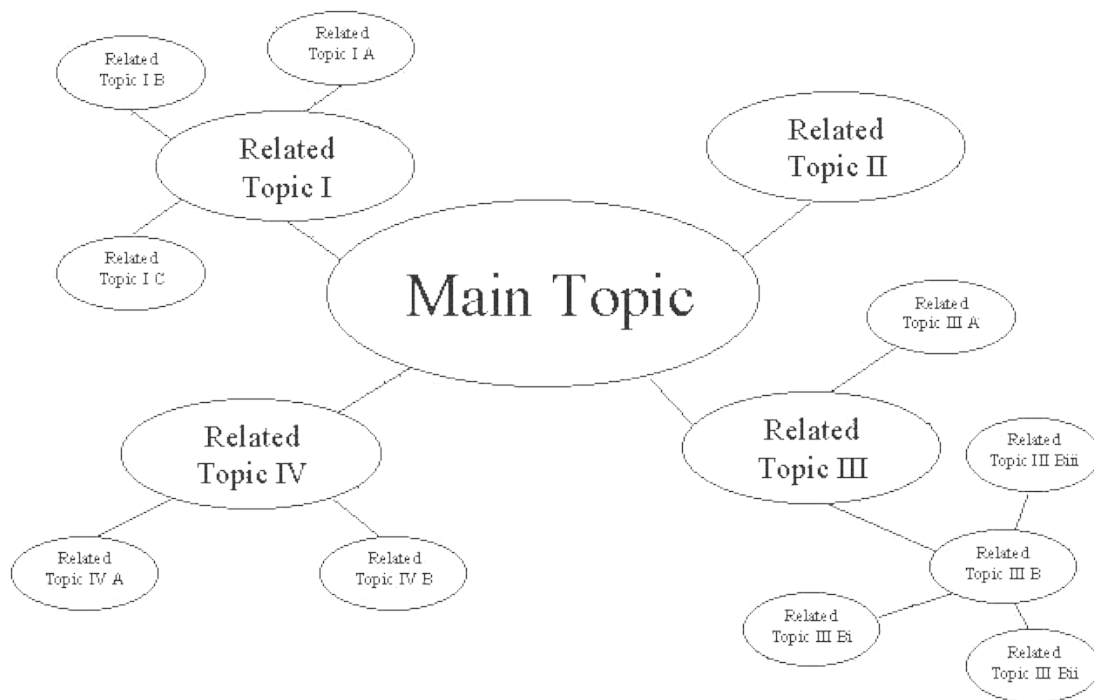
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Clustering

This is another way to record your thoughts and observations for a paragraph or essay after you have chosen a topic. It's a great way of **identifying the parts within your topic**, which will provide content for the paper. It also helps you discover how these parts **relate to each other**.

- First draw a circle near the center of a blank piece of paper, and in that circle, write the subject of your essay or paragraph.
- Then in a ring around the main circle, write down the main parts or subtopics within the main topic. Circle each of these, and then draw a line connecting them to the main circle in the middle.
- Then think of other ideas, facts, or issues that relate to each of the main parts/subtopics, circle these, and draw lines connecting them to the relevant part/subtopic.
- Repeat this process with each new circle until you run out of ideas.



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References:

<https://owl.excelsior.edu/writing-process/prewriting-strategies/>

<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/vccs-enf102-17fa/chapter/text-prewriting-strategies/>



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