

Writing Handout 09 - Prewriting

Before you can begin to write, it is important to first do prewriting. Prewriting helps you to generate ideas and then focus those ideas. Prewriting lets you throw out ideas that will not be good for your writing and keep the ones that will work well.

There are many ways to do prewriting. For this class we will practice TWO different ways. You can use whichever way you like better, but you **MUST** do prewriting for every writing assignment and every final examination that involves writing.

You cannot write if you have not decided what you will write about. So, before they start to write, good writers brainstorm (they think and write down ideas to find ideas that they can use).

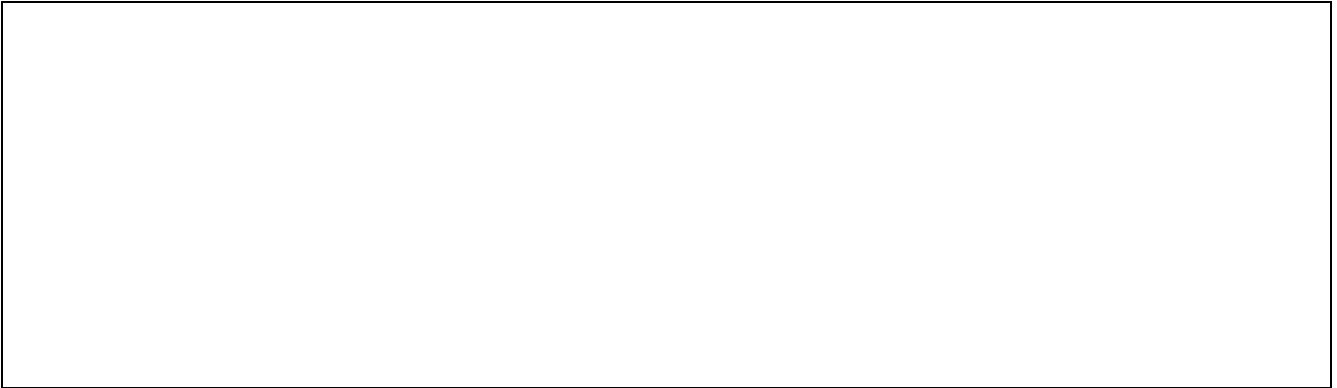
Practice Activity 1: Brainstorm 30 ways students can come to campus

1.	7.	13.	19.	25.
2.	8.	14.	20.	26.
3.	9.	15.	21.	27.
4.	10.	16.	22.	28.
5.	11.	17.	23.	29.
6.	12.	18.	24.	30.

Practice Activity 2 : Draw a house

In the box below, draw a picture of a house.

In the box below, draw a different (hopefully better) picture of a house.



Which house would you want to live in? If you did the activity correctly (as most students do), the first house was maybe very simple. If you drew a second house, there is probably more details, and there were things added that were not in the first picture. This is brainstorming! You might have good ideas, and they might work, but if you play with your ideas, it usually leads to better ideas!

Method 1: Brainstorming with Lists

How to make a list:

- ☐ Use a separate sheet of paper.
- ☐ Write your topic at the top.
- ☐ Write down **as many ideas as you can** about your topic.
- ☐ Write down single words or short phrases, but do not write long sentences.
- ☐ Write down every idea that comes to you, and do not worry about whether the ideas are “good” or “bad.”

Editing your list:

After you brainstorm, you need to go back and see which ideas you can use (that is, which ideas you can support in your writing). Circle or highlight the good ideas. Cross out the ideas that are not related to your topic or that you do not want to use.

For example, a writer used the following list to brainstorm ideas and then write a paragraph. Read the list and then read the paragraph. Cross out the ideas that the writer did not use. Compare your list with a partner and say why you think the writer did not use the crossed-out ideas.

Beach

vacation
 relax
~~good snack food~~
 air – hot, dry, windy?
 water – cold, cool, fresh, wet
 swim, surf
~~can't windsurf~~
 seagulls
~~beach umbrellas / expensive to rent~~
~~too far away~~
 smell – salt, suntan lotion
 feel – sand
 sounds – birds, children, ocean waves
~~taste – salt water tastes bad~~

Relaxing at the Beach

The beach is one of the best places to go to during summer vacation. The air is hot, but the water is cool, wet, and fresh. You can enjoy swimming and surfing in the ocean. When you get tired, you can come out and lie on the beach. The sand is soft, white, and beautiful. The beach is noisy with seagulls and children laughing, but it is a pleasant noise. The smell of the beach is also nice. The air smells salty from the sea and sweet from everybody's suntan lotion. It can really be relaxing. For all of these reasons, the beach is where you should go next summer vacation.

The writer thought of many many many many ideas! The writer did not keep all ideas.

Did you notice that the writer's list also had many descriptive details? The supporting sentences in the paragraph supported why the beach is a good place to go: the scenery, the feeling, and the smells. All of this information developed the paragraph and gave descriptive details.

▲ ▲ ▲ Now it is time for you to practice brainstorming by making a list. Choose one of the topics below. Take five or ten minutes to make a list of ideas. Use a new sheet of notebook paper. Share your list with a partner. Use descriptive details.

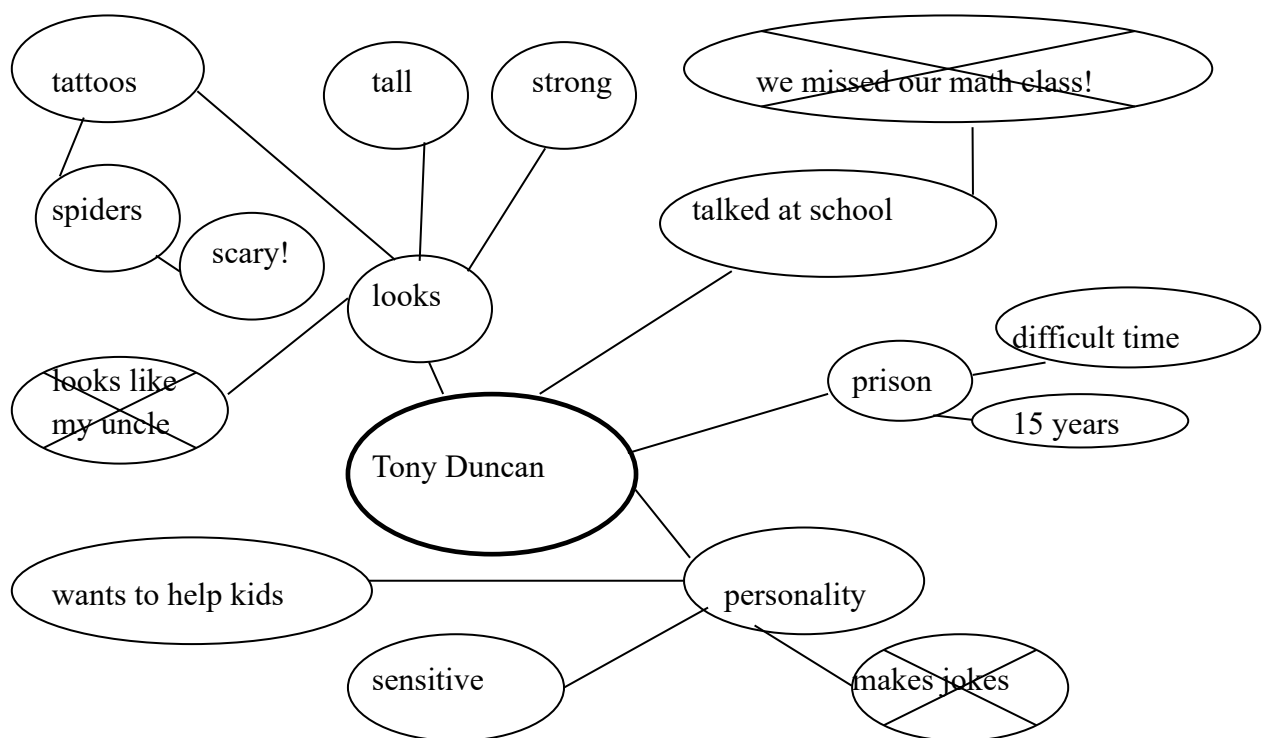
- (a) A good place for students to study OR (b) An interesting city tourists should visit

Method 2: Brainstorming with a Cluster

A cluster is another way to brainstorm ideas. Clusters can help you think of many ideas for your writing and see the connections between the ideas. Use the following guide to write a cluster:

- ☐ Use a separate, whole sheet of paper.
- ☐ Write your topic in the middle and draw a circle around it.
- ☐ Write an idea about the topic nearby and circle it.
- ☐ Draw a line to connect the circles. This shows that the idea and the topic are related.
- ☐ Add more ideas and circle the ideas.
- ☐ Draw lines to connect any circles with related ideas.
- ☐ Write down every idea that comes to you, and do not worry about whether the ideas are “good or “bad.”
- ☐ After you finish, cross out any difficult ideas or ideas that you do not want to use.

Take a look at the cluster below about a person named “Tony Duncan.”



As you can see, the writer wrote down many things about Tony Duncan. Some of the ideas are not good for a paragraph or an essay, but that is okay. The important thing is to write down as much as possible and make sure that everything is related. The things that cannot be used or cannot be supported can just be crossed out later.

▲ ▲ ▲ Make a cluster about one of the following topics. Use a new sheet of notebook paper. Be sure to use many descriptive details. Share your cluster with a partner.

- (a) a relative (your mother, father, brother, uncle, etc.) OR
- (b) a teacher you liked in high school OR
- (c) a famous person (movie star, musician, etc.)

From your cluster, decide what would be a good topic to write about: the person's character, physical appearance, the person's good or bad points:

Topic: _____

Cross out the descriptions in your cluster that do not relate to your topic.

NOTE: Of course, you can always do your clustering after you have decided a topic / controlling idea. The important thing about clustering (and prewriting) is that it helps you make, organize, and focus your ideas!!!