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Using the Technique of Brainstorming in the Writing Process

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"I don't know what to write!" If you are a parent or teacher, you may have heard your children or students say this a million times when they are trying to write a story or essay. Some students love to write, while others find it difficult and laborious. So, how do we encourage and teach students to enjoy writing, even though they may not know much, if anything, about a subject? Simply by brainstorming.



Brainstorming prompts students to tap into their curiosities or prior knowledge of a topic or subject then write their thoughts on paper. It is a very quick, spontaneous, and unrestricted writing exercise. Students have creative license to write whatever they want without worrying about organization, spelling, or how their ideas will eventually fit together. Brainstorming stretches students' thinking and problem-solving skills by allowing them to generate lists, phrases, thoughts, words, ideas, or questions about a topic without the fear of being "wrong." The purpose of brainstorming is to prepare the student for writing by engaging and focusing the brain on one topic, allowing him/her to write freely without judgment, and eliminating his/her fear of failure because *there are no wrong answers*.

Tips for Brainstorming Sessions



When overseeing a brainstorming session with your children or students, encourage them to think of and write down as many thoughts as possible in a designated period of time; however,



avoid making any positive or negative comments—even constructive criticism. If students know whatever they write is okay, it helps diminish the anxiety or dread of having to eventually show or share their ideas with teachers, parents, and peers. When students understand that no one is judging them or their thoughts and ideas, they will, in turn, participate more willingly in writing, sharing, and listening to ideas from others.



After completing a brainstorming exercise, teachers can separate students into small groups to share and discuss their ideas on a particular subject or theme. Then, teachers continue guiding the students through the next steps of the writing process by helping them learn to organize and outline their ideas and details in preparation for constructing a first draft of the writing assignment. At home, parents can discuss the topic or subject with their children, look over



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their brainstorming ideas, help them eliminate unnecessary ideas or details, and then organize/categorize the ideas and details that remain and write a first draft. The classroom teacher will continue to assist and monitor the students' work through the first drafts, revisions, and proofing until the final draft is ready for publication. As well, many teachers provide story maps, graphic organizers, or "webs" to their students to help organize their ideas. Story maps, graphic organizers, and webs are helpful, visual tools for completing brainstorming and other prewriting activities.



Brainstorming Topics

Use the following topics to practice brainstorming at home or in the classroom.



- What are all the things you can do with a blanket? A shoebox? A rope? etc.
- Name and describe all the things you know that are red. (square, wet, heavy, etc.)
- Describe the perfect vacation spot and what you would do there.
- What if there were no combs or brushes?
- How many ways can you describe how chocolate chip cookies smell when they're baking?
- What things must you always have with you and why?
- What if there were no books, TVs, computers, or telephones?
- What if you were trapped in a bear's cave?
- What would it be like if it never rained?
- What could you do or make with six bricks?
- What would it be like to live without sunshine?
- Describe a world with many kinds of shoes.

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