



Palm Beach Atlantic University  
Center for Writing Excellence

## BRAINSTORMING

The hardest part about writing is figuring out where to start. Brainstorming is often the overlooked preliminary step in the writing process. Brainstorming helps you organize and shuffle through all your thoughts and ideas. If you ask any writer, they would agree with the saying “writing is essentially editing.” By taking the time to brainstorm, you are providing yourself with editing material to kick starting your paper.

Whoa, not so fast. First let’s identify what it is you are writing about. Make sure you to identify all parts of the prompt before you even pick up the pen. It would also be beneficial to identify what type of paper you are writing. Is it a narrative, persuasive, research or compare/contrast essay? Knowing this puts you one step in the right direction.

### Brainstorming Methods

Start writing the body before starting with the introduction. It can be hard to start off writing the introduction that is supposed to guide your paper when you don’t know what direction you are headed. By starting with the body paragraphs, you can organize your ideas and develop main points.

**Free write.** Set up a timer for 10-15 minute and write the first thoughts that come into your mind. At first, your draft will look a lot like word vomit, but it provides you something to work with and edit. The act of writing itself will help you organize your thoughts.

**Bullet points.** Simply start making a list of all the ideas that you can think of. Make a list of the things that you want to include in your paper or a list of topics that you need to research before writing.

**Research.** Get your creativity flowing with a Google search or hit the library to find out more about your topic. This is especially helpful when you know little about the topic of your essay. Make sure to cite any ideas that you use from your research to avoid plagiarism!

**Map it.** If you are a more visual learner, it would be beneficial to try to use a diagram or idea web to link your ideas together. By mapping out your ideas, you can visually see the correlation between each point. Start by writing the topic in the center of your paper and circle it. From that general topic, write down a new idea and connect it to the central topic. As the web grows, you should notice your ideas getting more specific as it expounds from the general prompt.

### What next?

**Outline.** Whether you used bullet points or an idea map, take a moment to organize and arrange your brainstormed ideas into an outline. This will give your essay a structural organize and a simplified preview of your essay.