# Brainstorming

Brainstorming techniques can help you to develop your thinking, to break a writing block, or to rethink the feasibility of your thesis. In addition to these exercises, you may want to try talking about your thinking with a peer or with a consultant at the UWC.

1. Start with the basics: Did your instructor emphasize any specific requirements for this paper?
2. What type of paper has your instructor asked you to write? Think about length, evidence, and the type of writing you’ll need to do. Is this an argument? A description? A lab report? Describe the assignment in your own words.
3. As spontaneously as you can, try listing some topics that you might be interested in writing about (you need not use complete sentences, or even complete ideas). You might want to set a time limit for this step (Try 5 minutes).
4. Circle one topic from your list and spend the next two or three minutes writing down words, ideas, or phrases that come to mind when you think of that topic. Try not to lift your pen from the paper. Just keep writing.
5. Pick one element from step four (a word, idea or phrase) and spend the next two to three minutes free-associating about that word. Again, try not to lift your pen.
6. Now that you have a general idea or set of concepts, it’s time to compare them to the assignment criteria. This will help you avoid wasted effort on topics that don’t fit or aren’t deep enough. Review steps one and two, then choose a promising idea from steps four or five. Take two to three minutes to write down sources of information that pertain to the idea. When you’ve finished, check your list to make sure you can get those sources in time for you to write about them. If you can’t, pick another idea and try again.

You might have found a topic by completing these steps. You may also feel unsatisfied with your lists. If so, go back over steps three, four, and five. You may need to go through a few pieces of paper before you find a satisfying topic.

If you’re more of a visual thinker, you may want to try arranging your ideas from steps three through five into an idea map. First, take your phrases and connect them with lines—or in any other way that makes sense to you—to group similar ideas together. Then think of blowing up a section of the map to see it more clearly. On another piece of paper, make a more detailed version of the section you’ve chosen to focus on. Again, connect the ideas graphically. Then complete step six.