

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is the process of generating ideas or topics to write about or discuss. It can be a useful tool when you are starting to write a paper, but it's also an informal process that can be done at any time during the writing process. There is no right or wrong way to brainstorm!

Why should a writer brainstorm?

Brainstorming can help uncover, discover, and build upon ideas. It also allows writers to explore various angles and cultivates critical thinking. Brainstorming can help eliminate systematic errors by flushing out logic early on. There is no single best way to brainstorm. Rather, writers should use what method is most effective and efficient for them. Brainstorming does not have to be a long, arduous process, but rather, it can be a fun and creative way to help with the writing process. Brainstorming is often done at the start of writing but can be returned to as often as needed throughout the writing process.

Activity 1: VARK Learning Style Test

The VARK learning style test is an assessment that helps people understand how they learn best. Having an awareness of learning strengths can help individuals find the best brainstorming method for them. An explanation of what VARK stands for can be found below. For this first activity, use the [following link](#) to take a free learning style activity test.

Visual	Aural	Read/Write	Kinesthetic
			
One learns best by seeing information.	One learns best by hearing and listening to information.	One learns best through reading and/or writing.	One learns best by doing.

What are common methods to use for brainstorming?



There are many ways to brainstorm, and it's important to find the method that works best for you. If you're new to brainstorming, it's often a process of trying different methods and seeing what you prefer. Recognize that what works well for one person might not be a good fit for you. Your learning style (above) will help you decide. A few common types of brainstorming are outlined below.

Freewriting

The goal of freewriting is to allow ideas to flow without restriction. Many individuals find it best to set a time and write through the entire duration of time allotted. It is important not to correct spelling, grammar, or other structural issues. Rather, freewriting allows the writer to get any and all thoughts out on paper. After an initial freewriting session, some find it best to highlight or pull out common themes or ideas they would like to explore further and continue brainstorming. Feel free to adjust this method to your needs; brainstorming aims to explore ideas comfortably. This method can be particularly helpful for individuals who learn best through reading, writing, and kinesthetic methods. The example below shows the informal ideas that one might jot down in response to a given prompt.

Freewriting Example

Step 1: Write down everything that comes to mind within a certain time limit. Do not edit or revise information.

Prompt: Argue whether academic systems should use letter grade-based grading.

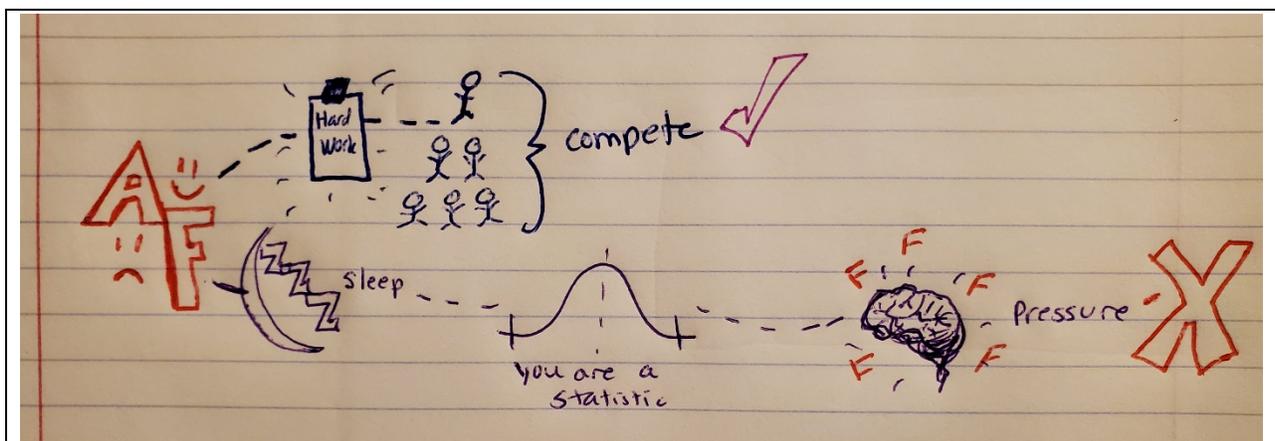
People understand A-F scales
Grades can be subjective
Antiquated
Doesn't measure growth
Grade norming
Grades are earned

Step 2: Pull out common themes or areas for expansion to continue brainstorming.

Grades can be subjective/grade norming
Each professor has different standards
Criteria varies

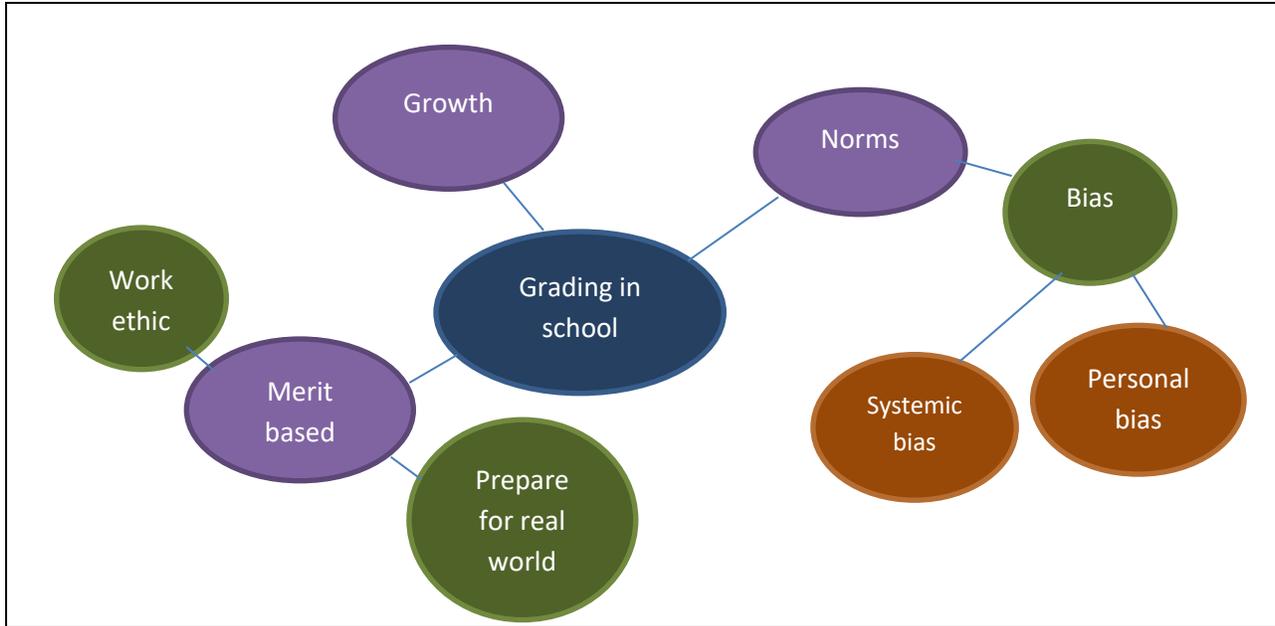
Drawing

Brainstorming does not have to involve writing. Drawing is a great creative way to express thoughts that come to mind. One doodle can lead to another until several cohesive ideas become prominent. Drawing is often preferred for visual and kinesthetic learners.



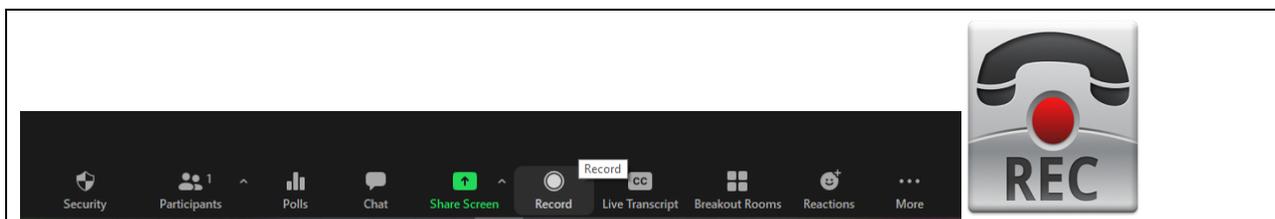
Visual Mapping/Mind Mapping

Mind maps are great ways to visualize thoughts. Start with a central idea in a primary bubble, and then branch and group subsequent ideas. Check out our [visual mapping handout](#) for a more in-depth look. This method can be particularly beneficial for visual learners.



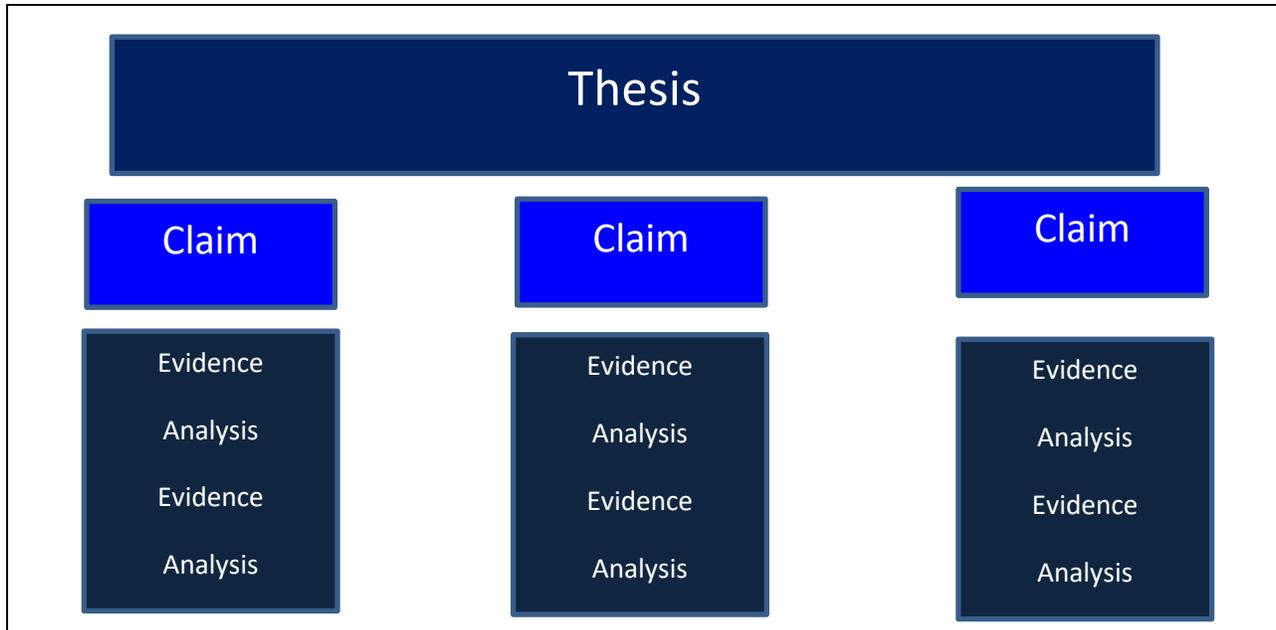
Recording

One can use any recording device, like a cell phone or Zoom, to talk out ideas verbally. Then, they can play it back and listen to common themes or thoughts. People often say or think something and forget it later. Brainstorm recordings help to keep track of ideas and thoughts. This is a great tool for auditory learners.



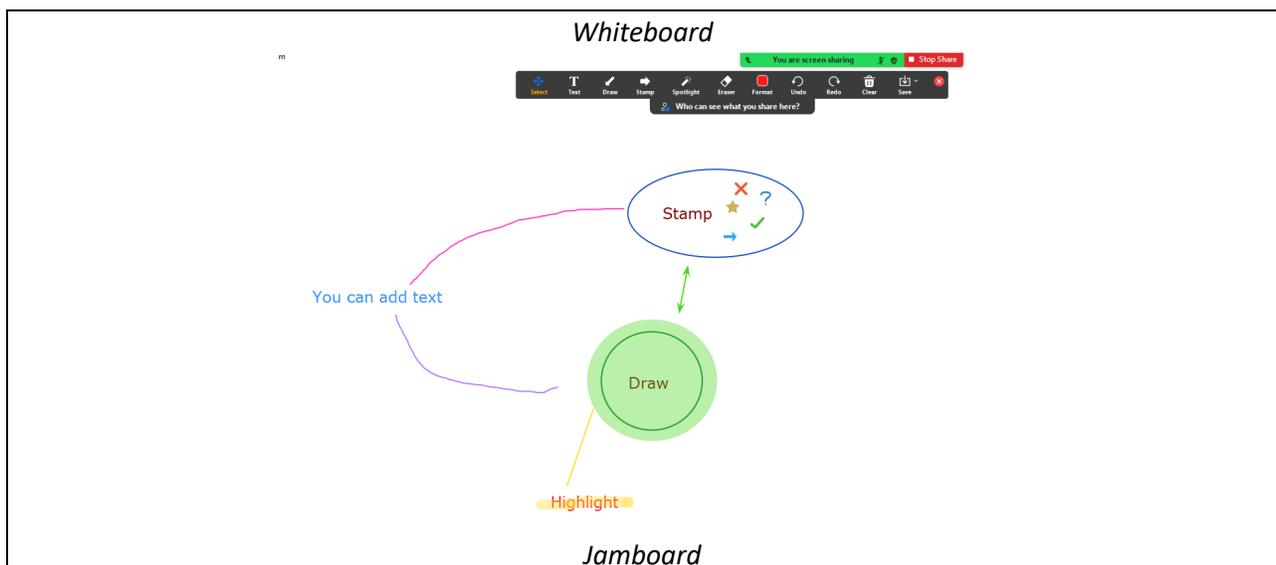
Organizational Brainstorming (Thesis Diagram)

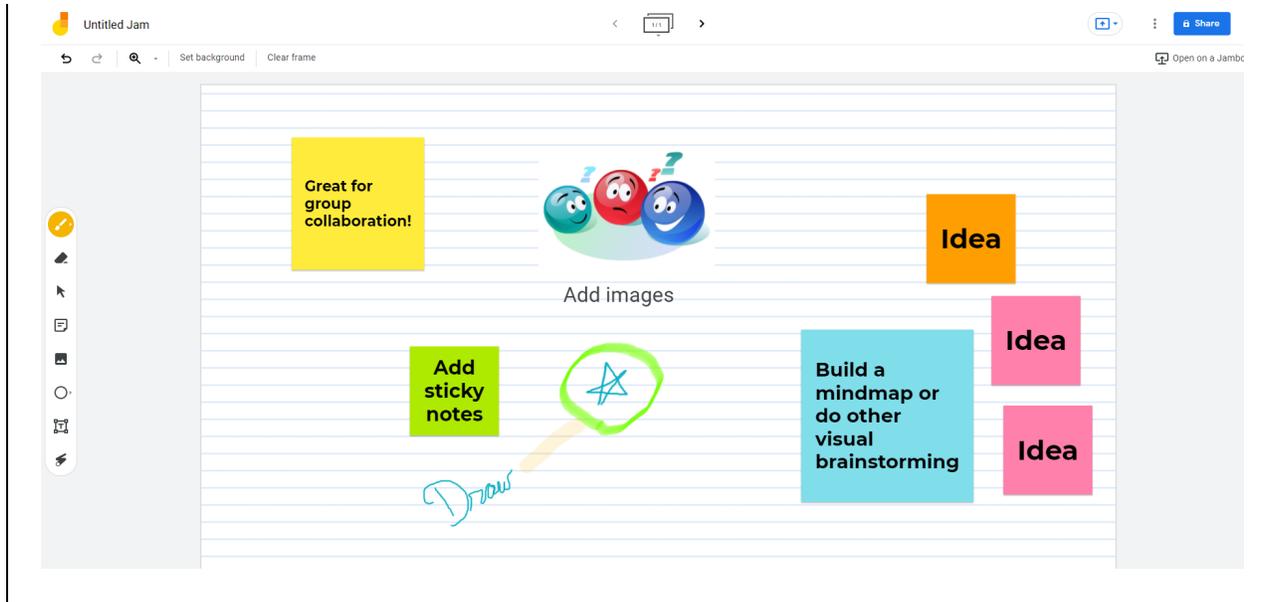
Organizational brainstorms can help with solidifying a stance and organizing ideas. One way to do an organizational brainstorm is to start with a thesis statement and as many claims as needed. The thesis statement presents the main point or argument in any piece of writing, so it can be useful to focus on that part of your writing first. Then, start to plug in evidence and analysis as you proceed. This process can help keep writing on track and prevent tangential arguments. Organizational brainstorms utilize visual, kinesthetic, and reading/writing strengths.



Using Whiteboard/Jamboard Online

Whiteboard and Jamboard are great online resources for brainstorming. They are particularly beneficial for tutoring sessions or online group meetings/projects. They are often visually driven and can be seen as a tool for other brainstorming techniques. To access Jamboard, you can use any Gmail account. Once your Gmail account is up, Jamboard can be found by accessing Google apps in the top right corner of your email. Scroll through the apps until finding “Jamboard”; it is marked by a yellow circle with orange squares. Individuals can collaborate on the same Jamboard or work independently. Jamboard allows users to write notes, insert images, draw, and more. Similarly, Whiteboard is a Zoom feature that also allows users to draw, write, and more. It can be accessed by starting a meeting, clicking share screen, and then selecting “Whiteboard.”





Activity 2: Brainstorming Activity

Your turn! Try to use one of these brainstorming techniques for your next writing assignment.

References

VARK Learning Limited. (2021). *VARK: A guide to learning preferences*. VARK. <https://vark-learn.com/>