

BRAINSTORMING SUCCESSFULLY

The struggle to come up with a topic for an assignment may lead to increasing frustration about a task. Nonetheless, this handout gives tips on how to proceed with successful brainstorming so that students feel **less stressed** and **better equipped** to tackle any topic.

Fun Fact: The term "Brainstorming" was popularized by A.F. Osborne; he used the term to describe creative ways of finding and improving concepts (Encyclopedia.com).

THREE STEPS TO BEGIN BRAINSTORMING

1). Write down a list of prospective topics – For example, you are asked to write a paper contrasting between two historic figures. You may come up with something that you have recently read about such as:

- Napoleon Bonaparte compared to Stalin
- Billy Graham compared to Charles Templeton

2). Draft one preliminary paragraph for each topic – If your instructor has already provided the topic, you should write a paragraph about the given prompt without completing any research to see what knowledge you have on the subject. Write down any questions that come up during this process.

Set a timer for no longer than **5 minutes**. After the timer ends, review what you wrote and start dividing the material into information to keep or discard. This method will help you determine which topic you may feel most comfortable addressing in a short amount of time.

3). Research each topic for 10 to 15 minutes – Begin researching. Pick out three main points from this research to address in the paper. Afterwards, find specific examples to support these main points.

Note: A timer helps you become more efficient researching and organizing the topic. This may seem daunting at first, but with practice, you will become more proficient and confident writers.

BRAINSTORMING TECHNIQUES

1.) **Bullet points:** These are great for listing out large concepts that you may want to write about in greater detail within your paper. To illustrate:

Topic: Comparison of Shakespeare's *Henry V* to modern diplomacy

- Diplomacy:
 - definition
 - examples
 - application
- *Henry V*:
 - dialogue
 - context

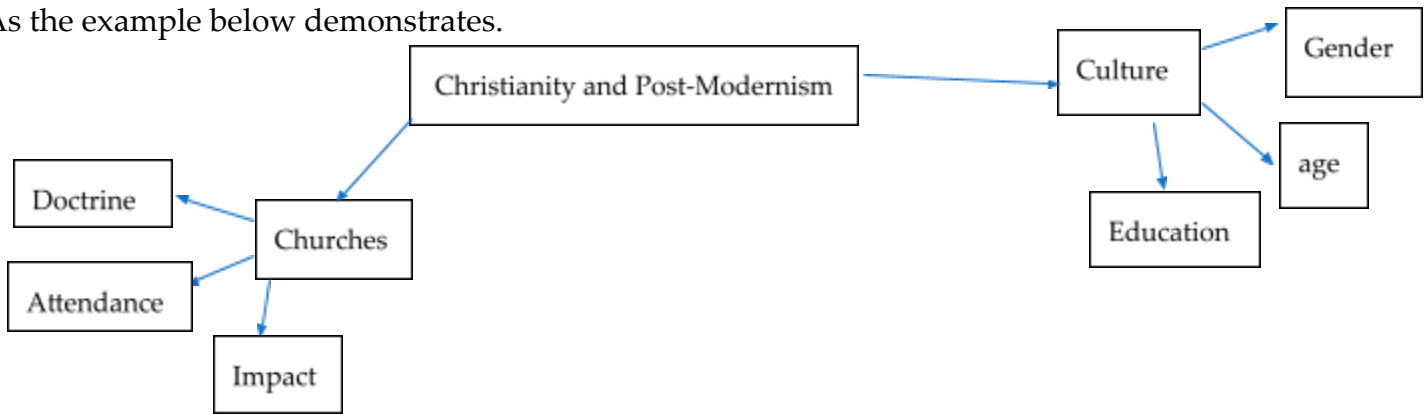
- goals for both France and England

Note: **This method is probably best used when conducting the preliminary research.**

2.) **Writing groups:** Talking with another individual or group is often a great idea because you can begin to receive feedback, clarify key points, and organize information. **However, this method is best utilized when you are trying to compile your research into a coherent argument.**

3.) **Freewriting:** As illustrated in the previous page, this typically consists of writing for a specific period without stopping. Once the allotted time is over, then you will read through the material and highlight sentences or ideas that you believe will become a key part of your assignment. **This method may be the most efficient brainstorming activity because it helps you begin to write a paper while figuring out what information you want to include in your paper.**

4.) **Mind mapping:** This method may help you begin to organize your ideas using visual processing. As the example below demonstrates.



Note: **This is a great way to see what ideas may or may not connect as easily with your topic.**

EXTRA TIPS AND TRICKS...

1. Write out an outline with the main ideas and supporting evidence for a topic.
2. Listen to calm music while writing a summary of possible topics.
3. Ask these questions to help determine whether you have enough information to begin writing:
 - What is one person, place, or thing that is relatable?
 - What interesting or exciting details could you include in the completed draft?
 - At present, how can principles taught in the class readings apply to personal experiences?

PRACTICE NOW