

Pre-Writing Toolkit

The term pre-writing covers a wide variety of activities and strategies designed to assist a writer in generating ideas, making connections between concepts and evidence, and organizing the parts of the pre-writing process into a cohesive whole.

This toolkit is designed to provide examples of prewriting activities and some suggestions for how to incorporate this sort of writing into an essay or research paper assignment. However, pre-writing activities do not have to be used only for formal writing assignments. Quite often the activities that are traditionally classified as pre-writing can also serve as writing-to-learn activities.

Writing-to-learn activities are discussed at greater length in another toolkit, but the writing assignments classified as writing-to-learn are designed to help students reinforce content knowledge, improve synthesis of ideas, and identify questions about a topic as well as give them practice writing.

This toolkit contains the following sections:

- [An overview of the types and purposes of pre-writing](#)
- [Links to websites that provide examples of pre-writing strategies](#)
- [Links to student-friendly videos about pre-writing](#)
- [Suggested uses for the iPad in prewriting activities](#)

Types and Purposes of Pre-Writing

Free writing

Free writing involves students jotting down on paper all of the ideas they have on a particular topic before they even begin to read about it or do research. In free writing, students should not worry about complete sentences, proper spelling, or correct punctuation and grammar. Instead, they are focused on putting all of the information and all of the questions they have on paper. Students should be instructed to write everything that comes into their minds about a topic—even if the ideas do not necessarily make sense yet. Give students a set amount of time (maybe five to ten minutes) to write down everything that comes to mind about a topic.

Brainstorming

Much like free writing, brainstorming involves capturing all of the thoughts, ideas, and fragments about a topic and writing them down on paper. Often, brainstorming looks more like a list while free writing may look more like a paragraph. With either strategy, the students' goal should be to get as many ideas down on paper as they can.

Clustering

With this technique, students start with a circle in the middle of a page that contains the main idea. Then they cluster smaller circles around that contain sub-ideas or issues related to the main idea. Then students draw lines or arrows to connect the ideas. The purpose of clustering is to help students begin to organize their ideas. Often clustering is a pre-writing strategy used after free writing or brainstorming. A number of iPad apps are excellent for clustering (also called mind-mapping). Take a look at Idea Sketch, Popplet, iThoughtsHD, Total Recall-MindMap, and Penultimate if your students are using the iPad for pre-writing.



Journalistic Technique

Students are encouraged to answer the six important questions journalists need to answer about any story they report: who, what, when, where, why, and how. By answering these questions, journalists can be certain that they have provided the most important information about an event, issue, or problem to their readers. These questions are valuable to students as writers to help them determine that they are providing all of the important information when they are describing an event or writing an informative essay.

Websites on Pre-Writing

Greg McVerry's blog on how pre-writing is—and should be—a messy, multilayered process:

<http://jgregorymcverry.com/pre-writing-and-embodied-learning/>

Sacramento State's site explains to students the value of pre-writing:

<http://www.csus.edu/wac/WAC/Students/prewriting.html>

Duke University's Writing Studio provides a handout that discusses both the value of pre-writing and some productive approaches to incorporating pre-writing into essay planning:

<http://twp.duke.edu/uploads/assets/prewriting.pdf>

Richard Wing's handout on preparing to write and thinking about audience:

<http://www.yale.edu/graduateschool/writing/forms/Pre-writing.pdf>

Empire State College has a thorough site that focuses on using pre-writing for idea production:

<http://www.esc.edu/online-writing-center/resources/academic-writing/process/prewriting-developing-ideas/>

Purdue OWL's comprehensive and helpful site on pre-writing:

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/673/01/>

Videos on Pre-Writing

For Students

Purdue OWL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JiOySoEv57U> (Length 4:38)

This video is a series of discussions about how to come up with ideas and how to organize them. The video serves as an excellent introduction to the techniques of pre-writing and to the reasons a writer needs to engage in planning and invention activities.

Writing Problem Statements and Research Questions

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SStB_INyruY (Length 2:28)

This brief video takes the writer through a process to identify the research problem and then to create a problem statement.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8gNonP_iZZo (Length 6:02)

This video gives a number of specific examples of research questions and explains how to explore an issue in order to develop a problem statement.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8BObOQHvvFQ> (Length 5:45)

This animated video illustrates how to move from a broad topic to more specific sub-areas, ending with a clear research question.

Brainstorming and outlining: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvBol3gZr6c> (Length 8:04)

This video walks the writer through the process of brainstorming for research writing and then creating an outline for the research project or paper.

For Faculty

University of Kansas: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cnq93SbEuXo> (Length 14:40)

This video connects types of pre-writing with specific learning styles (visual learners, kinesthetic learners, auditory learners, etc.). The video is probably most useful to the instructor, but students can view it to try to identify the pre-writing strategies that would be best for them.

Brainstorming: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAidvTKX6xM> (Length 3:35)

This video discusses mind mapping, right braining, provocative actions, break-and-build, and pessimist-vs-optimist, and randomness. These approaches to pre-writing are particularly good for visual and kinesthetic learners.

Suggestions for Using the iPad for Pre-Writing

Seton Hill University has a blog devoted to teaching writing. Here is a link to their post on using the iPad for pre-writing: <http://shuwriting.wikispaces.com/>.

Here is a slideshow that gives an overview of pre-writing using the iPad and provides a few student examples from specific iPad apps: <http://prezi.com/jivvgyxawbig/using-the-ipad-for-prewriting-plotting-and-planning/>

Since pre-writing can involve either working alone or in groups, the suggestions for this section are organized around both solo work and group work.

Pre-Writing with the iPad for the Individual Writer or for Groups

Popplet Lite allows Idea Mapping via bubbles and connecting lines. This app works really well in a group setting as students can pass around the iPad and share their contributions by adding ideas in bubbles or by indicating connections between ideas.

Corkulous creates a bulletin board of sticky-notes, titles, and images. Like **Popplet**, **Corkulous** can work well for individual pre-writing or with group discussions. Students can create a visual analysis of a topic in class and then share it with group members via email.

Infinote creates a map of sticky-notes that a single student can use to organize ideas prior to writing an essay. Once a student has created a sticky-note outline, he or she can send it to classmates or to the instructor for feedback and suggestions.

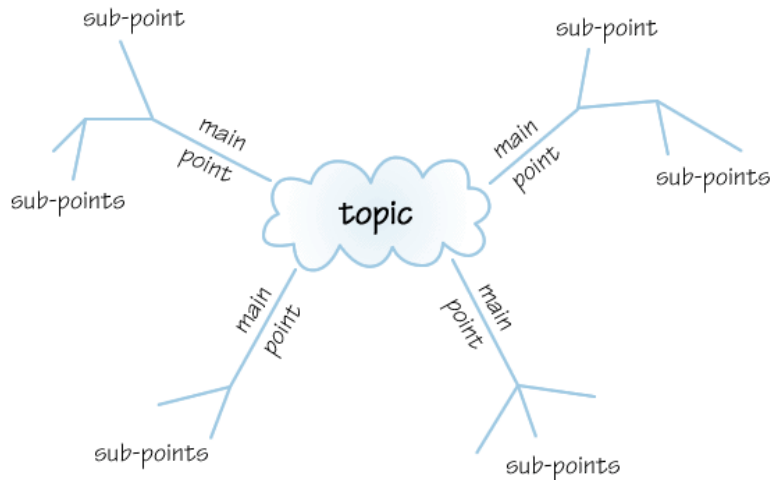
Index Card creates an electronic version of a stack of index cards, great for planning a research paper.

Mindmash draws maps of ideas with images, texts, as well as lines, arrows, and circles to show relationships between ideas

Pocket (used to be called ReadItLater) allows online articles to be placed in a que and read later, even without internet access. **Evernote Clearly** and **Readability** perform similar functions.

Students can use **Evernote** with **Postach.io** to organize notes or share them on an individual or a group blog. The two note-organization and sharing tools that make it easy to capture snippets of content (**Evernote**) and then share them online (**Postach.io**).

Adam Renfro (GettingSmart.com) suggests that our use of concept maps with novice writers, which covers many young writers should look like this rather than something a bit more cramped and “bubbly:”



You can easily iPadify your concept maps using apps like the five below:

1. [Idea Sketch](#) (free but \$2.99 with in-app purchase) - This is my favorite concept mapping tool--and I've tried the expensive ones--because it's easy to use and inexpensive. It features Dropbox support and exporting to multiple file formats.
2. [Popplet](#) (\$4.99) - The free version lets you create 1 popplet, while the paid version lets you share content you create with others.
3. [iThoughtsHD](#) (\$9.99) - A powerful, massively compatible with other desktop graphic organizers.
4. [Total Recall - MindMap](#) (Free) - A free, easy to use mindmapping tool.
5. [Penultimate](#) (Free) - A nice app that you can type and/or “write” in with your finger or stylus. I haven't quite warmed up to this app, even with its ability to synchronize to Evernote.