



Brainstorming

Brainstorming is an excellent pre-writing technique that allows you to develop ideas clearly and effectively. After you have a good grasp of what a particular prompt is asking, brainstorming helps you figure out how you will respond. You should brainstorm as many ideas as possible. You won't necessarily use all of the ideas you come up with, but it's helpful to have lots of ideas to choose from when planning your essay. Even though you may feel rushed to begin writing right away, it's important to take some time to brainstorm and make sure you have an interesting main idea with plenty of supporting points.

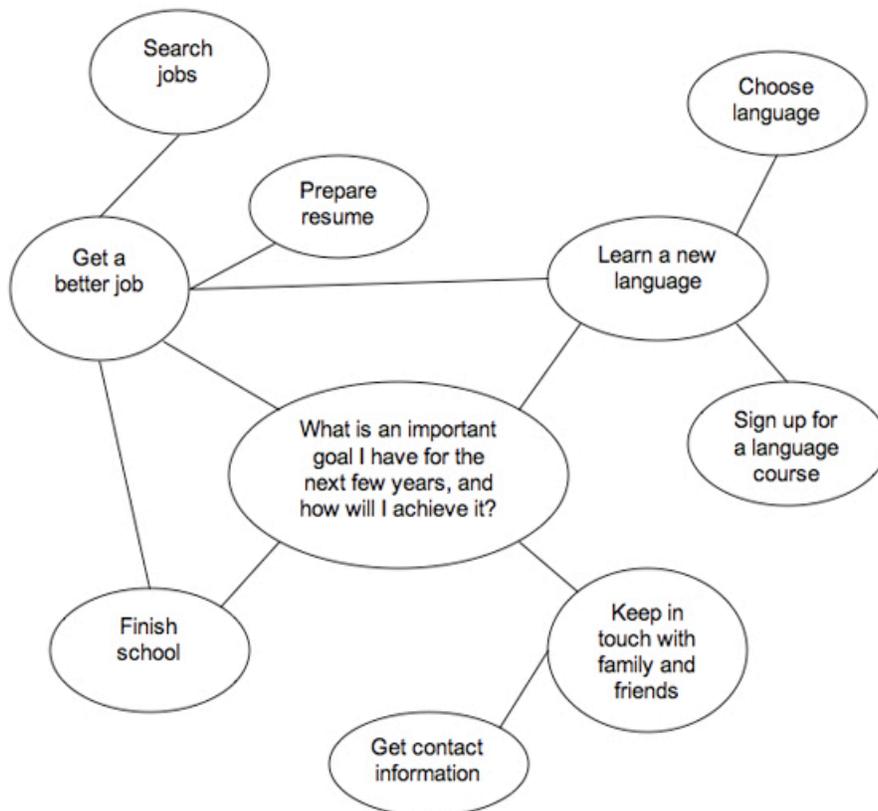
Here are strategies you can use to brainstorm:

- **An Idea Map**

Drawing a map might help you see how your thoughts connect to one another, which will help you when you begin organizing your essay.

In the center of the map, you will write your topic and draw a circle around it. When you come up with a new idea, write it down, draw a circle around it, and draw a line to show how it connects to the topic in the center and/or the other ideas you've written down. Look at the main ideas you've written and see if you can think of other ideas that connect to them. It's okay—actually, it is great—if you have a surplus of ideas. You won't necessarily use all of them in your essay.

Example: "What is an important goal I have for the next few years, and how will I achieve it?"



There is no wrong answer when it comes to brainstorming.

Notice how the ideas develop in a direction from general to specific.

During this stage of pre-writing, you are simply getting ideas on paper – whatever they may be.

Trim ideas that do not follow the prompt.

Eventually you will end up with relevant answers to the prompt.



- **Idea List**
- **Listing**

Another option to brainstorm is to simply list your ideas. Lists are a great way of finding and recording your ideas. Idea lists help you “mine” your ideas so that you have many to choose from and also help you find a main idea and supporting points, which will be useful as you plan your essay.

At the top of your list, write your topic. Then, list the ideas you think of in the order that they come to you. You can use multiple lists to find supporting points for each of your ideas.

Here is an example:

- **Important goals for the next few years?**
 - finish school
 - get a better job
 - keep in touch with my friends and family
 - learn a new language
- **How can I achieve my goal?**
 - To finish school
 - figure out what my goals are
 - find a school that fits my goals
 - apply to schools and for financial aid
 - To get a better job
 - finish school
 - learn a new language
 - search for jobs
 - prepare my applications
 - make a list of people who will give me a good reference
 - **To keep in touch with my friends and family**
 - make a list of everyone’s contact information, like addresses, phone numbers, and email
 - **To learn a new language**
 - pick what language I want to learn
 - get a dictionary
 - find a class

Notice how the above lists uses titles and sub-titles to help visually organize thoughts.

- **Free writing**

Sometimes the best way to begin thinking about your writing assignment is to just start writing. Free writing shouldn’t be done with any sort of “rules” in mind, such as grammar, punctuation, or form. Just get your thoughts onto paper. Free writing is the most free form of brainstorming. In a way, free writing is like journaling with a specific and eventual end goal. It is a good idea to take frequent breaks from your writing, setting your mind on



something different for a little while, and then returning to your writing refreshed.

Whichever method of brainstorming you prefer, the important thing to remember is to organize and draft your ideas the best you can with as much time as possible before your due date.