Generating Ideas for a Paper

Free Writing, an exercise that involves writing continuously for 5-10 minutes without stopping. Let the ideas flow--don't be concerned with punctuation, grammar, or spelling. Write whatever comes to your mind in the order that it comes to you. Attempt to have your fingers keep up with your thoughts. By continually writing for several minutes, a variety of thoughts concerning your paper will appear before your eyes. Free writing allows you to take risks that may otherwise be prevented by the constraints of formal writing.

Brainstorming can be as structured or as creative as you like. It's all about taking the ideas in your head and putting them on paper. Write down any word, phrase, or sentence relating to your subject matter that comes to your mind. Create a diagram or use the webbing technique or make a list--whatever it takes. This may help you recognize the direction to take in your paper and even help you divide your information into topics. Refer to *Venn diagram* and *Brainstorming* handouts for more details and illustrations.

Asking Questions is another way to determine the direction of your paper could be by asking and answering several questions. Like a journalist, put your paper to the test and ask *who, what, when, where, why and how.* Asking these questions might allow you to approach your subject matter from a new direction.

Mapping, also known as clustering or webbing, allows you to see the connections between your ideas. By placing your subject matter in a circle in the middle of your paper and brainstorming related ideas and literally connecting them to your topic, you can see how topics and main ideas for your paper can tie together. Refer to the *Brainstorming* handout for an illustration.