

# THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS CENTER

at **Sam Houston**  
STATE UNIVERSITY

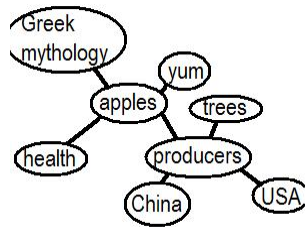
## Prewriting

Prewriting — which occurs before the writer produces the first rough draft — is a planning and preparation stage. In prewriting, the writer selects a subject and begins to discover what he wants to say about it and how to best present his thoughts to his intended audience. This stage provides the foundation for discovery; it is the stage in which ideas begin to take shape.

### Prewriting strategies

#### **Clustering/Mapping**

Capture your topic or idea in a single word or short phrase, and place it in a circle in the center of a sheet of paper. Write down things about the topic that come to mind, circling each item and connecting it with a line to the main topic (center) or to the surrounding circles — whichever seems more appropriate. The idea here is to connect related ideas.



#### **Brainstorming**

Quickly list any and all ideas that come to mind. Do not censor any ideas; just list. Do not worry about writing complete sentences. When you're finished, you should have a list of potential essay topics. Which topic are you most interested in exploring?

#### **Freewriting**

Start writing. Once you start, do not stop. Write rapidly for five or ten minutes and pay no attention to form or correctness. Repeat words or phrases if you cannot think of what to write; the key is to keep writing without stopping. When you are finished, read over what you have done. If anything stands out to you as a potential essay topic or point of interest, circle it.

#### **Journal writing**

Journal writing is similar to freewriting, but it is more structured. Choose a particular topic and explore it in as much detail as possible.

#### **Questioning**

Gather information by asking questions like *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how*.

### **Discussing**

Compare your ideas with the ideas of others. Come to the Academic Success Center and talk through your ideas with a tutor!

### **Tips for Prewriting**

Do not censor yourself. Remember: in most cases, the only person who needs to see your prewriting is you. You have no obligation to any of the ideas you create.

If you are struggling to develop an idea, consider changing your topic. Is there something else that you would enjoy exploring?

If you try a prewriting strategy and it does not work, try another! Everyone thinks differently; try to find a strategy that works for you.

These strategies are not set in stone. Remember: prewriting is all about experimentation.

If you are really having trouble getting started, schedule an appointment at the Academic Success Center. We would be happy to help you with your prewriting; brainstorming sessions are among our favorites!

Information on this handout borrowed from:

The Longwood Guide to Writing (Second Edition) by Ronald F. Lunsford and Bill Bridges.  
Strategies for College Writing (Second Edition) by Jeanette Harris and Ann Moseley.