



How to Brainstorm

When we talk about brainstorming we mean -- collecting ideas about a concept or topic through the free association of all members in a group.

Brainstorming is effective because it encourages participants to freely express their ideas about a topic in order to develop a range of things that might be included

- To support participants in spontaneously proposing ideas and/or solutions, certain ground rules need to be established and roles designated. There must be a recorder, someone who writes down all responses.
- A facilitator asks for elaboration when necessary and when no one else in the group does.
- Censoring of responses is not allowed. Any and all responses are listed.
- Don't underline obstacles when you are brainstorming, just list the possibilities.
- Sometimes a participant repeats a response that already exists. Encourage the participant to come up with her own idea.

Here are some tips about the process:

- Produce a great number of ideas
- Record all ideas
- Allow no criticism - focus on quantity, not quality
- When you're out of ideas, force yourself to add three more - innovation and creativity can surface after the apparent solutions have been exhausted
- Brainstorm with a group
- Let one idea give you another idea
- Include outrageous and off-the-wall ideas
- If you brainstorm alone, write continuously for another 5 minutes after you feel like you've run out of ideas
- Only after brainstorming, think through the ideas and begin narrowing the list

Here are some other important "do's and don'ts"

1. Do collect as many ideas as possible from all participants with no criticisms or judgments made while ideas are being generated.
2. Do welcome all ideas are welcome no matter how silly or far out they seem. Be creative. The more ideas the better because at this point you don't know what might work.
3. Don't allow discussion during the brainstorming activity. Talking about the ideas will take place after brainstorming is complete.
4. Don't criticize or judge. Don't even groan, frown, or laugh. All ideas are equally valid at this point.
5. Do build on others' ideas.
6. Do write all ideas on a flipchart or board so the whole group can easily see them.
7. Do set a time limit (i.e., 30 minutes) for the brainstorming.

A Student Tool for Webquests

Follow this Brainstorming Sequence:

1. One team member should review the topic of the brainstorm using "why", "how", or "what" questions. *Example:* The topic for the brainstorm is developing a training course on automobiles. What should we focus on as the content?
2. Everyone should think about the question silently for a few moments. Each person might want to jot down his/her ideas on a sheet of paper. *Example:*(1) Types of cars; (2) Parts of cars; (3) Car manufacturers; (4) Categories of cars; (5) How cars work.
3. Everyone suggests ideas by calling them out. Another way is to go around the room and have each person read an idea from his/her list until all ideas have been written on the board or flipchart. (Note: The team member in charge of the brainstorming session should be enforcing the rules.)
4. One team member writes down all ideas on board or flipchart.

Making the final selection:

1. When all the ideas have been recorded, combine ideas as much as possible, but only when the original contributors agree. *Example:* (1) Types of cars and (4) Categories of cars (from example under #2 above) are really the same, so number 4 is eliminated.
2. Number all of the ideas.
3. Each member votes on the ideas by making a list of the numbers of the ideas he/she thinks are important or should be discussed further. This list should contain no more than one third of the total number of ideas.
4. After counting the votes, cross out ideas with only one or two votes. Then vote again until only a few ideas remain(i.e., 3 or 4). If there is no clear-cut winner, then vote again or discuss the remaining ideas and determine which idea best answers the original question.