

How to Brainstorm

Brief: Use brainstorming techniques to help identify speech topics.

Learning Objective: Understand how to use brainstorming techniques to generate possible speech topics.

Key Terms:

- **Brainstorming:** A technique used to stimulate creative thinking and generate ideas.
- **Mind Mapping:** A brainstorming tool that uses informal diagrams to generate, visualize, structure, and classify ideas, as well as an aid to study and organize information, solve problems, make decisions, and write.

What is Brainstorming?

In 1939, advertising executive Alex F. Osborn began developing methods for creative problem solving. Frustrated by his employees' inability to develop creative ideas for ad campaigns, he began hosting group idea generation sessions and discovered a significant improvement in the quality and quantity of ideas produced. Participants in the process dubbed the term "brainstorm sessions," taking the concept after the use of "the brain to storm a problem."

If you're having difficulty identifying a speech topic that excites you, using brainstorming techniques can help. Because brainstorming is designed to quiet your mind's internal critic, it tends to feel less stressful than other methods of generating ideas.

How to Brainstorm

Individual brainstorming is the use of brainstorming in solitary situations. It typically includes such techniques as free writing, free speaking, word association, and mind mapping, which is a visual note taking technique in which people diagram their thoughts.

Free writing is a good place to start. When brainstorming for speech topics, write at the top of a page: "What topic should I choose for my speech?" Then jot down whatever comes to your mind.

Start with brainstorming subjects with which you are familiar. For example, write down academic subjects you've excelled at in school or extracurricular activities you've practiced for years. You'll probably spend a great deal of time on your speech, so it makes sense to take the time to come up with a long list so you have more options to choose from. As you continue to brainstorm, add subject areas you're unfamiliar with, but would like to learn more about.

Set a time limit on your brainstorming session. Hopefully at some point during your session you'll identify the perfect topic for your speech. If that doesn't happen, end that session and plan another one for the next day.

Mind Maps

Mind maps can be used to generate, visualize, structure, and classify ideas. They can also be used as an aid to study and organize information, solve problems, make decisions, and write. Mind maps can help you see the "big picture" to gain new insights regarding possible speech topics

When you use a mind map to brainstorm, you insert ideas radially around a center node. Don't worry about prioritizing or organizing information as you create the mind map. The work of sorting information into categories and creating an organizational structure can be completed during later stages of topic development.

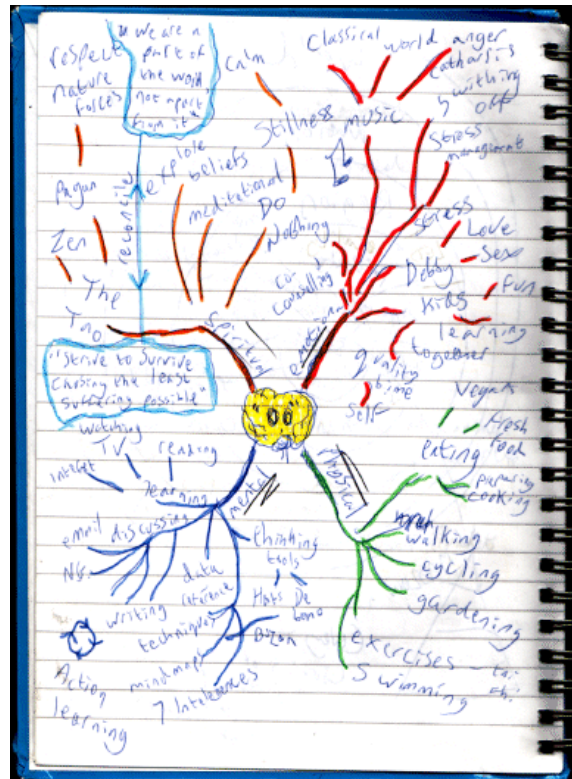
Guidelines for Mind Mapping

The following are useful tips for effective mind mapping:

- Start in the center with an image of an initial topic idea.
- Use multiple colors throughout the mind map, for visual stimulation and also for encoding or grouping.
- Use images, symbols, codes, and dimensions throughout your mind map.
- Select key words and print using upper or lower case letters.
- Place each word/image on its own line.
- Don't be afraid to develop your own personal style of mind mapping.

From Concept to Action

The best way to learn how to use a brainstorming technique is to try it out for yourself. Set aside at least five minutes in a quiet place. Be sure to have a clean piece of paper and colored pens or pencils (in at least three colors). Choose a topic area that you're considering. Place that topic in a representative shape roughly in the center of the page. Then, start branching out ideas from there, starting with a sub-idea and linking related ideas using connecting lines, until you reach the end of that branch. Then, return to the central idea, choose another sub-idea, and



An example of a mind map

start another branch. Continue on in this same way until you're run out of sub-ideas. When you finish, see if you notice any patterns. Which sub-ideas had the longest branches? Which, if any, are related? Does anything interesting jump out at you? What additional information can your mind map provide you about this possible speech topic?

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"Brainstorming." Lumen Learning. <https://lumen.instructure.com/courses/218897/pages/linkedtext54176>. Accessed 06 April 2019. [CC BY-SA 3.0]

"Mind map." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind_map. Accessed 06 April 2019. [CC BY-SA 3.0]