

## Introduction

A blank page can be intimidating and can easily trigger feelings of anxiety. This is especially true if you are writing on a topic you have limited knowledge of, which often is the case at university. Many writers use various strategies to get them started. Pre-writing is a way of developing ideas without necessarily worrying about the overall structure of a writing task, grammar, and syntax. In this sense, pre-writing is a way of thinking. In this unit you will learn about various pre-writing strategies used academic writing. Students often start writing with unclear ideas that require work before the actual writing can begin. As you are going through this content please forget about what you were taught about brainstorming, mind mapping and outlining when you were in school. If applied correctly the strategies we are exposing you to in this unit can prove to be very useful and powerful in preparing your ideas for the main event – the first draft of your essay, lab report or assignment.

## Learning Content

The period of time between receiving an assignment brief or question and composing a response is a golden opportunity to resolve some of the uncertainties you may have as a writer. These uncertainties are often summarised by the following questions:

1. What is my thesis statement? And how should I specify it when write it?
2. How should I organise my essay, lab report or assignment?
3. Which sources will help me present the best response to the assignment question?
4. What should I write in the introduction?
5. How should I order my ideas?
6. What should I write in my conclusion?

Pre-writing can help you resolve these questions, and will assist you with breaking down your assignment topic and figure where to start. The following are some of the strategies you can use during the pre-writing phase:

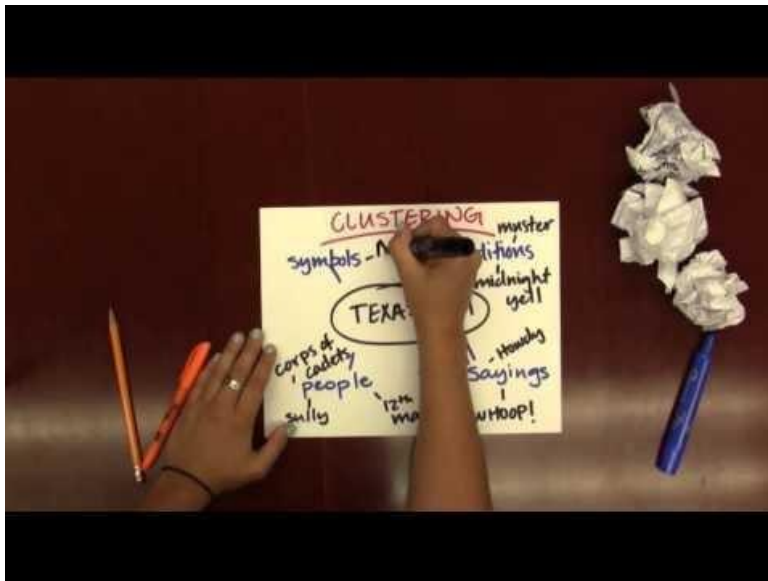
## Brainstorming



Refers to the process of coming up with ideas that may be relevant on a topic without being worried about organisation. In other words, putting on paper everything you know on a topic. It is closely related to freewriting, which is a strategy we use where we whatever comes to

mind about the topic. It helps not to worry about grammar, punctuation, or spelling. Rather, focus on coming up with as many ideas as possible.

Take a look at the following video, which provides some useful tips on how to brainstorm:



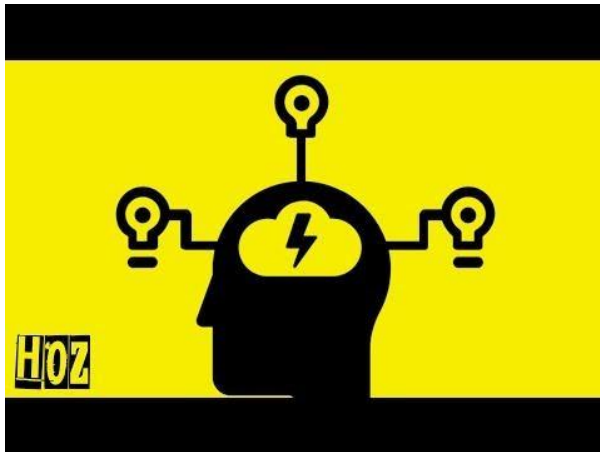
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSufG-AIQYo>

## Mind Mapping

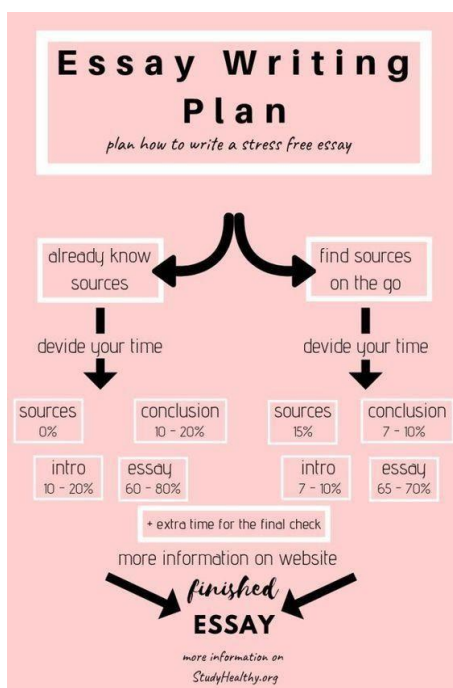


Mind maps help by organizing ideas into visual into visual outlines. Writing down related phrases and concepts can help with establishing the main idea of an essay or assignment. But also helps with understanding the connection between different ideas, which can lead to a better organisation of claims, sub-claim and counter-claims in argumentative and persuasive writing.

Take a look at the following video that introduces Mind mapping as a tool for conceptualising and organising ideas. The name of this channel is “They Call Me Hoz.” The host of the channel also reviews and illustrates how to use a range of mind mapping software, some of which is free and easy to use:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xges9V4rLms>



**Drawing** - Other students use drawings and sketches as a way of thinking. Students who use this strategy use creative ways to link drawings to sketches. Sketches and drawing tend to only make sense to the person who writes them, and this is perfectly fine.

**Asking Questions** – Writing out a set of questions can help you focus your ideas. Questions can be on the topic, and/or the process required for completing a piece of writing. Other students prefer asking, Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

**Outlining** – Students use outline as a way of organizing their thoughts into some type of logic. It is important to start with the overall topic, and the proceed to list out any supporting ideas. Coming up with the main sections and subheading can ease you into the writing process.

The following video illustrates how an outline can be approached. As you are watching the video consider how you can use this method for some of your essays, lab reports and assignments:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAwmEV-aWIY>

## Summary

In this unit we shared some strategies you could use when preparing your ideas before you start writing. Pre-writing may seem like a chore, but it can lead to very useful and important insights that will help guide your writing.