

Term Paper: Brainstorming Draft

This assignment is to get you writing before the dreaded “night before the paper is due,” and to encourage you to practice the substantive, and substantial, rewriting that excellent writing requires. From your prospectus and your progress report, you should be able to come up with many more ideas than you can put into a ten page paper. This assignment is an opportunity to get those thoughts down on paper in rough form, examine them, think about them, and choose the best of them to develop more fully in your paper.

For this assignment, you will want to take between 2 and four blocks of 30 minutes of uninterrupted time, and just write uncritically. Simply spew out ideas as they pop into your head; in fact, this type of paper is sometimes called a “spew” paper. See if the following ten questions give you any ideas, either by your answers to them, or by suggesting other questions that you can ask:

1. What is the purpose, goal, or point?
2. What is the problem or issue being solved or described?
3. On what data or evidence is the decision / definition / problem based?
4. What inferences are being made from what kind of data, and are these inferences legitimate?
5. What is the solution, outcome, or resolution of the problem or issue?
6. What are the short-term and long-term implications of the solution / consequences of the outcome?
7. What are the biases or assumptions behind the inferences, selection or collection of data, or framing of the problem / experiment?
8. What are the basic concepts or terms being used? How do these definitions affect the framing / understanding of the problem?
9. What point of view is being expressed? What political / ideological / paradigmatic considerations inform or govern or limit point of view?
10. How would someone from a related but different discipline look at the problem / solution / issue, and could an interdisciplinary approach improve the analysis / discussion / evaluation?

Once you change these questions to fit your situation, they will encourage you to:

- brainstorm more effectively
- see beneath the surface
- understand alternative viewpoints
- avoid being unduly influenced by what others say
- decide what you think and why
- defend and adapt your positions intelligently."

Don't worry about how your draft looks. You can always go back and complete sentences, rearrange sentences into paragraphs, and paragraphs into sections. Look at what you have on the paper, and make notes on the paper about references and questions that you want to follow up on. You will be surprised at how effective this technique is!

The key here is to use the power of word processing to give yourself raw material. Just write—and don't worry what it sounds or looks like. Just get it on paper, and then work with it.

As always, if you have questions, please come and see the instructor or a TA, or send us email.

What to Turn In

Please turn in at least 2 pages of material with your name and email address on it. What is important is your respect for the thinking and writing process; the cosmetic appearance of this paper is irrelevant.

Grading

If you turn in 2 pages as described above, you will receive 20 points. If not, you will receive nothing.