

E1 - Step 1

BRAINSTORMING

There are very good ways to come up with ideas for essays. However, many people do not use good ways. One of the easiest, most common—and worst—ways to come up with an essay idea is to just think, and then use the first acceptable idea that appears.

That method is bad for a few important reasons. For one thing, your first idea is probably not the best one. There are dozens of possible ideas; it is very likely that idea #8 or idea #25 is the best idea.

Secondly, you did not explore the idea before deciding upon it. To explore the idea, you have to ask yourself, *is it true?* We often believe things that are not true.

You have to ask, *is the idea interesting enough to write about?* You may find that the examples and stories connected to your idea are simply not remarkable.

Even more importantly, ask yourself, *what are the examples I would use to prove that my idea is true?* After all, you will need at least **six examples**, six stories about that idea which provide **strong, compelling evidence** that your idea is correct. If you can only think of six examples, that is not enough, because not all examples are good. Probably 12 or more examples is best, so you can pick and choose the best examples.

Regarding the examples, you have to ask, *do I know enough about these stories that I can write about them in detail?* Often we hear about a story about someone else, but we do not know enough to explain it as well as we think we can.

For that reason, we have to **brainstorm**, to come up with many ideas, and then choose the best from those groups.

BRAINSTORMING PROCESS

For this essay, our brainstorming will have several steps. You should remember these steps, and the reasons for them, as you will use them again and again in future essay-writing.

In this essay, we must come up with a person we know who has a strong character point. It cannot be a normal character point (e.g., *My mother is caring to her children*). The character point—and the examples for it—must be unusual, more than normal. Here are the steps:

1. Brainstorm all the people you know, and assign character points to each one
2. Choose the most likely person about whom you know the most stories in detail
3. Brainstorm many specific & detailed stories about one character point for that person
4. Group the stories into aspects
5. Choose two examples (stories) for each aspect
6. Confirm that each story can be told in detail and is interesting and strong
7. If steps 3~6 do not produce 6 strong examples in 3 aspects, go back to step #2 and repeat the process; do this until you have success.

The process is given in detail over the next few pages.

Step 1a: Brainstorm People You Know

There are several ways to brainstorm. You should use the type that gives you the best results.

1. Listing
2. Clustering / Mapping / Mind Mapping
3. Cubing / Viewpoints
4. Freewriting
5. "5 Ws" / Journalistic questioning (asking *who, when, where, why, etc.*)
6. Researching
7. Browsing (*informal, unstructured researching*)
8. Interviewing
9. Charting / Outlining
10. Discussing / "Bouncing Ideas" off of another person

Some of these will work better for you, some will be worse. Non-native English speakers will find freewriting too difficult, for example. Discussing & interviewing require a partner or partners. Researching may be too tiring, and Browsing may be too distracting.

The most popular forms are usually Clustering and Listing. We will use both of those methods.

ACTION 1A: On a blank A4 piece of paper, make a clustered map of all the people that you know. The example below shows how. Begin with yourself at the center, add groups (family, friends, coworkers, classmates, etc.) and add all the people you know well. Next, for each person, list the character points you associate strongly with them.

