

# Prewriting Strategies



The beginning phase of the writing process is called prewriting. This handout offers several prewriting strategies to help you generate, contextualize, organize, and focus ideas. You may need to try a variety of approaches before finding what will work best for you and your assignment.

## Questioning and Researching

Researching with questions in mind can be useful as a prewriting strategy because it can help you develop and narrow your ideas and understand the context of your work. Try approaching research with these questions:

- What interests me? **Why?** Can I write about it?  
**Note:** Writing about what you are interested in will be much more exciting and motivating; the writing process is more rewarding when you feel what you are saying is significant. Approach potentially boring topics from new angles.
- Who is involved? What is happening? Where is it taking place? When has this happened? **Why?**  
**Note:** Becoming familiar with your topic makes it easier to develop claims and ideas to write about the topic in an informed way.
- What do people argue about? **Why?**  
**Note:** Your writing is entering a conversation, whether in your community or a specific field of academic study. Looking at a variety of relevant and reliable sources can help you develop your ideas and understand where to step into the conversation.
- What do I disagree with? **Why?** Can I defend my point?  
**Note:** Researching can help you decide what information is important to focus on in your writing. Your opinions can provide writing material, but it is useful to pair that with research that covers opposing viewpoints, so you can think through counterarguments and understand the complexity of the topic.

## Discussing

Discussing your ideas with someone can help you figure out what you have to say about a topic. Consider bringing up your ideas, findings, or claims in casual conversations with your peers. See what sorts of questions others ask and what counterarguments they bring up, then incorporate those into your writing. You can also bring your ideas to your instructor, a TA, or a writing consultant and talk through your ideas. This exercise can help you relate to your audience and understand the scope of your paper by showing you what readers want to know.

## Freewriting

Freewriting can help you get all the ideas you've been formulating out of your head and onto paper. To begin, give yourself a set amount of time and write whatever comes to your mind about your topic—creative introductions, anecdotes, related subjects, research, more specific ideas, anything and everything. Once your ideas are written out, you can look through them and decide what topic you want to focus on, figure out what you want to research more, and even incorporate some of your freewriting into your rough draft.

## Diagramming

If you are a visual learner, it might be helpful to draw a diagram since diagrams can help show the connections between your ideas and the structure of your argument. There are plenty of ways to map out your ideas; here are two effective methods:

**Bubble diagram** (See *Figure 1*). Draw a circle and write your topic in the center. Then draw other bubbles branching out of it. Write ideas in these bubbles that build off of the central thought. Keep branching off of your bubbles to make clusters of related ideas.

**Outline** (See *Figure 2*). Write your central idea or tentative thesis. Underneath this main heading, make a bulleted list of the supporting arguments for your thesis (they can be labeled A, B, C, etc.). For each of those arguments, list support (labeled 1, 2, 3, etc.). This exercise helps you consider the logical progression of your ideas, and your initial outline could even turn into the organization of your paper.

## Taking a Break

If you have tried these prewriting techniques and are still not satisfied with your progress, give yourself some time away from your project. Giving yourself time and space away from your work can help you relax, gain perspective, and return to your writing with fresh eyes and new insights.

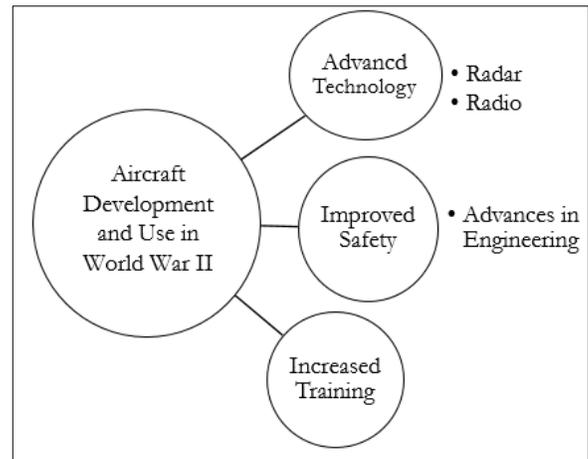


Figure 1: Bubble Diagram

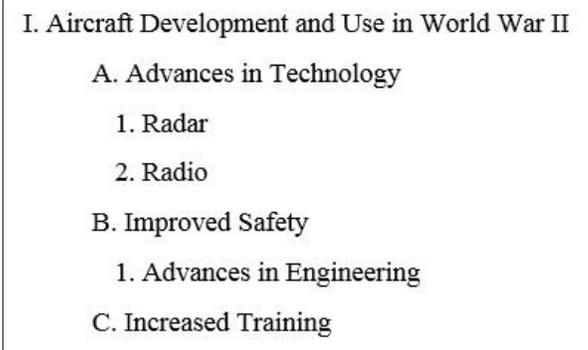


Figure 2: Outline