

Johnson County Community College**TECHNIQUES FOR CREATING (PREWRITING)****A. LOOPING (Cowan)**

The value of looping, as you'll soon know from trying it, is that it helps you produce an idea to write about. Because looping has a broad focus in a general subject area, it helps you move toward a specific topic. If you stop after each loop and read your notes, you'll soon see that your thoughts are drifting toward that particular topic or idea--the "hot spot," or center of gravity, to be expressed in a sentence. With that, you are zeroing in on your narrower subject as you write.

In exploring ideas, we land on many different points--some we are comfortable with and some we cannot use. As we loop for ideas, we must keep moving to land on as many points as possible. We just start with a subject and write anything that comes to mind about it. The rules for looping are simple:

1. Begin with a specific topic.
2. Write nonstop for a predetermined number of minutes.
3. Make no corrections.
4. Write a summary sentence for each loop before going on to the next.
5. Do three loops for each topic.

B. WRITING DIALOGUE (Cowan)

Another creating technique is writing dialogue. You write as though you were talking out loud to yourself. If you bog down and need an idea booster, simply become the second voice--ask a question and resume the conversation. Use short, quick answers to keep the ideas flowing.

This approach can be fun, and it can lead to some discoveries fast. Writing dialogue is often a good preliminary creating technique. It gives you ideas that you can then use in a second creating technique: looping or cubing, for example.

C. CUBING (Cowan)

Another useful technique in the Creating Stage is cubing. Cubing helps you explore your subject quickly from different angles or points of view. You dip into your mind for each new perspective on the topic--one point of view right after the other.

Imagine a solid cube with an activity or angle printed on each of its sides. In cubing, you would do a series of quick runs into your mind for whatever presents itself on each of the activities or angles, one right after the other. Then you would read over the notes you made to find one angle or perspective that brings an essay into focus for you. Rules:

1. Use all six sides of the cube.
2. Move fast. Take only 3 to 5 minutes for each side.

What are the six angles or activities on the cube? Here is the list. Do them in this order:

1. Describe it. (Look closely and tell what you see.)
2. Compare it. (What is it similar to? different from?)
3. Associate it. (What does it remind you of? What other associations come to mind?)
4. Analyze it. (Tell how it's made; make it up if you aren't sure.)
5. Apply it. (Tell what you can do with it. How can it be used?)
6. Argue for or against it. (Take a stand. Give any reasons--silly, serious, or in between.)

When you finish, read what you have written for each side. When one angle or perspective strikes you as particularly promising, you have probably come up with a focus for your essay. You'll know it when it happens; you'll have the urge to zoom in on the topic and write.

D. CLASSICAL INVENTION

The traditional method of inquiry about a subject is called classical invention. You ask sets of questions to gather ideas on the subject. The questions are arranged according to Aristotle's common topics: definition, comparison, relationship, circumstance, and testimony. You follow these rules for classical invention:

1. Take the questions one at a time.
2. Write brief notes for answers.
3. If you have nothing to say, skip the question and move on to the next.
4. Record your answers. Mark those that seem most likely to yield something to say on the subject.

Just looking over the checklist of Aristotle's common topics can help you remember "regions" of your mind and your subject to explore. You may want to keep it handy to consult whenever you are in the Creating Stage of writing.

ARISTOTLE'S COMMON TOPICS

DEFINITION

- A. Genus
- B. Division

COMPARISON

- A. Similarity
- B. Difference
- C. Degree

RELATIONSHIP

- A. Cause and effect
- B. Antecedent and consequence
- C. Contraries
- D. Contradictions

CIRCUMSTANCE

- A. Possible and impossible
- B. Past fact and future fact

TESTIMONY

- A. Authority
- B. Testimonial
- C. Statistics
- D. Maxims
- E. Law
- F. Precedents

E. **REPORTER'S FORMULA** (Cowan) or **JOURNALIST'S QUESTIONS** (Ways to Writing)

The reporter's formula is especially good for essay examinations--and, of course, for newspaper articles--when you have to write something in a hurry. Just ask these six questions about your subject and write what quickly comes to mind: **WHO? WHAT? WHERE? WHEN? WHY? HOW?** Then read over your answers to find a central message you can write about.

Practice Exercise

Topic: Shyness

1. Who?
2. What?
3. Where?
4. When?
5. Why?
6. How?

Read over your answers to discover or invent a central message for an essay on shyness. Write it here in one sentence:

F. MAKING A LIST

We all make lists in order not to forget. What about making lists in order to discover? List-making can be a valuable first step in many writing situations, especially those that require you to recall or realize something you already know. For example, you might list the steps in a process--how to make a bookshelf--or list arguments for or against something. As you settle down to write, a list can:

1. give you a definite purpose and activity to get you started
2. cause you to have associations and thereby to think of something you might not have thought of before
3. provide you with a framework for your thinking at that moment

You hardly need any rules for list-making, but you might want to remember these suggestions:

1. Put a title at the top of your list so you will stay on purpose and always know why you are making the list. ("Why I deserve a raise" or "Things our town could do for young adults.")
2. Write as fast as possible and use short words or phrases.

3. Don't be critical of any item on the list at this point; just collect as many things on the list as you possibly can in a limited time.

When you have finished the list, you can do several things: select the items on the list that seem to have the most promise for your writing; put the items on the list in some order--say, most important to least important; cross out items that you don't like; expand one or two items; add new items. The important thing is for the list to serve as a source of ideas for you as you begin to write your paper.

G. TAGMEMIC INVENTION

Young, Becker, and Pike, in their book Rhetoric: Discovery and Change, present an invention approach based on language theory (tagmemics). Here is a simplified, adapted version of their technique. The writer asks questions such as these about certain qualities of the subject, and the questions generate ideas to be explored.

CONTRASTIVE

How is the subject different from things similar to it?

How has this subject been different for me?

What would a snapshot of this subject be?

How is this subject made?

VARIATION

How much can this subject change and still be itself?

How is it changing?

How does the subject change from day to day?

What different varieties of the subject do I know or have I encountered?

What particular experiences do I have that illustrate the kinds of things I know or problems I have in relation to this subject?

How do I change in relation to this subject?

DISTRIBUTION

Where and when does this subject take place?

What is the larger thing of which this subject is part?

What is the function of the subject in this larger thing?

How does this subject fit into my life?

What other things (experiences) preceded it? followed it? were similar for me?

H. BRAINSTORMING (Cowan)

1. Do it as a group activity.
2. Call out every idea you have on the subject.
3. Be absolutely nonjudgmental. No idea should be made fun of or discarded. You and the others in the group must feel completely free to say whatever comes to mind and know that the idea won't be evaluated.
4. Jot down all the ideas as they are spoken so that you will have a list to use later.
5. Do your own evaluation of the ideas privately sometime after the brainstorming session.

You will probably have a long list of ideas when the brainstorming session is over. Now go through the list and mark out all the ideas that absolutely won't work or that you are just not interested in. Then, of the remaining ideas, pick the one or two that you can really see yourself writing on. Finally, run these ideas through one of the written creating techniques, and you will be well on your way to knowing what you want to say about this subject when you write.

I. THE DRAMATISTIC APPROACH (Burke's Pentad)

Act 1, Scene I (The Tragedy of Macbeth)

Thunder and lightning. Enter three Witches.

#1 Witch: When shall we three meet again? In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

#2 Witch: When the hurly-burly's done, when the battle's lost and won.

#3 Witch: There will be ere the set of sun.

#1 Witch: Where the place?

#2 Witch: Upon the heath.

#3 Witch: There to meet with Macbeth.

#1 Witch: I come, Graymalkin.

(#2 Witch) Paddock calls.

(#3 Witch) Anon.

All: Fair is foul, and foul is fair.
Hover through the fog and filthy air. (Exeunt)

Notice how soon you find out the following things about this drama: who is in the play? where is the play taking place? what is the action? how is the action going to take place? why? If you were using the Reporter's Formula, you'd have answers to all your questions. However, in the Dramatistic Approach, you yourself set up the play and actually create the ideas and actions.

Kenneth Burke, a well-known writer, has developed this technique. He identifies five aspects of the subject:

AGENT	PURPOSE	ACT	MEANS	SCENE
-------	---------	-----	-------	-------

According to Burke, the importance of these five aspects of a subject is really seen when you mix two of them together--agent and means, for example, or purpose and act; and there are many different combinations possible. (In fact, it is this mixing that makes the Dramatistic Approach different from other techniques, such as the Reporter's Formula.)

When two aspects of a subject are identified and then brought together, new sparks fly; and you think of still more ways of looking at the subject, still more insights. Using these five aspects of a subject, you can put on paper the actual "drama" that occurs when you think about a thing.

J. JOURNAL WRITING

A journal is not a diary of events; it is a daily record of the impressions and feelings which you have experienced and observed throughout a day. Start writing in a journal today. Write in it for at least ten to twenty minutes every day. Your journal can be an excellent source for your writing in the future.

K. FREE OR SPRINT WRITING (Elbow)

With a general subject in mind, write freely not taking pen from paper for at least 30 to 35 minutes. Choose focus or significant points from writing. Do another freewriting, if necessary.

L. CLUSTERING

Key ideas suggest related details or ideas which further suggest more ideas. Also called nutshelling and branching (variations of clustering), clustering is an excellent way to focus ideas, to group details, and to see weak areas. Start with your general topic in the center and branch off, becoming more specific as you go out.

M. Explorer's Questions (Ways to Writing)

1. What features characterize it? In other words, what is it, and what does it look like?
2. How does it differ from others in its class?
3. How does it fit into larger systems of which it is a part: a larger category, an enterprise, a neighborhood, or a community?
4. How does it change? How has it changed since its inception? What was its high point? What will it be like in the future?
5. What are its parts, and how do they work together?

N. Classical Questions (Ways to Writing)

1. What is it?
2. What class does it belong to, or what classes can it be divided into?
3. How is it like or unlike other objects, events, or ideas?
4. What caused it?
5. What did (will) it cause?
6. What process does it go through (has it gone through)?
7. What has been said about it by others?
8. What general ideas and values does it exemplify?
9. What examples are there of it?
10. What can be done about it?