

GETTING STARTED: SOME STRATEGIES FOR PREWRITING

- 1. Brainstorm Ideas.** When you are done, draw lines connecting ideas that fit into similar categories. (Here are several examples of categories: past, present and future for chronologically organized essays; pros and cons for argumentative essays; part to whole categories for analytical essays; causes and effects. These examples are by no means all inclusive.)
- 2. Ask yourself questions to help generate ideas.** Questions about the who, what, when and where of your subject are important, but so are the how and why.
- 3. Ask yourself about the audience of the essay:** Who are they? How much do they know about the subject? How much more do they need to know about the subject to understand it? What are their feelings about it? How should their knowledge and feeling help shape the language I use and the level of information I include?
- 4. Ask yourself about the purpose of the essay.** Is it my purpose to have the reader experience first-hand a specific aspect of the subject, to inform the reader about the subject, to argue a position on the subject, or to persuade the reader of a specific point concerning the subject? Make sure to shape your development of the subject to fit your purpose.
- 5. Ask yourself what types of development best accomplish your purpose given your specific audience.** Listed below are some possible forms of development.
 - Illustration of a point
 - Narration of a story related to the subject
 - Analysis of parts of the subject
 - Definition of terms relevant to the subject
 - Classification of the subject within a larger whole
 - Causes and effects of the subject
 - Comparison and contrast of the subject to other related subjects
- 7. State your thesis in one sentence.** The thesis may well change by the time your essay is complete, but having a tentative main idea to work with will help as long as you recognize when it needs revision.
- 8. Make a tree diagram of your points and their relationship to each other.** Decide what main points help support your thesis and what particular points of evidence help support your main points. Charting these out will help focus your organization.