

Brainstorming and Organizing Ideas

Description

Brainstorming is a process for creating a list of ideas in response to an initial question or idea. Brainstorming emphasizes broad and creative thinking, inviting all participants' points of view in an effort to ensure that all relevant aspects of an issue or question are considered. Example: *If there is a hurricane or another natural disaster, what should everyone do to be safe?* It's usually a good idea to use graphic organizers such as "idea maps" or flow charts so students can see the relationship between various ideas. Brainstorming can be done with the whole class, in pairs or small groups, or individually. It also lends itself to using the Think-Pair-Share strategy.

Purpose

Brainstorming provides an opportunity for students to generate ideas or solve a problem. In addition, the activity prepares students to use brainstorming as a tool for work and personal planning. It also teaches them to organize the ideas they have generated into logical sequences, into priority lists, or other meaningful units and evaluate which ideas pertain to a topic, problem or a situation, and which ideas are interesting but irrelevant to the topic at hand.

What to Do

1. Introduce a topic, ask questions and ask students to write their ideas on the board (or give them to one person writing responses on the board), either as part of a list or in the form of a graphic organizer.
2. Keep asking for more ideas and offer some of your own.
3. Guide the brainstorm by scribing ideas as they come, stopping any comments that evaluate ideas, inviting new ideas, and encouraging the group to share their ideas freely. Help generate energy and free-thinking through encouragement.
4. Organize the ideas and make the organization explicit, saying something like *Ah, you said we needed emergency supplies, so let me put "water" and "flashlight" under emergency supplies.*
5. After a few simple brainstorms on topics that students are familiar with, demonstrate how brainstorming works and set some ground rules.
 - All ideas, however simple, creative, or off the wall are welcome.
 - No one will comment on the ideas during the brainstorm.
 - If you wish, offer a one minute "quiet period" before the brainstorm for people to reflect upon or start lists of ideas on their own.
6. Explain what will be done with the brainstormed ideas.

7. Ask for clarification of any ideas that are not clear to you or others.

Keep in Mind

Brainstorming relies on people thinking and sharing freely. Remind them of this as you enter the activity, and reinforce initial ideas and creative ideas to help everyone participate freely and fully.

- Be ready to stop the first effort at judging a suggested idea (as well as subsequent judging types of comments). Remind the group that brainstorming accepts all ideas without criticism or evaluation.
- Especially in groups where some individuals may be more reflective thinkers, give people a minute to start jotting down some thoughts on their own before starting the group brainstorm aloud. This will help those people get started with the whole group.
- Scribing technique: Use two different colored markers, alternating them with each idea. Make your letters 1.5 inches high or more so all can see (and work off of).
- With an active group, use two scribes so the writing doesn't slow down the idea generation.
- In cases where the items on the list should be prioritized, use "sticky dot" voting. Give each participant 1-3 sticky dots and ask them to put a dot next to the items they think is most important or most answer the original question. Identify those items that get the most votes and eliminate those items that have the fewest votes. This is not a mechanistic process. Leave room for discussion if someone feels strongly about an item.