

## Pre-Writing Activities

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Many students say that the hardest thing about writing is just getting started. They look at the piece of paper or the blank computer screen, and cannot think of a thing to say. Pre-writing activities are a great way to help you come up with ideas about what to write on, to dig deeper into the topics, to explore new ways of thinking about an idea, and to organize the material so that you can create a well-written paragraph.

There are several methods, and no one is better than the other, it is just a matter of preference. Try each one out until you find one that best suits your thinking process and writing style.

**A. Freewriting** is a method where you just write out everything you know about the topic, no matter how trivial. The important part of freewriting is to not stop, even when you think you are stuck and don't have anything else to say about the topic. It is okay to just let your mind wander to other ideas that may be only somewhat related. You will be surprised at how this can lead to things you had forgotten, or help you see relationships between ideas. Start out with the facts – what do you know about the topic. When you have those down, ask yourself, how do I feel about this topic? Where have I heard of this before? If I was going to ask my best friend, or my mom about this topic, what would they say? Where would they tell me to look for more information? It is okay to come up with a list of questions that you have about the topic, things you want to find out, because that will give you the next place to go to learn more.

On the next page you will find several possible topics. Before you look at them, make sure you know in your head how you will proceed with your freewrite. Time yourself, and write without stopping for **five minutes**. When you are ready, turn the page and complete the freewriting practice.

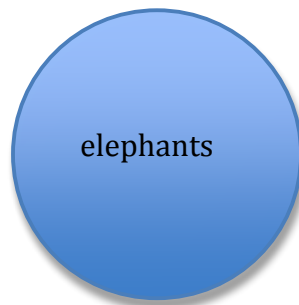
## **Practice I: Freewriting**

Write without stopping for five minutes on one of the following topics:

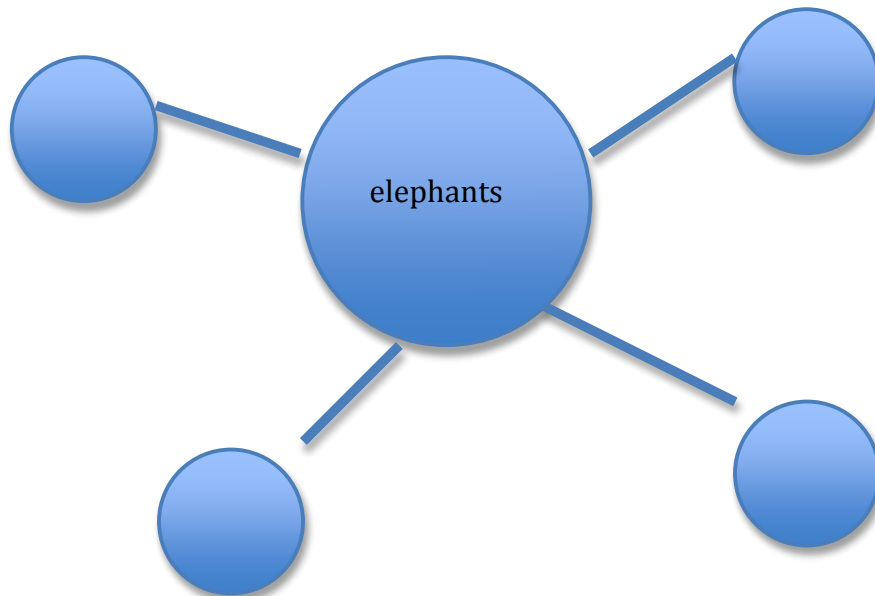
1. Dogs make great pets.
2. Explain what is the best holiday.
3. Why children should be given chores to do.

When you are done, look back at what you wrote. Was it more or less than you expected? Was it difficult to write for the full five minutes? Do you have enough information to edit that into a developed paragraph? How about a longer work...could you use that to get started on a short essay?

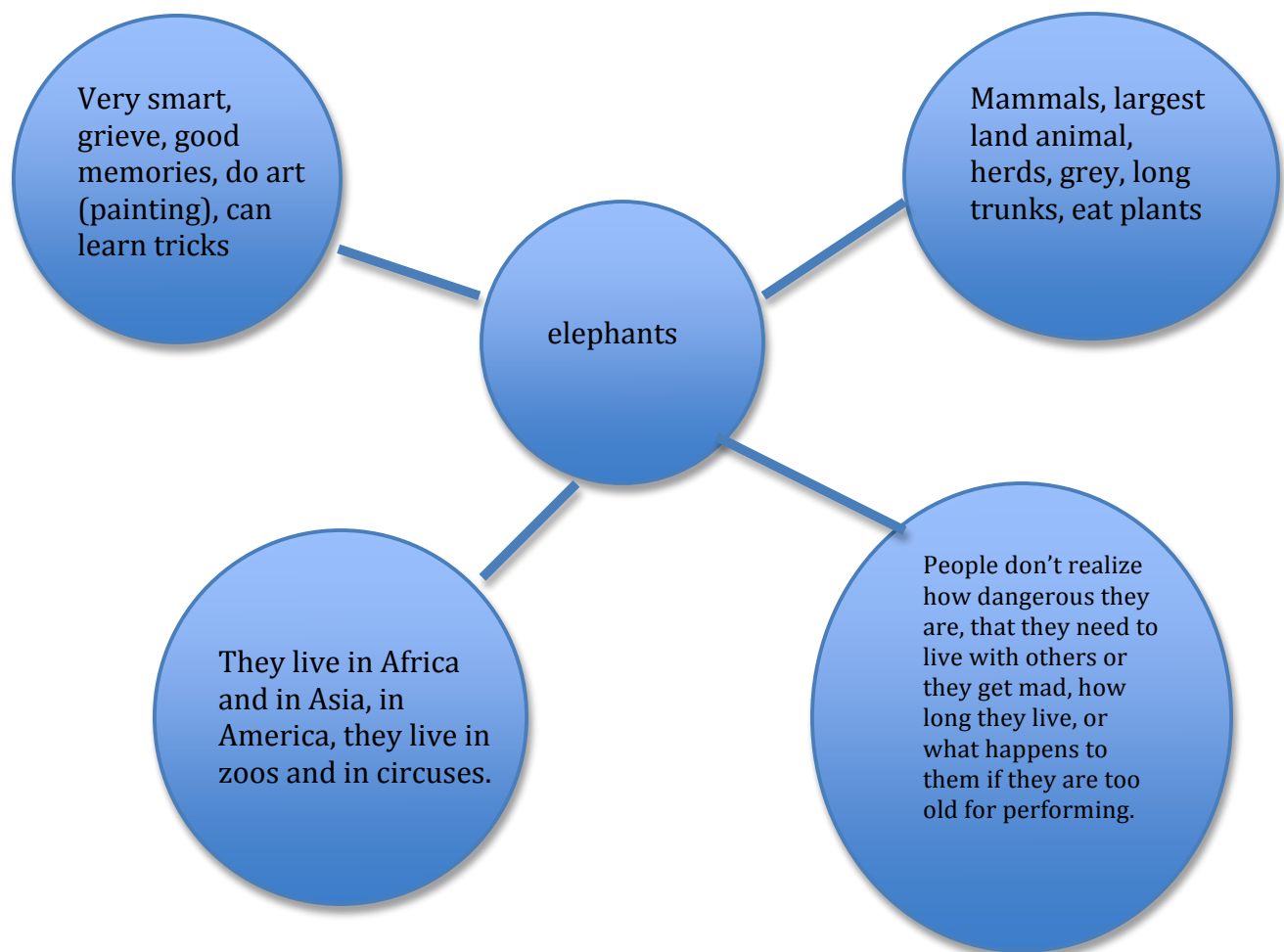
- B. **Idea Wheel**, sometimes called *clustering*, is another effective pre-writing strategy. In some ways it is a lot like freewriting, only instead of writing out the ideas, you draw them out into a wheel, which can help you visualize the ideas and see the connections between them. To practice this, imagine the topic is the hub or center of the wheel. Each idea that you come up with that is related, draw as a spoke coming from the hub, and place any additional details as bubbles from the spokes, until you have something sort of like a wheel. For example, suppose the topic I was given was about elephants. I would start by putting that topic in the center, like this:



Next I would draw spokes coming from the wheel, and bubbles



The next step would be to fill in the bubbles with things I know about elephants. For example, one bubble could be just what they are; mammals, very large, live in herds, vegetarians. The next bubble could be that I know they are smart – how do I know? Well, they have very good memories, they grieve for other elephants that die, they do tricks in the circus, and they create art....that would go in another bubble. A third bubble could be where they live, and maybe a fourth bubble could be what people often misunderstand about elephants. So my chart would look like this:



You can see how some of these ideas overlap. The part about tricks is included in the bubble for how smart they are and where they live (in circuses). So you could draw a line to show that these are connected. You can also see that I have way more information than I could use in a paragraph! There is enough here for several paragraphs or even a short essay. If the assignment was just one paragraph, then I could pick just one bubble and focus on that. Instead of elephants in general, my **main idea sentence** could be, "There are many ways that we know that elephants are very smart."

Each of those items in that bubble can now become a Major or Minor **supporting sentence**.

## **Practice II:** Idea Wheel

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On a separate piece of paper, construct an idea wheel for one of the two topics you did not use for Practice I. Spend between 5 and 10 minutes on your wheel, making sure that the topic is the center.

When you are done, look back at what you wrote. Was it more or less than you expected? Was it difficult to work for the full five minutes? Do you have enough information to edit that into a developed paragraph? How about a longer work...could you use that to get started on a short essay?

### Practice III: Moving from Pre-Write to Writing

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Now we are going to take the pre-write and turn it into a paragraph. Much like what you did in the previous exercise, you are going to fill in a chart, so you have each part of the paragraph: main idea, supporting sentences (major/minor details). You may use either of the two pre-writes that you have already completed. You do not need to write out full sentences, but be sure to include enough information so that it is clear how you are going to develop this into a paragraph. You must have between five and seven sentences total.

**NOTE:** Do not just write "here I will offer an example," you need to provide a few words about what that example will be.

Unacceptable:      List an example of why spanking is bad

Acceptable:        young children don't know why they are being  
spanked/confusing

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Main Idea:

Support #1 (indicate if this is major or minor detail)

Support #2 (indicate if this is major or minor detail)

Support #3 (indicate if this is major or minor detail)

Support #4 (indicate if this is major or minor detail)

Support #5 (indicate if this is major or minor detail)

Support #6 (indicate if this is major or minor detail)