



Creative Brainstorming Techniques

More than half the fun of writing and producing a story is brainstorming that story. At the very start, you and your team find yourselves on the edge of creative possibility: you are about to create a world of characters and events that is new and original. Below are some fun, game-like approaches to brainstorming to help your team get the idea going. Pick one or more, then go!

Starbursting: This is a structured brainstorming technique based on asking questions rather than generating answers.

- Draw a large six-pointed star on a piece of paper and write the word “story” in the middle. Write the words “Who”, “What”, “Why”, “When”, “Where”, and “How” at each tip of the star.
- Brainstorm questions about the story starting with each of these words and have these questions radiate out from the center of the star. (Examples: Who is the villain? Where will the climax take place? What time period will the story be set in?)
- Don’t try to answer the questions as you develop them; instead, focus on coming up with as many questions as possible. And then answer the questions that are the most interesting.

Rolestorming: In this character-driven approach, group members take on someone else’s personality to come up with new ideas.

- Have everyone in the group choose a character to play. It can be anyone (other than a group member) like your teacher, friends, parent, or even a celebrity (past or present). It should be someone with whom you are familiar enough to take on his or her identity.

- Once everyone is in character, brainstorm ideas using your new identities! (Example: Albert Einstein, Katy Perry, and your principal all discuss how the conflict in your story should be resolved). You may want to have one person who is just listening and writing down the good ideas that emerge in the dialogue that follows.

Brainwriting: Each group member thinks and records ideas individually.

- Each group member is given one piece of paper. Everyone has 3 minutes to write down 3 ideas. These ideas should be unedited – whatever comes to mind.
- After 3 minutes, everyone passes their paper to the group member on their left. Everyone reads the ideas previously written and has another 3 minutes to write down 3 more ideas. You can use the ideas already written as triggers for new ones, or you can ignore them altogether.
- Repeat this process until everyone has his or her original sheet back. Then, read the ideas aloud and discuss!

Random Idea Starters: This strategy can be a good way to spark the initial idea that will become the story.

- Have each person pick two random stimuli – a word, a number, an image, a song title, or an object from the dictionary, the internet, or the TV – and write them down on a piece of paper.
- Place the papers in a hat and pull the first one out.
- Have a brief discussion about story ideas that might incorporate whatever was written on the paper. (Example: A cuckoo clock on the wall could inspire you to create a story that takes place inside the clock’s machinery where the cuckoo bird lives).
- Repeat until all the papers have been chosen.

What If: This tool is useful in thinking of creative situations.

- Ask some questions starting with the words “what if” and use one of these questions as the basis of your story. (Examples: What if there was no water on our planet? What if the streets were made of water and the sidewalks made of Jell-O? What if trees behaved like pet dogs?)

Analogy: This is another tool to generate creative, non-obvious ideas.

- Take two unrelated ideas, concepts, or objects and try to connect them. Start with the question: “How is a _____ like a _____?” See where this leads you. (Examples: How is a monster like a chair? How is being scared like being happy?)

Exaggeration: This will stretch your current ideas further.

Take whatever idea you have and exaggerate it to the maximum. (Example: If you decide to set your story in cold location, push it to the extreme: maybe the average temperature there is 0° F. What new problems does this create for your characters?)