

Course: Written Comprehension and Expression

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Week Two: Stages of Writing _ Prewriting



Objectives

- Understanding the nature of the writing process
- Understanding the forms of brainstorming
- Practising some prewriting tasks

Introduction

Writing is never a one-step action; it is an ongoing creative act. When you first write something, you have already been thinking about what to say and how to say it. Then after you have finished writing, you read over what you have written and make changes and corrections. You write and revise and write and revise again until you are satisfied that your writing expresses exactly what you want to say.

Even professional writers do not sit down and write a paper automatically, in one draft. Instead, they have to work on it a step at a time. Writing a paper is a process that can be divided into the following steps:

- Prewriting
- Writing the first draft
- Revising
- Editing and proofreading

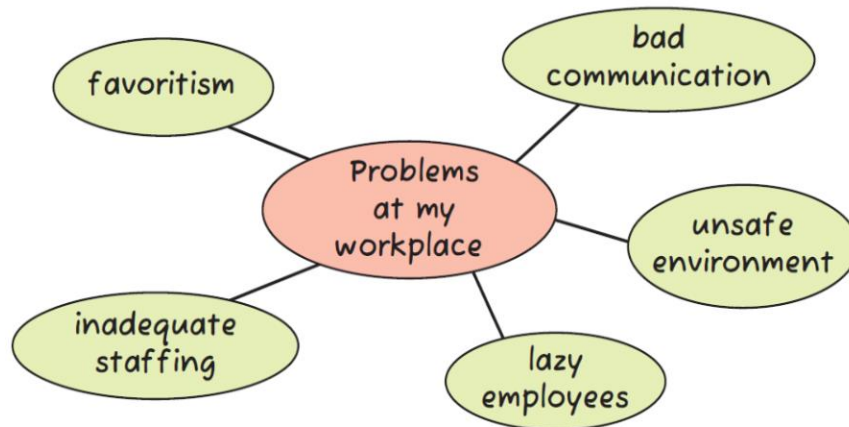
Prewriting

The first step is called prewriting. Prewriting is a way to get ideas. In this step, you choose a topic and collect ideas to explain the topic. In the prewriting phase, writers may use one of the following four tasks:

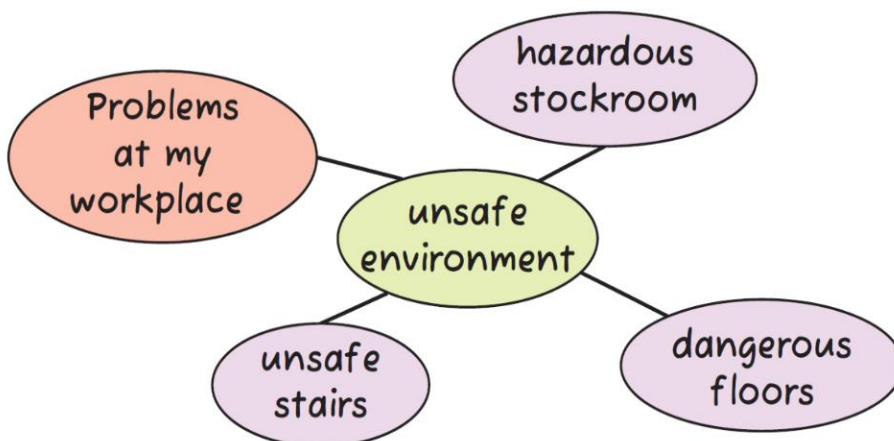
1. Clustering
2. Listing
3. Questioning
4. Freewriting

1. Clustering

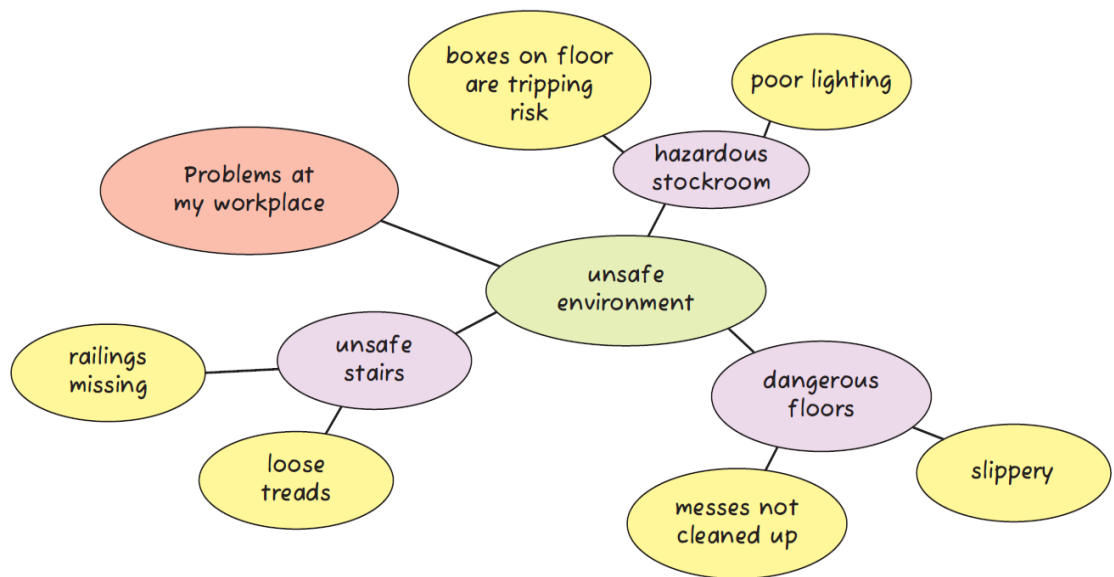
Clustering involves using a series of bubbles (circles) and connecting lines to record your thoughts. Clustering is especially helpful for students who have trouble organizing their ideas; the bubbles and lines help group related items together.



Next, focus on one big idea at a time and provide related examples for each



Finally, focus on one example at a time, adding specific details to illustrate each example. When you reach this final level of support, remember to look back at your topic to stay focused



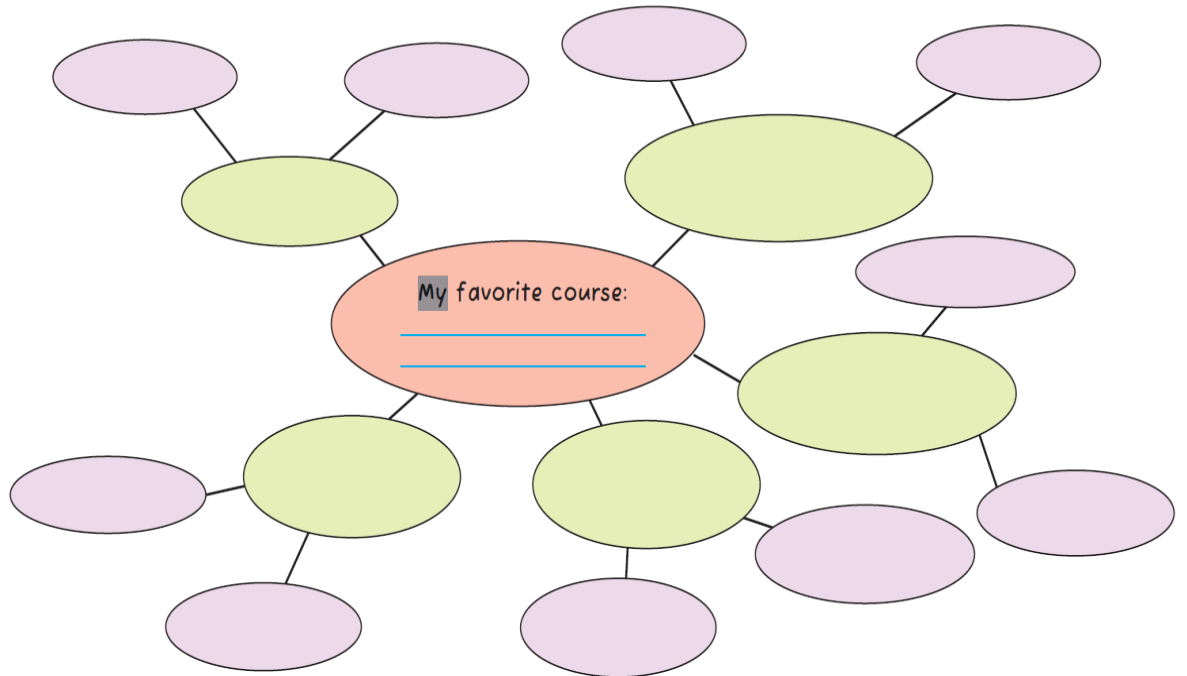
Activity 1: Answer the following questions about the cluster immediately preceding this activity.

1. What are the three related examples of an unsafe environment?
.....
2. What are causes of hazards in the stockroom?
.....
3. What specific details are related to the floors?
.....
4. How many specific details about the stairs are named?
.....

Activity 2: Complete the cluster below. Follow these steps:

1. Write the name of your favourite college course in the centre bubble.
2. Fill in the *green* bubbles with big ideas about why this is your favourite course.
3. Fill in the *purple* bubbles with examples to support your big ideas.

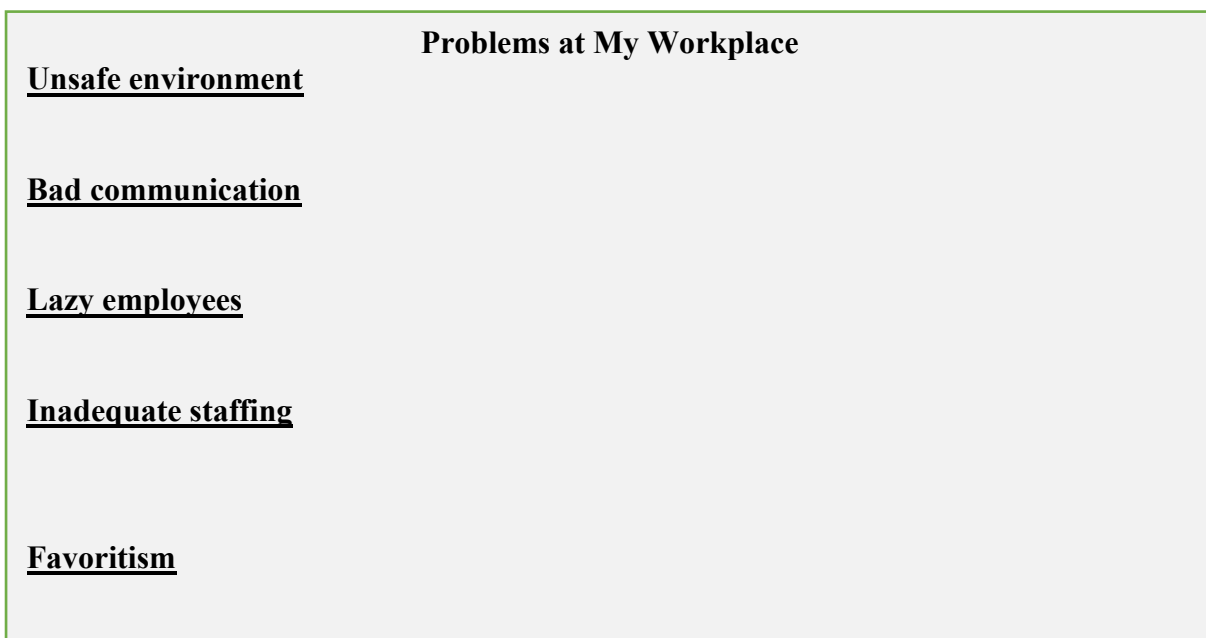
Note: You may leave some bubbles empty or add extra bubbles if necessary.



2. Listing

Some students do not like using bubbles and lines to record and connect their ideas. Instead, they prefer to list ideas on paper or a computer screen. If you use this method, it is helpful to think of your list as *a series of short lists*. This will help you group related ideas together.

Here is an example of listing using colour coding. Notice that the narrowed topic, *Problems at my workplace*, is placed at the top of the page, and the big ideas are listed below, with space between each one.



From this point, you can build your list by working on one big idea at a time. For each big idea, give yourself at least five minutes to list related examples and specific details.

Problems at My Workplace

Unsafe environment

hazardous stockroom – boxes on floor are a tripping risk, poor lighting

dangerous floors – slippery, messes not cleaned up

unsafe stairs – railings missing, loose treads

Bad communication

Activity 3: Use the listing technique to brainstorm ideas for one of the following topics.

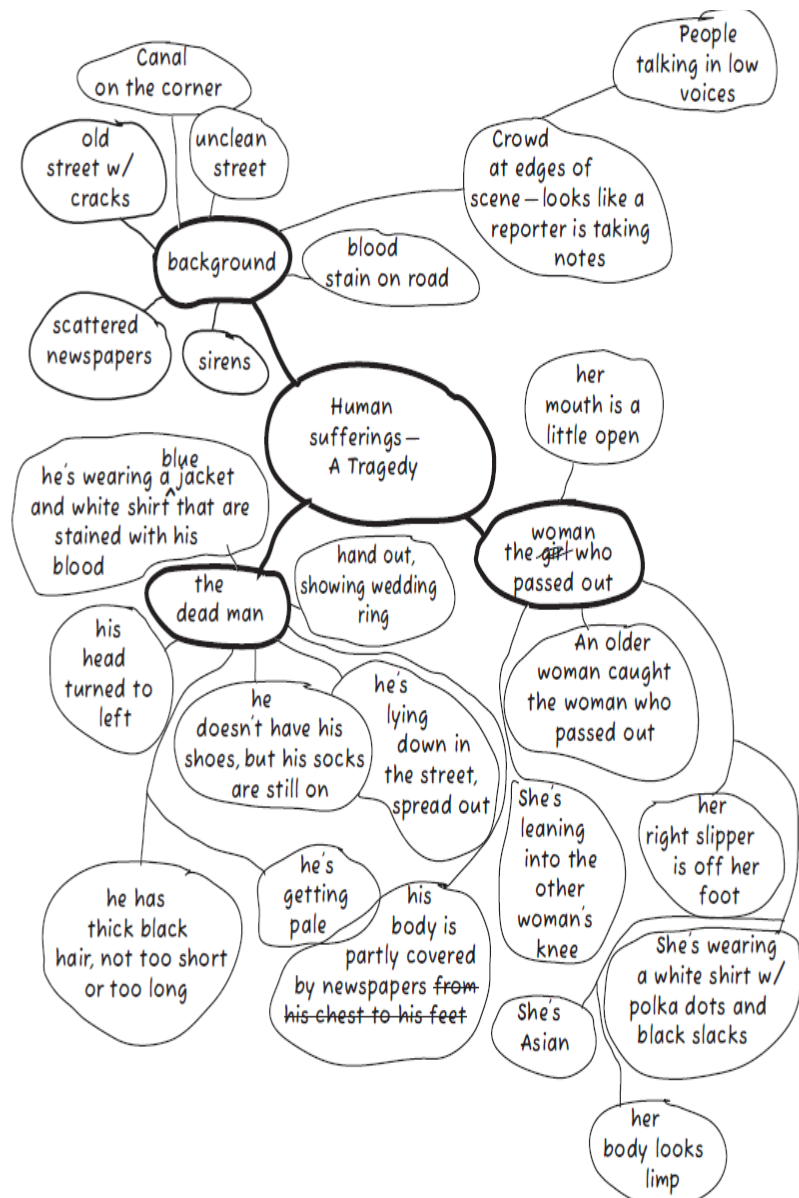
1. Topic 1: a perfect vacation
2. Topic 2: responsibilities that you had as a child
3. Topic 3: the most important person in your life right now
4. Topic 4: stress factors in your life
5. Topic 5: ways to relax

Clustering and listing are not always as neat as the previous examples suggest. Because you will be writing quickly, expect to have to squeeze in ideas and bubbles where you don't have enough space. Also, don't expect your cluster or list to be perfectly organized.

When you use clustering or listing, keep the following points in mind:

1. Although these methods can help you keep related ideas grouped together, **do not worry about organizing your thoughts** at this point.
2. Ideas are likely to pop into your head rapidly and randomly. Just **let your thoughts flow**, write them down, and keep moving.
3. **Do not worry if you repeat some ideas.** Repetition during brainstorming can help you identify ideas that are especially important for your topic.
4. Try to fill up your page with thoughts, and **do not stop working** too soon. It is often during the last minutes of your brainstorming that you discover your most powerful ideas.

Now, take a look at an example of clustering from real students:



3. Questioning

Another brainstorming method is **questioning**. With this method, you use the five *Ws* of critical thinking: *Who? Where? When? What? Why?* These questions can help you get below the surface of your topic and look at it from different viewpoints.

1. **Who** are the important people involved in my topic?
2. **Where** did the events connected to my topic take place?
3. **When** did the experiences in my topic occur?
4. **What** important things happened in relation to my topic?
5. **Why** did these things happen, and **why** did people act the way they did?

Activity 4: With classmates, form *W* questions for the following topics. (It is not necessary to answer the questions.) If one *W* does not fit a topic, just write “does not fit” in the space provided.

EXAMPLE: Discuss a powerful dream you’ve had.

Who? **were the people in my dream**

Where? **did the events in my dream take place**

When? **did the events in my dream happen**

What? **happened in my dream**

Why? **did these things happen**

1. Discuss a powerful memory from your childhood.

Who?.....

Where?.....

When?.....

What?.....

Why?.....

2. Write about your “fantasy” job: the job you would have if anything were possible.

Who?.....

Where?.....

When?.....

What?.....

Why?.....

Freewriting

Another method of generating ideas is called **freewriting**. With freewriting, you simply write down your thoughts as you would in a diary or personal journal without worrying about grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Write down whatever comes to mind, even if it seems silly or disconnected at first. This process gives your mind time to warm up and may help you uncover more ideas than you thought you had on a topic.

Here is an example of freewriting on the narrowed topic, *Problems at my workplace*.

I can't believe how much I hate my job! On Saturday I came home from work dead tired, it was soooooo busy and we only had four workers on the sales floor. Of course, Maggie won't lift a finger to serve a customer because she has to "supervise" (which basically means talking on the phone to her boyfriend). At one point I slipped on some spilled liquid on the floor and twisted my ankle. And where were my wonderful co-workers? Off smoking in the stockroom which is not allowed anyway and it wasn't their break time. And Tom makes me so mad — he won't listen to anything I have to say, he never admits that he's wrong and his parents think that he's perfect. I am surprised that this business stays open but the owners (Tom's parents of course!) use it as a tax shelter or something funny like that. The whole thing is a big mess and I don't know if I can survive another weekend. . . . HELP!

The next step in freewriting is to read what you have written and circle two or three big ideas that you would like to explore further. Remember to select ideas that are closely connected to your topic

(in this case, *Problems at my workplace*). Here is what this student circled in her original freewriting:

I can't believe how much I hate my job! On Saturday I came home from work dead tired, it was soooooooooo busy and we only had four workers on the sales floor. Of course, Maggie won't lift a finger to serve a customer because she has to "supervise" (which basically means talking on the phone to her boyfriend). At one point I slipped on some spilled liquid on the floor and twisted my ankle. And where were my wonderful co-workers? Off smoking in the stockroom which is not allowed anyway and it wasn't their break time. And Tom makes me so mad — he won't listen to anything I have to say, he never admits that he's wrong and his parents think that he's perfect. I am surprised that this business stays open but the owners (Tom's parents of course!) use it as a tax shelter or something funny like that. The whole thing is a big mess and I don't know if I can survive another weekend. . . . HELP!

Activity 5: Using freewriting, discuss *someone you admire*. Follow these steps:

1. Freewrite for ten minutes on the topic.
2. Read what you wrote and circle two or three big ideas that you would like to develop.
3. Select ONE of those ideas and freewrite on it for five minutes.

If you use this method to brainstorm your topic, keep the following points in mind:

1. **Freewriting generally requires more time** than the other methods, so it may not be ideal for timed writing assignments in class. Make sure you practice one of the other methods as a backup for timed writing assignments.
2. **Freewriting does not count as a draft of your composition.** After you complete your freewriting activity, you will still need to write an outline for your composition and *then* write your first draft.
3. **You might start with freewriting to warm up your brain**, then switch to clustering or listing when the ideas start to come faster.