

EXPLORING THE TOPIC OF YOUR RESEARCH PAPER

Exploring your topic before you begin to write about it will help you to establish *what you already know* about it, *what you think* about the issues involved, and *what you need to find out*. When you explore ideas, you are trying to capture your thoughts on paper, to create meaning, build understanding, and consider all the possibilities of the topic. The following strategies are powerful tools to help you generate ideas:

BRAINSTORMING:

- Put down everything that comes to mind on the topic as quickly as you can.
Don't criticize or edit your ideas.
- Also brainstorm any questions you can think of, concerning the topic.
- Then look at your ideas--what ideas link with others? What ideas particularly interest you? What questions would you like to explore?

MAPPING:

a non-linear, interconnected way of brainstorming

- Write your subject or topic in the centre of the page.
- Branch out from the centre by brainstorming an idea related to the topic.
- Explore this idea further by branching to other ideas.
- When you reach the end of one branch, go back into the middle to generate a new idea and make it a new branch to explore.
- When you finish, look at the map. If a particular area seems to grab your attention or holds particular potential to develop more, create a new map, this time putting that branch's key idea in the centre. See how much more you can explore that topic.

FREE-WRITING

a technique that captures your flow of thought

- Start writing and let your ideas flow as if you were talking about the topic.
- Write quickly without worrying about correctness; do not reject or edit any ideas.
- Read what you have written and see what ideas you came up with.
- Pick out and underline key sentences and phrases. Using these, write a sentence (or more) to summarize the most important things you said about the topic.

QUESTIONING:

Brainstorm around your topic by asking yourself the journalists' questions:

Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

TALKING:

Talk out loud to yourself, or find someone to listen to you.
Jot down your ideas in point form.

INTERVIEWING:

Speak to others about your topic--gather opinions, observations and specialized information.

RESEARCHING IN THE LIBRARY

Use CLUES, CD-ROM, the Internet, or ask the research librarian for help.

GATHERING

Gather information from other sources, such as organizations, government offices or other relevant resources. Find addresses for organizations using the directories in the library. There will also be internet-based sites for many of them.

EXAMPLE 1: BRAINSTORMING

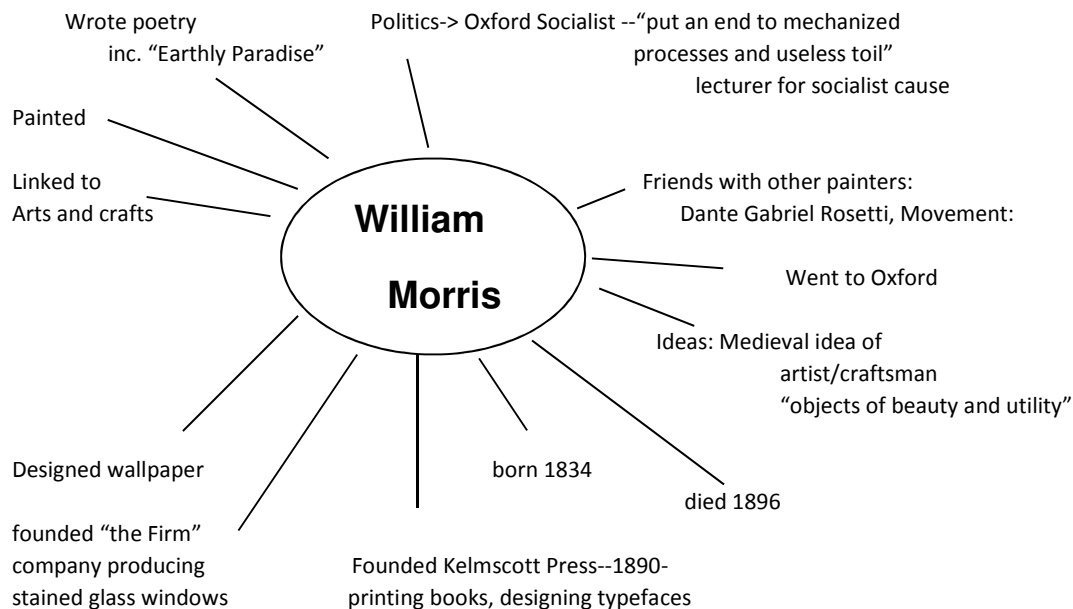
on William Morris, nineteenth century artist.

This writer has put down a few initial ideas about the artist--they are not extensive but they give scope to develop further.

- British artist
- wallpaper designs--flowers, animals
- popular now
- 19th century--Victorian style
- connected with Socialist cause
- knew other painters
- went to Oxford
- connected with printing in some way

EXAMPLE 2: MAPPING

Here the topic is explored in a slightly different way--this writer knows a bit more about William Morris and so has been able to develop the initial ideas a bit further.



Any of the "exploring" strategies can work well as a way to generate ideas. The key is to capture thoughts and ideas on paper to give a starting point for more development using research.