

Brainstorming & How to Get Started

Holding a brand new paper assignment in your hand can be nerve-wracking. You may read it once, twice, three times (maybe even more!) before you really think you understand it. But once you think you know what it's asking, how do you get started actually *writing* it? Do you sit down and start banging away at the keyboard? Or do you try to format it in your mind before putting it down on your virtual paper? There are many ways to approach brainstorming for assignments, so if you find that one way just doesn't do it for you, give another method a try!

Start with an outline:

One good first step to try is creating an outline. Now, an outline doesn't have to be anything fancy; sometimes, the most thought-provoking outlines for writers are the simple ones. Leaving out the important details in an outline (don't worry, you can always add this in after you've figured out your points) will keep you from getting preoccupied by coming up with information (which can often lead to an outline that's so full of stuff, it's practically a paper itself!):

Introduction:

- There were lots of little European & Indian conflicts
- Two big ones were King Philip's War and Pueblo Revolt
- Working Thesis: These two wars had different causes and different results, but both were started because the Indians involved in each felt that their rights weren't being recognized.

Point One:

- What happened in King Philip's War?
- Why?
- What was result?

Point Two:

- What happened in Pueblo Revolt?
- Why?
- What was the result?

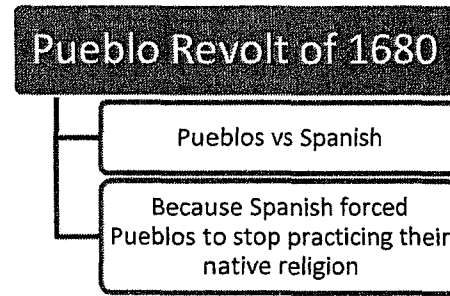
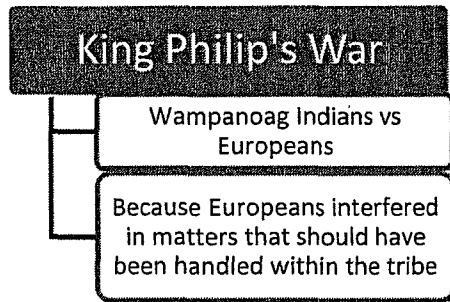
Point Three:

- Similarities?
- Differences?

Creating an outline will help you do more than just get your thoughts out there; having an outline to follow as you write will also help keep you on topic as you move forward with your paper.

Draw a Bubble Map:

Creating a linear outline that flows logically from one point into the next can be a lot to ask of your brain when you first sit down to brainstorm. If you have a couple ideas but don't want to worry about the order they'll go in or how you'll transition between them, a bubble map might be the way to go! You can make a bubble map in whatever shape helps you the most - it doesn't even have to have any bubbles!



If you have an iPad, you might want to download an app called **InspirationMaps**. This app streamlines the bubble map-making process by offering a variety of templates that you can choose from, allowing you to focus less on the layout of your map and more on the ideas that you're trying to figure out!

Book or Film Comparison Template

Works being compared:

Similarities

Differences

King Philip's War

Pueblo Revolt of 1680

Inspiration Maps™ Upgrade Available Here!

Once you've filled in some of the points you want to cover, you can switch the view and see your bubble map as an outline! InspirationMaps has a free version of the app as well as a paid version.

Make a list:

Outlines or bubble maps not your thing? Then make a list! Creating a bullet point list of ideas and facts that you think are going to be important in your paper will get your brain into writing mode without asking too much. Lists are easy to create and don't even have to be in order of importance:

- *King Philip's War was very bloody with a lot of casualties*
- *the Pueblo Revolt was very well organized*
- *Both wars were very different in terms of reasons and participants*
- *The Spanish oppressed the Pueblo religion*
- *The English oppressed the Indians' agency*

Just dive in:

Sometimes, when outlining or bubble mapping or bullet-pointing your ideas just doesn't get your thoughts flowing, the best way to get started is to just jump right on in and start writing. What comes out first doesn't have to be gold - in fact, it often won't be anything you'd want to share with anyone. The important part, though, is that you've started putting your ideas down on paper.

When you jump right in, you don't have to start at the beginning. Skip over your introduction and thesis entirely (you can worry about these later) and start with the point that interests you the most:

"A few years after King Philip's War and hundreds of miles to the west, the Pueblos revolted against the Spanish who had moved into their land many years before. In the beginning, Indians had gotten along well with the Spanish (why? cite something here?), but those friendly attitudes quickly changed."

By starting in the middle like this, you avoid all that worry about writing an engaging introduction, argumentative thesis, and interesting title. You can put aside all the technical things that can make starting a paper so daunting, such as citations or explanation, and just leave a reminder to go back later and add in that important stuff. And remember, what ends up on paper at this point doesn't have to be perfect - it's just a way to get the thoughts out. You can always revise later!

Take a break!

Sometimes you just can't get your brain to play along. Maybe you've tried all of these strategies and are surrounded by an entire notebook's worth of pieces of paper containing half-outlines, short lists, and the beginnings of paragraphs, but you just don't think any of it is any good. In this case, it's likely that you've been looking at it for too long and have thought yourself into a rut - it's okay, it happens!

Take a step back from the assignment and think about something else for a while. Study for that important test you have tomorrow, read a couple chapters in a favorite book, or watch half an hour of a show you love. If none of that sounds appealing, take a walk, take a nap (but remember to set an alarm!), or go outside and sit down somewhere nice and pretty. You can even call a friend and talk for a while! Just do something that isn't in any way related to the assignment

you're struggling with. Giving your brain a chance to relax and think about something else will, believe it or not, help a lot.

Coming back after a short break to look at the assignment sheet or the brainstorming you've already done will give you an opportunity to look at your work from a different, freshly cleansed perspective. More often than not, those paragraphs you wrote before your break (you know, the ones that you thought might just be the worst writing ever written?) will seem a lot less bad - and may even be something you end up using. Being too close to something for too long tends to cause a trance-like state of confusion. Step away!