

MERRIMACK COLLEGE WRITING CENTER

GETTING STARTED: A THINK-ALoud ACTIVITY

So you're having trouble getting ideas from your brain to the page. No problem. If you have a pad of paper, a pen, and a friend (or a writing consultant), you can get the ideas out quickly.

Consultant's Instructions

You are the note-taker, so get paper and pen or your laptop or tablet.

1. Record all major points.
2. Record any good quotes.
3. Do these in an *unnumbered* list.

If the writer gets stuck, use open-ended questions to prompt, but remember to keep taking notes!

1. Why is this topic/subject/issue (X) important?
2. Who needs to know about this, and why?
3. What causes X to occur? Where is this problem rooted?
4. Why does X occur when it does? (Historians: Ask "if then, why then?")
5. What processes are at work here? How does it happen?
6. What happens if X isn't changed? What if it doesn't occur?
7. How do you think X can be solved?
8. What will it take in resources and people to solve X?

Writer's Instructions

Speak freely and openly about your subject, but don't take notes. Just talk until you have nothing left to say and the prompts yield nothing.

Analyze the Text

When the writer has nothing left to say--she or he has said everything--and the consultant has no more questions to ask, begin organizing the list of items you wrote together.

The writer should number the items, not the consultant!

Consider the following:

1. What organization will help your audience understand the best? Do you want something memorable at both the start and the finish?
2. Is there an order of importance?
3. Are there steps in a process, or a chronology?
4. If there is cause and effect or problem and solution, which should come first, and why? These have an order of importance as well.
5. If there is a comparison and contrast, will the audience better follow if the comparison is vertical (discuss all of one item, then all of the other) or horizontal (discuss a quality of one item, then the same quality of the other item, and continue back and forth).
6. Do some items illustrate other items?
7. Is there a classification of many things?

Now, the writer should type up these notes in the order you just created. Remember to add ideas as they come to you during this process!



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