

# Pre-writing Strategies

Let's face it...writing can be chaotic. Fortunately, there are writing tools—**pre-writing strategies**—that can help you control that chaos. Using pre-writing strategies can help you pin down even the most wiggly topic on your mind's wrestling mat. Here is a quick overview of some prewriting strategies, along with thumbnail descriptions of what they are and how they work.

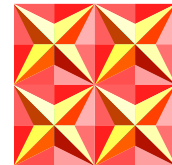
## ***Idea trees***

Idea trees don't have roots in the ground; their roots are in your brain. Idea trees come in handy when your brain is full of ideas that need a good place to sprout. Idea trees can grow up, down, or sideways or wherever the sun shines brightest. Idea trees have brainstorm roots, topic trunks, nonlinear branches, and subjective leaves.



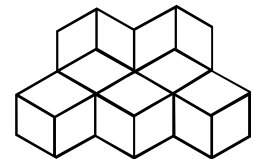
## ***Idea clustering***

The universe is bursting with galaxy clusters and superclusters—what's to stop you from organizing your brilliant ideas with the structure of the universe in mind? Let loose your mental nuggets in whatever shapes—or shapelessnesses—best suit your needs. Clustering is about getting something down on paper **now** so you can make sense of it all **later**.



## ***Mapping***

So clustering is too “unstructured” for your taste, eh? Maybe you'd like to try mapping ideas instead. Idea mapping is to clustering as military boarding school is to a school for the performing arts. Use mapping when you have a firmer grip on where you are in the writing process and/or in which direction you would like to go.



## ***Developing an Outline***

Although sometimes we might wish they would, essays don't spontaneously generate—they *evolve*. You might think of an outline as the primordial ooze from which crawl your single-celled thoughts as they evolve out into creatures of multicellular complexity.



## ***Reverse Outline***

Here is something to try when you've written a bit and you want to see how it fits together. Simply take a full paragraph and write out its main idea and the ideas that support it. This exercise will show you if the text follows sensibly from one paragraph to the next. Try it—you'll like it!

