Research Paper Prewriting
Brainstorming Strategy #1: LISTING

**Step 1:** Set a timer for 5 minutes. List anything that comes to your mind that is related to your topic. This is similar to the *schema* activity we did during the lesson on *metacognition*.

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**Step 2:** When you are finished, evaluate your list. Cross out items that are irrelevant to your paper. Circle 3-4 items that are the most useful. Look for patterns in your ideas. Identify
Research Paper Prewriting
Brainstorming Strategy #2: CLUSTERING

Step 1: This strategy uses an organizational chart to sort the ideas that you circled during the Listing activity. Below is a simplified example. On the next page, draw your own cluster diagram. Yours may have more circles than this. You may also add sub-points to your ideas.

**TOPIC**
Example: Art and architecture in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

**IDEA #1**
Example: The stained glass of Notre Dame was beautiful

**IDEA #2**
Example: The gargoyles on Notre Dame are grotesque

**IDEA #3**
Example: The cathedral is the main setting of the book
Research Paper Prewriting
Brainstorming Strategy #2: CLUSTERING
Research Paper Prewriting
Writing a Thesis

Directions: Now that you have brainstormed ideas for your topic, it is time to write your thesis. Read the following information about the thesis and then write your own. This will be a “working thesis,” which means that it is a work in progress that will continue to be adjusted and refined during the Prewriting stage.

What is a thesis statement?
A thesis statement is the sentence (or two) stating the essay’s argument. It provides a foundation for smaller arguments and guides the reader through the essay. Usually located near the end of the introduction, a thesis narrows your general topic to a specific, focused argument which is supported by the evidence presented in the rest of your paper. A good thesis should answer the question, “What does this paper prove?”

Common thesis mistakes
- Thesis versus Topic – One of the most common mistakes students make is confusing the thesis with the topic. Here is an example of each:
  - Topic: school vouchers
  - Thesis: The implementation of a tax-funded voucher system would not harm the public schools and would achieve the desired outcome of overall educational improvement.
- Summarizing – Your thesis should state your position on the points you are analyzing. It should bring together your analysis of the text with your use of outside sources. It is not a plot summary; it is not a book report.
- Ask a question – avoid turning your thesis into a question. Examples:
  - At the end of the story, the reader must ask, “Did Quasimodo really grapple with his own inadequacies?”
  - Does Beowulf demonstrate heroic qualities?
- Make an announcement – Do not begin your paper with an announcement of the topic. Ex:
  - In my essay, I will talk about how Shakespeare was inspired by the Gunpowder Plot of 1605.
  - This paper will compare Paradise Lost with the Bible.
- Quote or reference secondary material. – Do you use quotes in your thesis. You should not substitute someone else’s insight or observation in place of your own thesis statement.

Identifying a Good Thesis Statement
How can you evaluate the thesis? Here are a few important questions to ask yourself:
- Does the thesis fit the scope of the assignment? Don’t try to analyze something too broad or too specific for the length of your paper.
- Does the thesis express one main idea that links together all of the supporting ideas in the paper? There should be a coherent thread of thought and development throughout your paper.
- Does the thesis answer the question “So what?” If it does not, you may be confusing the thesis and topic.
Review your brainstorming activities (listing and clustering) and the information about writing a thesis. Now it’s time to pull it all together into a working thesis. Make sure you go through all the steps. Don’t worry if it’s not perfect. This is just the first draft of a thesis.

My topic______________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

What is your main point?________________________________________________
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____________________________________________________________________

Supporting point 1______________________________________________________
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____________________________________________________________________

Supporting point 2______________________________________________________
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Supporting point 3______________________________________________________
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Working thesis________________________________________________________
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