Brain-Writing

A fast and effective way to stimulate creative thinking!

BRAINSTORMING: A powerful tool for corporations, but challenging to apply in the classroom.
"Brainstorming" is used by businesses to generate creative ideas. Many of Silicon Valley's biggest innovations can be traced back to brainstorming sessions. However, traditional brainstorming can be hard to do with students:

➢ Some young people are not comfortable participating in group conversations
➢ A few out-spoken students may dominate the session
➢ An early idea from a popular student may discourage other participants from voicing different solutions
➢ Some students are so busy listening they don't have time to think of their own ideas; some are so busy talking that they don't have time to think

With a few changes to the process, these limitations are easy to overcome!

**BRAIN-WRITING: An effective way to get students thinking and sharing!**
"Brain-writing" follows the same rules as regular brainstorming, but it happens quietly. Instead of saying ideas out loud, participants write their ideas down. Here is how it works:

(1)   Leader writes the problem statement on the board (for example, "What should we do for next month's community project?").
(2)   Leader explains the brain-writing process and shows the students the brain-writing form (for example, a simple sheet of paper with 6 boxes on it).
(3)   Leader briefly discusses the problem statement with the students and demonstrates how to write one solution in one box on a brain-writing form as shown – draw pictures if possible. (This form will be used later.)

A solution		

(4)   Leader passes out one blank form to each participant.
(5)   Student "A" writes one solution to the problem in one box on his or her sheet, then holds the sheet in the air.
(6)   The "Paper Passer(s)", the leader or designated participant(s), takes the sheet from Student "A", and trades it for the leader's sheet from step 3.

(7)   Now the process is underway! As each participant finishes writing one idea on their sheet, they hold it up and the "Paper Passer(s)" exchanges it for a sheet collected from another student. The student reads the idea(s) on the sheet, adds one more idea in an empty box, and holds up the sheet.

(8)   Eventually, most of the sheets are full. It is easy to collect over 100 ideas in 15 minutes.
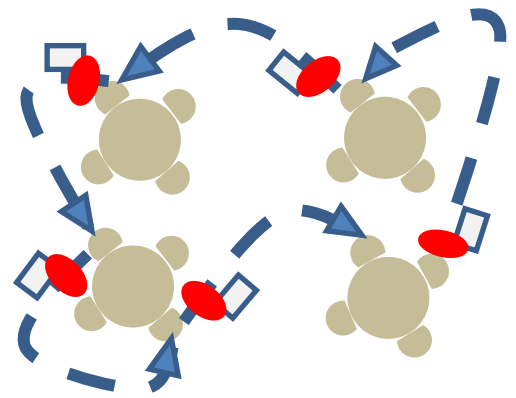
What happens next?
Now, the leader invites one student to read any one idea from the sheet they have in front of them. It does not need to be their idea, or the "best" idea on the page.

The leader writes the idea on the board and invites other students to share similar or related ideas from their sheets. During this process, the leader can facilitate short discussions to encourage students to add details or additional thinking to the ideas as they are read out loud.

In the end, everyone in the group will have had an opportunity to add to the thinking. Quiet students will have had an opportunity to be heard. Students with "different" ideas might feel more confident about sharing their thinking in this somewhat anonymous format.

Collect the sheets so that all the ideas are captured.

Teachers who use this technique tell us that students love it! It has been used to help children share ideas on sensitive problems like bullying, etc.

By the way, it also works at faculty meetings! Many adults are more willing to share their creative thinking in a written format than they are out loud. Try it and see!

ADAPTATIONS – To make Brain-Writing work best for your group

Brain-writing is a flexible process. It can be adapted to meet the needs of most students and teaching environments. Here are some changes to consider.

For students who are working on content, language, and collaboration skills, start with topics they have already mastered and are comfortable discussing as a group.

For younger students or students who are working on writing skills, pick a simple question that can be answered with a single word or quick sketch.

For older or more experienced students, ask a more involved question, such as "What can our school do to reduce pollution in our city?" Challenge students to spend more time thinking before they write.

If some children are uncomfortable participating in the activity – because of difficulty with language, writing, or sitting still, have them be "paper passers".

To speed up the session, simplify the question or assign more students to be paper passers.

For large groups, or when space is limited, ask the students to trade papers within small groups. (A single paper passer can "cross-pollinate" the groups by periodically exchanging sheets from group 1 with group 2, etc.).