

How to Generate Innovative Ideas for Writing

By Linda Elizabeth Alexander

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There is nothing scarier than staring at a blank piece of paper with a deadline quickly approaching. Whether you're writing a column, article, or essay, the following ten techniques will help you find the topic or angle you are looking for.

1. Read

You can read anything ? a newspaper, book, or milk carton. Jumping into an environment that already has lots of ideas in it may lead to new ideas.

2. Surf the Web

Start on your favorite site, and follow random links for a few minutes until you come to something strange to you. Reading about something new, unconventional, or out of your comfort zone will get your brain moving.

3. Seek Help From Coworkers

Two heads are better than one. And three heads are better than two. Ask some coworkers if you can bounce ideas off them. As you speak, have them respond with

their own ideas. Soon, you will have several working topics to write about.

4. Exercise to Stimulate Your Brain

Sitting in front of your computer in your boring corporate office will drive you nuts. Go for a walk or to the gym and get moving! The oxygen and adrenaline in your system will stimulate brain and body will inspire you to write.

5. Go Somewhere New

Again, sitting between the familiar four walls of your office is probably what dried up your ideas in the first place. Go to a park, a museum, the mall, or the gym. Being in a different environment will stimulate new ideas.

6. Listen to Music

I don't often recommend listening to music while you're trying to concentrate. However, immersing yourself in sound will allow you to free associate. Let your mind wander off. It may wander into the garden of writing ideas.

7. Flapoodle

This is Doug Hall's (author of *Jump Start Your Brain*) term for an exercise you may have heard of. Put your main idea in the middle of a blank sheet of paper. Think of three or four possible topics and branch them off the main idea. Allow each "branch" of the "tree" to grow its own branches with related ideas. Soon, you'll have a messy page filled with lots of useful thoughts.

8. Brainstorm

Get an easel and a group of coworkers together. Shout out ideas while one person writes them down. Pay no attention to whether they make sense, are silly, impossible, or totally unrelated. When the page is full, sort through the ideas, picking out the ones you like best.

9. Freewrite Until You Get There

This is the fastest way I know to beat writer's block. Get out a blank pad of paper, put on some classical music, and write. Keep the pen moving for a set time, say, 10 or 15 minutes and write down whatever comes to mind. Don't think, look back, correct, or delete anything; just write. At the end of the session, read what you wrote, underlining anything that jumps out at you. Use these words to find a topic.

10. People Watch

Go to the mall, an airport, or other crowded place. Take a seat and watch people go by. Where is that guy with the green sneakers going? Where does that couple live and what do they drive? How about those children running back and forth while their parents pay no attention? Think up stories for all these people to get your mind moving. Soon, you'll have several topics to write about.

Using any or all of these techniques is sure to stimulate your brain. Keep this list posted somewhere in your office for the next time you need to invent a topic to write about.

Linda Elizabeth Alexander is a business writer and marketing consultant specializing in web and sales copy. Be heard and understood! Subscribe to her FREE ezine, Write to the Point, for business people who want to be better writers.

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