Prewriting Strategies

Prewriting and outlining is a great way to help focus your ideas and the great thing is there is more than one way to do it! Here are some strategies that you can try:

- **Freewriting:** Give yourself a particular amount of time (10-15 minutes) and just write everything that comes to mind on your topic. Try not to lift your pencil off the paper--don’t worry about spelling or grammar.

- **Brainstorming or listing:** This is similar to freewriting, but may just involve simply writing out ideas or key words as a list.

- **Clustering or making a thought web:** This is helpful if you are a visual learner, so that you can map out your ideas and see how they connect.

- **Talking it out with someone:** This is helpful if you are an auditory learner.

Here are some questions you can ask yourself if you find that you’re getting stuck with your topic:

- **Particle, Wave, Field Technique** (Examples borrowed from the North Carolina Wesleyan College Prewriting Strategies Page)
  - **Particle:** looking at something as a static entity (describing what it is)
    - What does the term nuclear family mean? Who formulated the term nuclear family? What features characterize the nuclear family?
  - **Wave:** looking at a dynamic, or something that changes over time
    - How long has the nuclear family characterized family structure in America? When did the nuclear family begin to change? What factors have caused the nuclear family to change? How might these factors affect the American family in the future?
  - **Field:** looking at the way something functions as a part of a larger network of relationships
    - How are changes in the structure of the American family related to other changes, such as those in the work force, organized religion, the educational system, and divorce rates? What are the consequences of changes in the nuclear family for American life in general? For politics? For social services? For education?

- **Journalist Technique**
  - Asking the **who, what, when, where, why, and how** of a particular topic

- **Directed Questioning** (Examples borrowed from the Simpson College Prewriting Strategies Page)
  - How can I describe the topic?
  - How can I define the topic?
  - How does the topic resemble or differ from other topics?
  - How does the topic work?
  - How does the topic affect other things?
  - Can I argue for or against the topic?
  - Why does this topic interest me?
  - What ideas are generally associated with the topic?