



IDEA GENERATION

WHAT IS IT?

Being able to generate ideas quickly, is a skill that's useful for planning sessions as well as for encouraging new ideas from students.

A brainstorm is an exercise to stimulate thought association. Using stimulus encourages ideas to be generated around the problem, which then leads to a new approach to the problem.

RECIPE

- **No. of participants:** 2 – 10 (per group)
- **Age of participants:** Suitable for any age
- **Preparation time:** 0 – 30 minutes to gather stimulus
- **Delivery time:** 10 minutes – 1 hour
- **Materials:** Paper / whiteboard and pens

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Identifying the problem or question is the first step so make sure you're very clear about what you want to generate ideas about / for before you begin.

A group of people of any size can generate ideas together; all you need is for someone to write down everything everyone says, so it's easier in smaller groups because you don't miss anything. It's important not to edit the ideas until afterwards – the initial 'thought-shower' should capture everything said (however daft) – which will also build confidence in all participants.

These methods mean that you can quickly take stimulus from almost anywhere to help give you a new perspective on a problem and to generate lots of alternatives.

Basic

A basic brainstorm involves putting the topic or question in the middle of a piece of paper and writing down everything the group can think of around that topic or question. The next step is to take one of these thoughts or solutions and explore it as a group to see how it could fit the problem.

Opposite Worlds

Think of all of the things that would be the exact opposite of what you want your idea to be or the opposite solution to your problem (often this is a lot easier!). This can help clarify what you do want it to be, but it's more exciting to then explore some of these opposites. E.g. In History: What if we told the story of an event with no reference to times or dates? What if we based it on a book set in the future?

HOW DOES IT WORK? (cont.)

Related Worlds

Find a world that is related to your problem or idea and brainstorm around that. E.g. What if an organisation like school was run like an army barracks? What if it was run like a temple for Buddhist Monks? Take some of the elements of this world and turn them into a solution or idea instead. You'll find that you're looking at the problem in a fresh, but still related, way.

Random

Brainstorm around a completely random item and then apply the results of that brainstorm to your problem. Force yourself to make the connection or come up with a solution incorporating these seemingly unrelated ideas.

Or treat your problem as if it were something else. Using a bank of stimulus e.g. a list of film titles; celebrities faces; news headlines, ask the group what your problem/lesson/idea would be like if it were that film, or endorsed by that celebrity, or had caused that news headline.

Idea Smash

Take two random topics and conduct two separate brainstorms around each of them. Now take one element from each of these brainstorms and smash them together to come up with an idea that answers your problem. You need to repeat this multiple times and not mind about the answers that are ludicrous. In fact, encourage them! The more creative the group gets the more likely they are to eventually come up with a clever and unique solution.

Writing Up

It needs to be someone's job to write up all of the ideas after the brainstorm. These are then distributed to everyone and used as a starting point when the group come back together. It's amazing how quickly great ideas are forgotten if they're not written up immediately. If there are too many ideas to write up then as an end point everyone in the group has 'Three Ticks' to choose their favourites. Only the ideas with the most ticks are written up.

TIPS

- Be confident and say whatever comes to mind; people will rarely have thought of the same idea as you, however obvious it might seem to you.
- A useful way to make sure that everyone in the group continues to contribute is to apply the 'Yes, and...' rule. Don't say 'no' to an idea, just keep asking for more.
- Be unrealistic and ambitious at first. Once you start making concrete plans it's much easier to reign something in than to try and make it more ambitious.
- Hold your planning sessions or brainstorms in an unusual setting, away from your normal office or classroom. You'll think bigger and better away from the norm.

FIND OUT MORE

- Thinkpak (Cards for Brainstorming) By Michael Michalko
- Advice and resources from Thinking Maps <http://www.thinkingmaps.com/>
- Free Mind Mapping Software download at Smartdraw.com <http://www.smartdraw.com/specials/ppc/mindmapping.htm>
- 'How To Have Creative Ideas' by Edward de Bono



THINKING SPACE

Flat 2, 46 Sale Hill
Broomhill
Sheffield S10 5BX
07986631385

info@thinkingspace.org.uk
www.thinkingspace.org.uk

