

Prewriting Techniques

If you have trouble getting started with your writing or if you can't seem to get your ideas organized effectively, **prewriting techniques** will help you. These techniques are practical ways to help you get started, but you must always keep in mind two important ideas:

1. Your ideas are valuable and need to be told to your reader—and—
2. You need to find the best way to communicate those ideas to your reader.

Once you have narrowed down your topic and have a specific purpose for writing about the topic, you can try one of the following prewriting techniques.

- ◆ **LISTING:** Jot down every idea you have about your topic. Free-associate; don't hold back anything. Try to brainstorm for at least ten minutes, and write everything down in a list form.
- ◆ **FREEWITING:** Some people just prefer to start writing in order to find a focus for their essays. Take out a blank sheet of paper, and begin writing for at least ten to fifteen minutes. Write whatever comes to your mind about your subject. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation, or grammar. Don't change, correct, or delete anything. Even if you can't think of something to write about, just write "I can't think of anything to say right now; I'm stumped." Just keep writing until a new thought comes into your mind.
- ◆ **CLUSTERING OR MAPPING:** Place your general subject in a circle in the middle of a blank sheet of paper and begin to draw other lines or circles that shoot out from the original topic. Cluster the ideas that seem to go together for at least ten minutes. This type of prewriting allows you to visually see how ideas can go together under each cluster.
- ◆ **CUBING:** Imagine a six-sided cube that looks something like a box. In your mind think of each side of the cube as looking at your topic in a specific way. Freewrite answers to the following questions, but don't worry about whether your answers are correct or not.
 - a. *Describe it:* What does your subject look like? What size, colors, texture does it have? Any special features worth noting?
 - b. *Compare or contrast it:* What is your subject similar to? What is your subject different from? In what ways?
 - c. *Free-associate it:* What does this subject remind you of? What does it call to mind? What memories does it conjure up?
 - d. *Analyze it:* How does it work? How are the parts connected? What is its significance?
 - e. *Argue for or against it:* What arguments can you make for or against your subject? What advantages or disadvantages does it have? What changes or improvements should be made?
 - f. *Apply it:* What are the uses of your subject? What can you do with it?

