WRITING WORKSHOPS: BRAINSTORMING

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THE WRITING PROCESS

Prewriting
Conduct research, notate sources (as you go!) in the form of a working (annotated?) Bibliography, then Brainstorm

Drafting
Commit some words to paper, not necessarily the words that will appear in your final draft

Revising
Interrogate the Clarity, Precision and Connectivity of your prose

Editing
Attend to the “little stuff” that isn’t so little: Spelling, Punctuation, Format (MLA, APA), Subject/Verb Agreement, etc.

Publishing
Starting Out…

…things may seem a bit fuzzy
This is *normal*

don’t FREAK OUT.
Just as your belly needs a meal, or a furniture factory needs wood, you need materials—in the form of data, secondary sources, etc—with which to work when composing college essays.

**IDEAS** are *not* created in vacuums.

And the ideas of others will often become the raw materials of your work.
Be sure to *direct* your research, though. Ask yourself:

‘What do I need to know in order feel comfortable enough to write about this subject?’

‘What do I find most intriguing about the subject matter I am supposed to treat?’ (typically the force and astuteness of an argument is a direct function of its author’s interest in and passion for the subject they discuss)

‘What is the professor asking me to do?’

‘How can I make my interests match their requirements?’

*Then:* “follow your nose,” as they say. Read, read, read. Read what the authors you read read while they were writing what you are reading.
And **PLEASE** keep track of what you read.
This is a seminal text difficult to sum in only two pages, but the thrust of the text is that which most concerns us for our purposes. **At the core of Douglass' argument** is the notion that that which is “dirty” is simply that which is out of place. From this seemingly simple point, Douglass goes on to extrapolate a myriad of assertions about the nature, interplay and function of taboo and sacredness in culture-specific contexts. Naturally, any conclusion Douglass reaches is grounded in her own fieldwork.

**In terms of its germaneness to my study**, I believe the word, “germane,” is rather unsubstantial. Douglass' core observation (noted above) is to be my working definition of filth. While I do certainly mean to juxtapose her work against other less qualifyable notions such as Kristeva’s “abjection,” I intend to leave it more or less unspoiled by eccentric theories and critical approaches. Initially, I will use Douglass’ definition of filth to identify filthy objects, individuals, etc. in Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*. Only then will I set off to explore the implications of such finds on terms of the text and the culture from whence it sprang. And as her seemingly simple observation regarding the nature of filth suggests, Douglass has the quality of being eminently readable and to the point, a fact that will no doubt be a boon to this author.
Remember that globulous, amorphous, undulating thought-blob of nothingess with which we began?

Well, once you’ve completed your initial research, that blob should seem a bit more manageable.

Now it’s time to parse out what’s important and what’s not and to begin to conceptualize your composition.

We do this through BRAINSTORMING.
Simply put, **BRAINSTORMING** is the process of sorting out and organizing decidedly *un*-organized thoughts through…

- discussion
- Clustering
- outlining
- Listing
- freewriting
- diagramming
- drawing

Sitting on the toilet, lost in thought… (you get the idea)
Let’s have a few examples, shall we…

Imagine that you have been asked to select a modern consumer product that impacts our society as much as coffee did Enlightenment era Europe and then to explain why you made your choice.

It’s a tough question. Colors and noises swirl and crease in your mind. A certain fuzziness threatens to overwhelm you and your pulse increases.
It’s okay, though; you know your pre-writing strategies…

#1 Think about what you need to know in order to answer the question and try to find out.

Coffee

Enlightenment era Europe

=  

Modern America

[In this case, we are dealing with a complex analogy with a missing term. Analogies express relationships. So, it stands to reason that we must first define the relationship between known terms before finding an analogous relationship between an unknown term and a known term]
A directed research effort should quickly reveal that coffee, not native to Europe, was first imported as a result of colonial efforts. Very quickly, coffee became “all the rage,” feeding a new merchantilist (capitalist) economy. Due to its popularity, coffee shops arose to meet rising demand. And it was in these coffee shops all across Europe that high and low class thinkers alike mingled and shared the ideas that led, eventually, to the American and French revolutions.

**Basically**, coffee directly and indirectly changed the way we think about (1) Consumer products and (2) the nature of government…This is a bit of an Exaggeration, but you get the point.

(The trick now is to find modern products that have changed the way we Think about our world)
To do so, it may make sense simply to create a **LIST** of influential products, i.e.

The ipod, the computer, automobiles, airplanes, mascara, bras, LCD lights, Guided missiles, nuclear energy, cell phones…(you think of a few)

Incidentally, when asked this same question, a friend of mine chose **myspace**

Now, myspace is of particular interest to this friend of mine because she uses it to advertise and promote her band. But how can she make it work as an answer to the question she was posed in her class?
A bit more research and some personal experience showed her that Myspace has essentially revolutionized the way we think about the music industry. No longer are bands dependant on the big three record labels for promotion, recording, distribution, etc. Today, bands can promote and distribute songs and albums digitally while displaying biographical material, hosting discussions, fielding fan comments, featuring images of themselves, etc.

From here, our hero opted to produce an outline in order to better organize Her thoughts prior to the drafting stage of her writing process.
Sample Outline:

I. Introduction/thesis
   A. Introduce coffee’s influence
   B. Transition to thesis (i.e. While not as impactful, in a political sense, as coffee was on Enlightenment era Europe, myspace has nonetheless Revolutionized the way modern people think about music because of (x), (y) And (z).

II. Body Paragraph 1 (coffee’s impact on Enl. Era Europe)
   A. Merchantilism
      1. Quote from (so-and-so), page 195
      2. Analysis of quote, etc
   B. Politics
      1. Quote from (so-and-so) re: Rossueau, page 55
      2. Explanation of quote

III. Body Paragraph 2 (myspace’s impact on the music industry)
   A. Distribution
   B. Promotion

IV. Conclusion Paragraph
Clearly, our hero has, by now, tamed the wild forces of her fear and imagination and is ready to begin drafting her response to her professor’s question.
Let's try another, shall we?

In a thesis-driven essay of 250 words, explain the meaning of the image above?
Where should we begin?

We might:

1. Ask ourselves what we need to know in order to answer the question. (for example: it may help to know what the text on the image means. It would also help to know who made the image, when s/he made it, why s/he made it (i.e. Is it art? Is it a joke? Is it an advertisement? Etc).)

2. We might conduct research to answer the questions we have about the image.

3. We should keep track of any valuable information we find because we may need to include quotes, provide references, etc. in our final draft.

4. We might list possible answers to the question, use a cluster diagram to condense like ideas, freewrite to allow our imagination to flow and record our responses, and/or outline our response prior to drafting.
Thank You

Have a nice day