



Brainstorming to Define Reasons

If you have done enough thinking to have a clear sense of your SUBJECT, your ESSAY QUESTION, and your tentative ANSWER to that Essay Question (or "thesis"), you can try this strategy to help you identify the reasons or Primary Supports you will develop in the Body of your paper. This strategy works also if you are not exactly sure what your thesis is yet.

To do some brainstorming to zero in on good reasons or Primary Supports to develop your essay, follow these steps:

1. Get a scratch piece of paper out (you could do it in a word processing document).
2. List at the top your Subject, Question or Issue, and your Answer/Thesis (if you know it--if not, leave it blank)
3. Then divide the page into however many columns as you have significant Answers to for the Essay Question
--for an issue-based topic, often there are two sides: pro and con, for and against
--for a question that has no definite answer, there may be multiple possible answers: make a column for each one
4. For each column devoted to a single answer, write out the WHY question at the heart of that particular answer to the essay question
5. Then list as many answers as you can for why you believe or support (or disbelieve and don't support) each answer.
--Make sure to list these in "because" clauses
--Brainstorm for reasons on both or multiple sides of the question/issue (even though you will eventually write about only one side).

The template below shows how these steps would look on the page (see also the example brainstorming done on the following page):

Subject: Essay Question/Issue: Answer/Thesis:	
Why do I support/believe the thesis?	Why do I oppose or disbelieve the thesis?
--because...	--because...
--because...	--because...



--because...

... keep listing as many reasons as you can

--because...

... keep listing as many reasons as you can

Processing your brainstorming list to create a "mini-outline"

Go over your list. See where you have said the same thing but in different language. See where one side might prompt you to see a possible reason you could use on the other side. Think about which reasons are stronger or weaker. If you are still not sure about what your thesis is, examine closely which side seems to have more support and be more plausible (especially in light of what you know about the text or data). Identify what you think are your three to five strongest reasons and recopy them out into a "mini-outline." Rephrase these reasons for clarity also.

Mini-Outline

Subject:

Essay Question/Issue:

Answer/Thesis:

--Reason #1 (--because...)

--Reason #2 (--because...)

--Reason #3 (--because...)

--Reason #4 (--because...)

See Gathering Data to Build Support for a strategy to continue heading toward your first draft of an essay.