

Brainstorming Strategies

Group Brainstorming

In group brainstorming, there are some techniques you can suggest students a way to increase participation:

- Use the “Yes and...” technique to set a positive tone and stop criticism and language that can deter others. When they practice this, students acknowledge the contributions of others and build on ideas. A “Yes and...” brainstorm might look like this if students are talking about developing a new type of classroom chair:
 - Student 1: I think customers want an inexpensive option.
 - Student 2: Yes, and it should be easy to deliver.
 - Student 3: Yes, and it should come in both pink and green.
- Along those same lines, remind students to build on each other’s ideas. Brainstorming for idea generation doesn’t have to result in ideas that are completely unique. The goal is to get lots of ideas on the table and students should explore, add to, amend, delete, revise, and revamp other ideas they hear.
- Have students record ideas in different ways—writing and drawing on big pieces of paper, with markers and gel pens—anything to step out of the regular notetaking process.

Brainwriting

Brainwriting is an idea generation method that encourages participation. Each individual participant is given a piece of paper and they write the question/problem at the top of the page. Each person then spends a few minutes writing down their own ideas on the piece of paper. They then pass their paper on to the next person to read. That person will add ideas to the new piece of paper. Everyone continues passing on their pieces of paper until everyone has written on every page. The papers are then posted in a central location so the ideas can be shared and used for further discussion.

Brainwriting is particularly useful when some individuals are hesitant for whatever reason (e.g. self-conscious, shy, afraid to look stupid or silly, embarrassed etc.) in giving ideas and so unlikely to contribute in traditional group brainstorming sessions.

TIP: At VentureLab, we specifically make sure to include these types of practices so that girls and young women don’t feel bulldozed and quieted in class by their male peers. We encourage you to be aware of and encourage participation by all students.

Brainwriting also works in workplace settings to overcome issues caused by authority and dominance by certain individuals. Brainwriting is important because it’s a way to experience the practice of one person’s ideas contributing to another person’s ideas.

Role-playing

Role-playing involves participants taking on a role while brainstorming. This is used to encourage looking at a problem or situation from many different perspectives. It can also help participants break free from their normal roles, have fun, and be more creative. Roles can be given to create different but realistic perspectives such as customers, employees, etc. Role-playing can also include looking at something from the perspective of a superhero or cartoon character to encourage more creative thinking and spark new ideas. Role-playing can be taken beyond the brainstorming session to include acting out certain roles and interacting with each other to explore a problem further.

Reverse Brainstorming

Reverse brainstorming is the process of looking at a problem backwards. Instead of trying to come up with ideas for solutions, participants come up with ways to cause the problem or to make the problem worse. Once you have identified as many different ways as possible to cause the problem or make it worse, you then spend time reversing each of those ideas. This is a particularly useful technique where participants are struggling to be creative in the brainstorming process and are being too analytical or judgmental. It also helps to take a different perspective in order to come up with additional ideas.