

ABC Brainstorm

What Is An ABC Brainstorm?

Before having your students talk about a major topic, it's essential to activate their background knowledge about it. One way to do this is the ABC Brainstorm. The idea is meant to be fairly simple. Students try to think of a word or phrase associated with the topic, matched to each letter of the alphabet.

How Does It Work?

Have students list all the letters of the alphabet down a sheet of paper (or use the printable ABC Brainstorm sheet available through ReadingQuest), leaving room beside each letter to write out the rest of a word or phrase. Let them work individually at first, thinking of as many words as they can that could be associated with the topic you identify. Do note: The topic should be big and general enough that students can actually think of a lot of possible terms. Then, in no particular order, let them begin filling in the blanks beside each letter of the alphabet. For instance, if the topic were World War II, students might list Allies, Bombers, Concentration Camps, Dachau, Europe, French Resistance, Germany, Hitler, Italy, Japan, and so on.

It seems to work well if you give students enough time to think of a lot of ideas, but then let them pair up or work in small groups to fill in blanks for letters they had not yet completed. In this way, you can let the brainstorming function like a Think-Pair-Share. This would be the "Pair" phase. Then, go around the room or get students to report out ("Share") possible terms for the different letters of the alphabet. Be open to a wide range of possibilities! Make sure students know that you're not looking for exact answers, just justifiable and relevant ones.

What Sorts of Topics Are Good for an ABC Brainstorm?

I say, keep it more broad and relevant. Topics like government, Islam, war (or a specific war), the Great Depression, or a broad geographical region are probably pretty fertile for an ABC Brainstorm. Topics previously studied, about which students know much, can be good recap brainstorms. This might include topics like The Gilded Age, Progressivism, a given decade (the Sixties or the Roaring Twenties, for instance), or capitalism. It's doubtful whether a narrow topic (Saddam Hussein, Circular Flow Diagram, the Constitution) would provide enough latitude for a good ABC Brainstorm, but you won't know until you try.

What Variations Are There?

An idea that has been credited to Janet Allen is AlphaBlocks. Rather than brainstorm ideas for all 26 letters of the alphabet, students brainstorm ideas within groups ("blocks") of letters (ABC, DEF, GHI, and so on). This simplifies and speeds up the brainstorming, while still causing students to turn their attention to and think about the topic at hand.

Another variation of ABC Brainstorm involves turning the topic on its side, and writing the letters of the topic down in the same way as a name poem or an acrostic. Students then brainstorm a word or phrase associated with the topic, one for each letter of the topic starting with each letter of the topic. For example, if the topic were COMPETITION in Economics, students might think of: Compete, Options, Monopoly, Perfect, Economy, Trade, Imperfect, TV ads, Inside Information, Oligopoly, Natural.

Think-Pair-Share

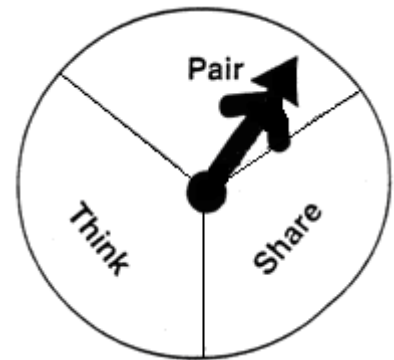
Think-pair-share is a three-step discussion strategy that incorporates wait-time and cooperation with a partner. This structure was first developed by Frank Lyman at the University of Maryland. This strategy encourages participation by all class members during group discussions. Think-pair-share is applicable across all grade levels, subject matters and group sizes.

Think-Pair-Share:

- 1) builds thinking time into the discussion process
- 2) provides time for mental rehearsal and verbal practice before sharing with the group
- 3) increases student engagement with the content and the class

Directions:

- Students listen while the teacher poses a question.
- Students are given wait-time so each can **think** of an appropriate response.
- Students are cued to **pair** with a neighbor to discuss their responses.
- Students are then invited to **share** their responses with the whole group.



Time limits can be set for each stage in the process. You can use cueing devices such as hand signals, pointers, bells or cubes to mark transition points during the cycle.

When appropriate, students can be asked to write notes, or web or diagram their responses during the think and pair segments. Think-pair-share can be used several times during one class period.

Variations:

- *Think-Write-Pair-Share.* Have students jot down their response to the question before moving to pairs. In this way, you shift from internal engagement to an external product which focuses the interaction, and which you can use to monitor learning.
- Structure the strategy to scaffold thinking. For example, divide the class into two groups; one for an issue, the other against. During think time, direct students to “build a case” for their position. During pair time, partners explore their diverse views. Share time should produce a rich discussion from multiple perspectives.

Popcorn Reading

Materials: Story

Directions:

1. Have your child select a book of interest to read together.
2. Begin by reading the story aloud to your child and read no more than a few sentences of the first page of the story.
3. After a few sentences, stop and call out “popcorn” to signal to your child that your turn is over and that it is his/her turn to continue reading.
4. Your child then reads a few sentences and calls out “popcorn” whenever he/she wants to turn it back to you.

Additional suggestions for Popcorn Reading:

- You may decide to vary the directions by calling out “popcorn” at the end of each sentence or at the end of every page. However, keeping it spontaneous will encourage your child to follow along more and keep his/her attention.
- When calling popcorn, and turning it over to the next person, the transition should be quick and without interrupting the natural flow of the story. The next reader should be able to jump in quickly, thus the name “popcorn”.

Concept Map

A concept map is a special form of a web diagram for exploring knowledge and gathering and sharing information. Concept mapping is the strategy employed to develop a concept map. A concept map consists of nodes or cells that contain a concept, item or question and links. The links are labeled and denote direction with an arrow symbol. The labeled links explain the relationship between the nodes. The arrow describes the direction of the relationship and reads like a sentence.

Uses:

- Develop an understanding of a body of knowledge. Explore new information and relationships. Access prior knowledge. Gather new knowledge and information. Share knowledge and information generated. Design structures or processes such as written documents, web sites, web search, multimedia presentations.
- Problem solve options.

Critical Questions:

- What is the central word, concept, research question or problem around which to build the map?
- What are the concepts, items, descriptive words or telling questions that you can associate with the concept, topic, research question or problem?

Suggestions:

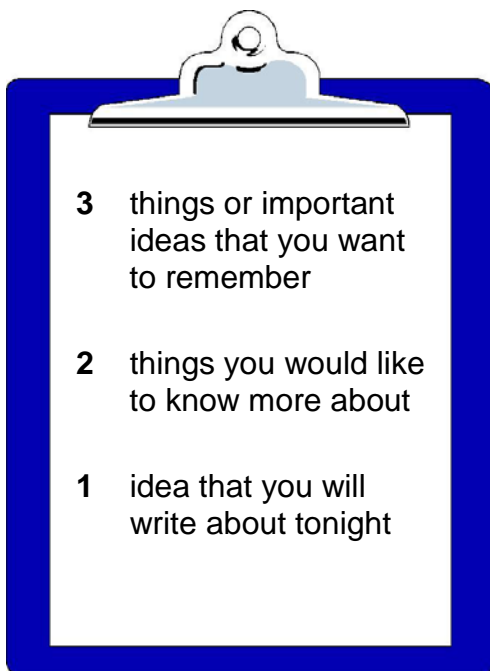
- Use a top down approach, working from general to specific or use a free association approach by brainstorming nodes and then develop links and relationships. Use different colors and shapes for nodes & links to identify different types of information. Use different colored nodes to identify prior and new information. Use a cloud node to identify a question.
- Gather information to a question in the question node.

3 – 2 – 1

3 – 2 – 1 offers a structured approach to students' learning logs or journals. At the end of class, after reading a story or viewing an audio visual presentation, or even after a field trip or assembly, ask students to respond in writing with a **3 – 2 – 1** structure.

Structured responses are a scaffold for success in writing. Asking learners for six pieces of information makes the task achievable and gives students a sense of accomplishment at completing the assignment.

Some possibilities include:



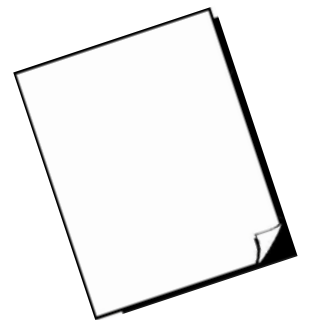
Variations:

- The **3 – 2 – 1** format can be easily adapted for activating and engaging. Before being introduced to a new topic, viewing a demonstration or reading a piece of literature, you can assign a **3 – 2 – 1** writing task. For example, you might ask students for **3** things they know about the topic, **2** predictions and **1** thing they're looking forward to.
- You can ask students about their own learning, or their group processes using **3 – 2 – 1**. For example, **3** strategies you used during this activity, **2** things you noticed about your own thinking, **1** thing you might do differently next time.
- Students often enjoy sharing their log entries with their peers. The logs make ideal vehicles for small-group discussions. The **3 – 2 – 1** gives the group work a specific focus and facilitates sharing. It gives students the opportunity to share successful learning strategies or particularly difficult concepts and ways to understand them.

- **3 – 2 – 1 plus 1:**

Each student creates his or her own **3 – 2 – 1** sheet. Students share their individual work with a small table group. As they listen to each other, group members place additional items in their **+1** columns. This variation reinforces listening skills and enhances the group's knowledge base.

- **3 – 2 – 1 plus 1** can be coupled with the Focused Reading Strategy as a powerful comprehension builder.



Strategies for Reading Comprehension

Selective Underlining

What Is Selective Underlining?

Well, there's underlining, and there's underlining selectively. [By the way, even though I'm using the word "underlining," you can feel free to know that that also means highlighting.] The way to make underlining useful as a tool for comprehension is for it to be strategic, selective, and purposeful. The underlining must be undertaken toward particular ends.

Do you remember how wonderful it was to discover the highlighter, perhaps when you were in college? I know that for me, I was more likely NOT to read the stuff I was highlighting. For some reason, that's the effect that a highlighter had on me. Or maybe I'd look back at the selection and find I'd pretty much colored the whole darn thing yellow. With selective underlining (and highlighting!), the idea is to underline ONLY the key words, phrases, vocabulary, and ideas that are central to understanding the piece. Students should be taught this strategy explicitly, given time and means to practice, and reinforced for successful performance.

How Can I Teach My Students to Selectively Underline?

There are several ways to go about it. You may be saying, "Selective underlining is all well and good, but have you eggheads up in the university forgotten that we use textbooks, and that our kids only get to use them for the year, but we have to use them at least five years??" That's a fair question, so how can you teach this strategy anyway?

1. First of all, let's realize that not every single bit of text you have students read is in a textbook and untouchable.
2. Second, consider seeking out appropriate content sources, such as newspapers, that students can indeed learn this strategy with while still pursuing meaningful social studies goals.
3. Third, think about how you can get around the problem of textbooks that can't be marked in. For instance, in order to teach the strategy, you might photocopy a page or two out of the text that students use and distribute it to them. Make an overhead of that selection for yourself. Model for them and guide them in practicing the strategy on the photocopies. Alternatively, if you have enough of the materials available to you, give each student a sheet of transparency film, some paperclips, and some overhead pens. Let them practice directly on their texts by using the transparencies.

Think about how this strategy would work when combined with Power Thinking. Students might put a box around Power 1 ideas; an oval around Power 2 ideas; and an underline under Power 3 ideas.

Students might also use different colors in their underlining. Power 1s could be blue, Power 2s could be red, and Power 3s could be green.

Practice selective underlining for different purposes: underline key vocabulary and its definitions or explanations, and use this as an opportunity to focus on how authors reveal the meaning of new terms within the context. Or have students underline cause and effect. Or ask them to underline the facts and concepts that support a particular viewpoint, as might be useful with a strategy such as Opinion-Proof. Remember, you're limited only by your own imagination with teaching and applying selective underlining.

Focused Reading

Focused Reading promotes active engagement with text. It encourages students to think while they read and to compare and contrast their current knowledge with the information that they are encountering in new material. It is an excellent strategy for both in-class and homework reading assignments.

Directions:

1. Introduce students to the focused reading symbols.
 - √ = Got it. I know or understand this.
 - ! = This is really important or interesting.
 - ? = I don't understand this or this does not make sense.
2. Assign a text passage for reading and marking with the three symbols. Using photocopied text for early trials of this strategy allows students to mark right on the paper. Later they can transfer the symbols to notes they keep while reading textbooks and other printed materials they cannot write on.
3. After reading, student teams of three to four students gather to compare their responses.
4. Student teams select sample items from each category to share with the class.

Variations:

Have student teams use the **3 – 2 – 1** strategy to organize their sharing. They select 3 √s, 2 !s and 1 ? to share. Responses can be put on charts for visual display.

Focused Reading

√ Got it. I know and or understand this

! This is really important or interesting

? I don't understand this or this does not make sense.

Say Something

Say Something is a paired reading strategy developed by Jerome Harste for constructing meaning from text-based information. Through structured exchanges, partners develop relationships between new information and what they all ready know or believe. Thinking out loud, supported by attentive listening, increases individual and shared understanding.

Directions

1. Partners read silently to a designated stopping point. When both students are ready, they each have a turn to “say something” about what they have just read.

The ‘something’ might be a question, a brief summary, a key point, an interesting idea or a new connection.

2. Once they have reached a designated stopping point and have each had an opportunity to “say something”, the process continues. Students read to the next stopping point, and so on, until the selection is completed.
3. Once all students are ready (or after a predetermined time period), the class engages in a discussion of the text.

Variation

Key Concepts / Key Ideas is a variation of Say Something. In this version, partners first work on their own, identifying what they believe are some key concepts and key ideas in the text. This method encourages individual thinking and provides peer support.

Directions:

1. Establish learning pairs.
2. Each partner reads the selection silently, highlighting words or short phrases that capture important or interesting ideas.
3. Once both partners have read through and marked their text, they share and discuss highlighted items, taking turns initiating an idea for exploration.
4. After a designated amount of time, open the discussion to the entire class by having partners share some of their new thinking and questions.

