



Brainwriting

Brainwriting is an idea-generating technique that combines features of the various approaches to brainstorming. As in the slip method, participants record their own ideas. Like freewheeling and round-robin, brainwriting provides participants the opportunity to build on others' ideas.

Compared to brainstorming, brainwriting tends to result in somewhat fewer, but more fully developed, ideas.

How to Use Brainwriting

In the most common approach to brainwriting, participants sit around a table and each writes his or her ideas on a sheet of paper. Members then place the papers in the center of the table to exchange their own with someone else's. Examining the others' ideas, participants try to build on them or come up with entirely new approaches. After an agreed-upon time period the papers are collected. Ideas can be clarified and evaluated at that time or later.

As a variation, some groups use large index cards, writing a single idea on each. Cards are then passed to the person on the right, to stimulate modifications or new ideas.

An alternate approach, sometimes referred to as the "gallery method", involves posting several flip chart sheets (at least two per participant) around the room. As above, each member writes his or her ideas on the sheets for 20 to 30 minutes. Participants then walk around the room for 10 to 15 minutes, reading the ideas recorded by others. For the final 20 minutes or so, members return to their sheets to continue writing, stimulated by and building on others' ideas.

When to Use Brainwriting

Like brainstorming, brainwriting is a powerful tool for the expansion phases of the problem solving process. There are several situations, however, where brainwriting may offer clear advantages over brainstorming:

- => When it's important to get more carefully thought-out ideas.
The very act of writing down one's ideas encourages people to think them through, to express them more clearly and completely.
- => If previous brainstorming sessions have been monopolized by one or two dominant members.
- => Brainwriting provides everyone equal time to think and write, and it virtually eliminates pressure toward group conformity.
- => If the group tends to "socialize" too much.
Brainwriting provides a very strong task orientation that some groups may need to keep them focused.
- => If there is strong conflict within the group, or if the topic is highly controversial. Although conflict can be beneficial to a group, it must be carefully managed by the leader or facilitator. Brainwriting can be successful in tense, highly charged situations where brainstorming may not be manageable.