

Fish & Wildlife Service – National Conservation Training Center
Critical Writing/Critical Thinking Follow-up Web Series CSP3167OL
Prewriting: Effective Use of Brain Storming and Mind Maps
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Speakers: Karene Motivans (KM)

[audio start]

Slide #1 [Welcome slide]- KM: Hello everyone, I am Karene Motivans and I am a course leader for the Critical Writing/ Critical Thinking course at NCTC. This webinar is on the topic of Prewriting: Effective Use of Brain Storming and Mind Maps.

Slide #2 [Title Slide] During our Critical Writing / Critical Thinking class here at NCTC we spend time encouraging you to engage in Prewriting as a vehicle to engage Critical Thinking. Thinking through all sides of your writing assignment and thinking about how to engage your reader is the first best step to clear and understandable documents. There is an aspect of creativity and innovation that is exhibited by pre-writing as well. It can help you come up with an angle or perspective for your audience.

Definition of: PRE-WRITING – I am referring to all the generating of ideas before you begin typing a document on the computer. Some of us use pencil and paper, a white board, or an excel spreadsheet. It is an often- neglected step and today I'm going to show you some tools like brainstorming and mind-mapping.

Slide#3 [What will we cover? Objectives] – KM: Here's what I intend on covering today. (Read objectives off slide) Some of you have sent me emails that you are interested in MIND MAPPING, so we are going to focus on that technique today.

Slide #4 [Picture of tomato] –KM: So first, a story. Think back a few years...Remember those old television ads that were selling kitchen knives where the commercial showed someone trying to cut with a dull knife and tomato guts splattered everywhere? Then, the commercial showed another knife effortlessly creating a plateful of perfectly sliced tomatoes. Do you remember that? The commercial was really trying to sell a knife, but I don't remember hearing much about the knife! I didn't hear about the type of steel or construction of the knife or the length of the blade or the width of the handle... The ad makers figured out that what **we viewers** were attracted to buying was the promise of those perfect tomato slices. No doubt, productive brainstorming sessions uncovered the tomato angle for this commercial. This example can be translated to your pre-writing.

Slide #5 [Benefit of pre-writing] - KM:If you spend time brainstorming to uncover the subtle benefits and desires of **your reader** you will be more successful when communicating your ideas. Information or facts alone are not as effective as synthesizing meaning for your reader. The first benefit of spending time preparing to write is...

Really getting to the heart of an issue. Consider you writing issues – conflicts with land use and endangered species OR sorting through issues for planning documents... Is there a way for you to uncover deeper angles for your reader? Is there an angle that might resonate with THEM better?

Oftentimes your reader is the decision maker. How can you get to the heart of the issue for them? Let's examine a way to find out.

Slide #6 – KM: Here is an example of pre-writing that is all about asking questions before your first draft begins. This diagram lists questions to ask your decision maker before you spend a lot of time writing something that totally doesn't hit the mark. You can imagine how far you could get off track if you do not review your basic approach with the decision maker. We have observed that Service writers tend to try to work quickly on a document, rushing to get the first draft done and allow others to edit and re-write it. This includes the decision maker, who gets frustrated that the document lacks connection to his or her approach. And ultimately, rushing the draft reflects poorly on the author for their lack of upfront analysis.

So, another benefit of pre-writing is using your time at the front end of the document instead of the reviewing end...

Slide #7 [Benefit of Prewriting]– KM: Pre-writing involves talking to your decision maker first! Or it means asking questions to find out the real motivations of your reader, whoever that may be.

Slide #8 [Prewriting Brainstorm] – KM: Brainstorming is all about generating ideas to answer those critical questions before writing. These ideas can lend themselves to follow-through in writing. Often we brainstorm in small office teams in front of a white board. Someone takes the smelly marker and jots down all the material everyone shouts out. We can even connect online with your teams virtually to brainstorm.

Involve a broad range of people in your brainstorming to bring out the creative angles. Consider getting those that may disagree with what you have to say into your brainstorming. I have attached two handouts accompanying this webinar on brainstorming, so I won't go into detail on the process here. A couple of tips: Get a person on the team who may disagree with you to give you ideas. You'll see more tips in the handouts.

Slide #9 [Benefit of Prewriting]– KM: Your analysis of an issue will be deeper from brainstorming with large teams on the most complex problems. You can make a safe place for innovation that will make your written material more powerful and engaging.

Slide #10 [Explore the Issue] – KM: To start with EXPLORE AND DEFINE your issue. Think about your reader or audience first – what is their opinion of this problem? What is their knowledge of the issue? Be sure you are very clear on your purpose – stay on track by actually writing it down. Take a look at how you, the author, want to portray yourself and what you represent. The overall context for this document includes issues like your authority to make a decision or recommendation on the problem and the standards you follow, and the policies and guidance you are operating within.

After the basics are defined, **say** what it is you want to achieve. Every document we write can be boiled down to a simple statement that can be analyzed. Put your issue down on paper. Operationalize your issue. Once you do, you can generate ideas.

After some centering you are ready to get creative and encourage yourself to generate ideas, make connections. This is really the fun part. Keep the writers triangle in mind. I like to draw myself a little triangle and label the

Slide #11 [Who wants to brainstorm?]- KM: Should we look at mind-mapping and try a simple one? Some of you asked for additional information on mind-mapping, so I will delve more deeply into this tool.

Slide #12 [color mind map]- KM: This is a mind map on global warming. It's a complex issue but it's a beautiful mind map. Even the colors mean something. The architecture of mind maps are specific: the central idea is in the middle and the brainstormed ideas radiate out from it. When we look at this one here and see the branch labeled "Travel" – it is an element that can be broken out in the context of global warming. Lots of ideas (see green circles) that include different modes of travel. Another branch called "Home" contains another set of ideas. This is a pretty and interesting mind map. The cartoon drawings help you visualize and all thinking is contained in a single view.

Slide #13 – KM: What is mind mapping? A technique (read slide). Since you can see all the brainstorming in one view (looks different than a typed page) on a single page, and when you see your entire subject in one view, your brain takes that in differently.

Slide #14 [color mind map]- KM: This is a mind map about mind mapping. According to the creative thinkers who popularized mind mapping, they describe how mind maps shows the shape of the issue – the relative importance of individual points and the way in which facts relate to each other. They are more compact than conventional notes, making them quick to review just by glancing at one. You can start to pull out what might be more important. They are said to engage more of the brain and in the process of assimilating and connecting facts compared to conventional notes. The central idea in the middle says "Mind Maps". The elements of mind maps are written here (see circles) color, structure, lines, paper, images and words. From what we see here, what might be the important thing to emphasize? Color and Words pop out. The way it's drawn helps to shape what's important. Areas that pop out for me as I view this are under the category of Words – the elements Key and Big are emphasized as is the large key (circled).

Slide#15 [color time management]- KM: This is a beautiful mind map on the subject of time management. It looks like it was constructed by an artist! Look at some of the major subdivisions. Faster. Delegation WorkLife Balance. Let Go. Etc. These labeled subdivisions start to help you arrange your first document draft and select the materials you want in and out. You can take this mind map and work out your document outline. Work-Life Balance (circled) can be an emphasis for you and you can create a whole other mind map for this topic. Which of these subheadings might be combined? This is like organizing and chunking content before you write.

This deluxe version is very engaging with lots of visual impact. The use of color helps to separate different ideas. And the use of images can help you remember information – like a mnemonic. We are very visual creatures, so images help us keep things in mind.

Slide #16 [gray time management]- KM: Let's look at another example on the same topic. Here we have a mind map without the high visuals.

We see here a treatment of RESEARCH on time management skills. The issue is in the center, subdivisions are labeled (and numbered in this case) and as you dig deeper into a subject and uncover another level of information, draw these out (see number 3) Notice that numbers are used here rather than the visuals. The first tier of information is 2 (circled) and off these tiers

are the 3's. Lastly, individual facts are off the main line and marked with a 4 (circled). This example is another way to organize a mind map and use it as a prewriting tool.

Slide #17 [hand drawn map]– KM: I used a mind map to put this webcast together. It doesn't have all the colorful drawings, it's kind of sloppy, but it was just as useful for me. Having all my notes on one page helped me see an arrangement and order to my examples and helped me select only the choicest bits. I started with "What are the benefits of pre-writing?" It got me brainstorm on this topic in a way that I wouldn't have if I was just writing straight notes. Let's take this idea as an example (circled) "It gives you a chance to think about what your reader wants". I got to thinking about this and that led me to thinking about the perfectly sliced tomato example.

Slide #18 [colored Queen map]– KM: Don't ya love these things??!! This one is on the one royal subject - the Queen Mum herself. It's organized by decade. There are lots of examples out there of mind maps and I encourage you to try one yourself.

Slide #19 [blank issue]– KM: So, using this basic construction, We have our central issue in the center. You can add a major subdivision, add a branch off. Use colored pens and try to draw images that represents your topic. Think about an issue that you can try to put to use today. See if you can generate new ideas and use this branching construction. Highlight new (AHA!) ideas that are new and pop them out with color and pictures as you explore your issue. It can be a fun activity with a team to get everyone brainstorming.

Slide #20 [outline]– KM: Here is what I love about mind mapping – your document outline practically writes itself. This linear outline would not have been good to use at the beginning, but you can use it after the mind map exploration.

Slide #20 – KM: I hope this taught you a little bit about how mind maps are constructed and you could follow how to make one. There are sources of materials out there for you learn more. The guru for mind mapping is Tony Buzan; he popularized it. There is a lot of material on his website. There is a mind mapping software tool.

Thank you very much!