

beingstorming *grant miller*
foreword by michael radelich



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foreword to *beingstorming*

White. A blank page or canvas.

Where do you begin your writing, and *how* do you begin?

“The art of making art,” as Stephen Sondheim has Georges Seurat sing, “is putting it together, bit by bit.” In Paris, Seurat composed his paintings by dabbing his bits, pointillistic pats of oil paint, onto his canvas. Using your pen and words, why not fill a blank page with *your* bits—words, snippets, phrases, or sentences.

Grant shows how enjoyable and liberating it can be for a writer to employ the small steps of brainstorming. Using only a few select words at a time, soon you can begin to fill that blank page, bit by bit.

Sometimes, I freewrite my bits:
*the sky rains rivulets of ideas, soon
bunched in loops and lines that are
joined or split, then read, yelled, or
left silent. Now my synapses are
supple.*

I’ve also clustered my bits into bunches: *drops of water spring into an ocean; seeds sprout into an oak forest; drips splat into a Pollock.* There—my fingers are limber.

Or I get more creative and haiku my bits:

*Clouds gather; rumble
Flash strike boom crack thunder rain
Plains soaked, soon lush.*

These ideas just can’t be stopped!

Seurat picked up his brush and painted a smudge, a line, a burst. Why not pick up your pen and write a word, a phrase, a poem? “Make a hat,” as Sondheim tells Seurat, “where there never was a hat.”

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40

Simulated images of the brain resemble a vast and rigid countryside, or some unexplored planet illuminated by flashes of lightning that allow the viewer brief glimpses of the landscape of thought. Synapses fire. It looks much like a brainstorm. But what about this: a dull pain behind the eyes. Obsessive scratching. Pacing. Seemingly empty words flow through swollen fingertips. The clucking of the tongue. The wall. The tightened chest. The reading and note-taking, thinking, the ineptitude of language to stand in for thought, the futile attempt to pull concepts from the sky like snowflakes that melt as soon as they touch the page. Brainstorming quickly becomes bodystorming becomes beingstorming in this attempt to arrange ideas into that sluggish dialectic that is the writing process.

But are there ways out of, or ways into, this blank page?

There are.

Brainstorming(orbeingstorming, whichever you like) is the first stage of the writing process and is often referred to as prewriting, that is, writing before writing. All stages of the writing process are similar in that one can find support during any stage by visiting the Writing Center. But this stage is special in that this is the stage where Spellcheck becomes irrelevant, the stage where one's internal editor goes on a short vacation to a sunnier place. Because brainstorming is just that: a storm. Ideas of raindrops fall indiscriminately, black clouds of freeflowing thoughts roar thunder and strike lightning where they may, without reason, and leave the blank page ravaged with tiny treasures of thoughts and ideas. And with any process or ritual, there are ways to conjure up this storm.

freewriting

Freewriting is my personal favorite way to get ideas on a page this is what you do just set a timer maybe and start writing and don't stop for anything until the timer goes off do not edit do not worry about grammar or punctuation do not worry about anything but getting those ideas out of your head and onto the paper or screen or whatever if you get stuck just write the same word over and over and over and over again until something comes and when you do go back through and highlight everything that may be relevant to your topic it is a wonderful way to go about it but it isn't for everybody so let's look at some other ways we might go about it

clustering

Go through
your syllabus
your reading
your notes
your mind

and jot down
everything that
seems relevant

42

this may look like
a strange free-verse

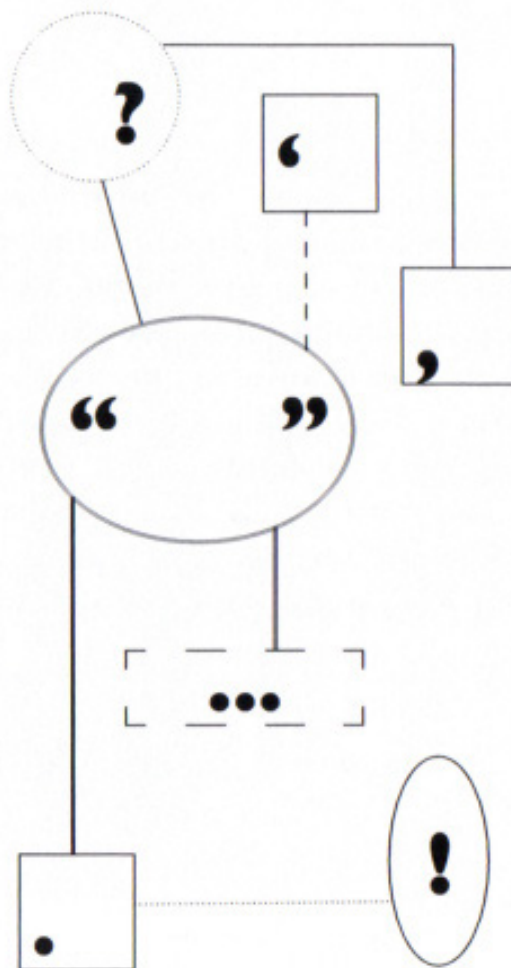
poem
or perhaps,
a to-do list

of ideas so one can
gather
them
into
murky puddles
with which one will
build
a

sandcastle

concept maps

Take out a piece of paper and
write down your main ideas
and circle them. Look for links.
Draw lines between ideas. Break
out the watercolors and paint
your ideas and how you might
translate them into words. The
more ideas you put in circles,
the more your ideas will come
together into something you
can work with.



These are simply a few examples of how to engage with brainstorming (beingstorming), this first stage of the writing process. The process can be sluggish, and it is the brainstorm that bridges the gap between thoughts or ideas and a blank page or screen. The brainstorm is the ante, the beginning, the blueprint. The space where the ideas form and solidify, becomes words, which become sentences, which become paragraphs, which become your first draft.

This is just the beginning.

Trust the process.

Begin...