

Writing: Getting Started

Clustering, or graphical outlining, is a technique, which allows students, or any writers, to quickly explore and organize ideas as soon as they cross their minds. Many teachers and students may have used this approach before but may not have called it clustering.

With clustering, a topic is placed on the board or paper, and a circle, “bubble”, is drawn around it. The writer is then asked to free-associate the ideas that are generated by the topic. As new ideas come to mind, more bubbles are linked to the topic and in turn to the sub-topics as further extensions are produced. This process is continued until the writer spins out most of the possible extensions and must then make a choice. That choice will probably be one that engages the student’s imagination or passion.

Although this technique may be used with any topic, it may be easier, in early exercises, to begin with personal topics such as “influential people”, as seen in the video.

It is important to urge the students to keep pushing the ideas until they have significantly explored various possibilities, before choosing a starting point that simultaneously links to the core idea, while engaging the imagination.