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**Means of Brainstorming and Developing Paragraphs****Nuhail H. Saeed****Department of English****College of Education****University of Mosul****ABSTRACT**

This study tackles the ways in which Iraqi students of English as a foreign language (EFL) gather ideas to use for writing composition. Specifically, the study deals with brainstorming which has different techniques . Moreover , the study shows the different methods the students can use to write and develop their paragraphs after brainstorming. The aim is to present these brainstorming techniques and indicate which one(s) students prefer most .Furthermore , this study sheds light on the students' erroneous use of the brainstorming techniques. The result of the study revealed that Iraqi EFL students use listing most.

**1.Introduction**

Before starting to write a paragraph, writers think of and write down ideas that can be used to write their paragraphs. This is the first stage of the writing process in which writers change the thoughts in their minds into words on paper. There is no need to think about order or correctness, since no one (except the writer) is going to read now. Here, the objective is to produce as many ideas as possible. Brainstorming is a way of gathering ideas about a topic. As the cloud rains drops of water, your brain also rains ideas onto your paper. You write down as many ideas as you can whether they are good or not (Zemach and Rumisek,2003:6). Furthermore, students should be aware of the different brainstorming techniques and must be able to use them in a correct way to achieve good writing.

## **2.The Problem**

Some writers face difficulties in writing their paragraphs because they don't know the right way to start the writing process. In addition, they are not aware of the different ways to arrange their ideas that can be used to write the paragraph later on.

## **3.The Aims of the Research**

The research first aims at showing the different brainstorming techniques used by Iraqi EFL (English as a foreign language) students for writing a composition and the one(s) preferred by the students. Second, the study also sheds light on the students' erroneous use of these techniques. Third, this study aims at showing the different methods of developing a paragraph.

## **4.Hypotheses**

It is hypothesized that some writers are unaware of the different methods which can be used to write down their ideas that are going to be used later for writing and some writers use brainstorming methods in an erroneous way. Furthermore, these writers are not acquainted with the different methods of developing their paragraphs.

## **5.The Limits of the Research**

The data used for this study comprises two topics given to 40 second year students( 26 females and 14 males ) of the year 2011 , the Department of English , College of Education ,University of Mosul, the morning study. The students were asked to choose one topic and write a paragraph .These students had studied the brainstorming techniques before and they were asked to brainstorm ideas using a list, a map, or free writing.

## **6.Definitions**

Many linguists have shed light on the methods that can help writers to start

writing composition and force the random thoughts to rain out on the page. This in turn gives writers some concrete ideas that they can then arrange according to their logical relations. In addition, other linguists have tackled the ways that can be used for arranging sentences to develop the paragraph.

## 6.1 Brainstorming

Some linguists use the word “brainstorming” as the first step of prewriting which consists of different techniques . Zemach and Rumisek (2003:6) show that brainstorming includes : Making a list, freewriting , and mapping . Zemach and Islam (2005:22) add that there are six ways of brainstorming: Lists, word-maps, freewriting, discussion, double lists, and pair interviews. Others use the word “prewriting” instead of brainstorming to mean gathering ideas for writing. Fitzgerald (1993:2) talks about the techniques that help the writer get started. She mentions that prewriting consists of three ways to generate ideas for a paper : Using the 5 W’s(Which? Who? When? Where? Why?), freewriting , and clustering. Langan (2005:23) argues that there are many techniques of prewriting : Freewriting , questioning, list-making , clustering, and preparing a scratch outline.

Another view deals with the word “brainstorming” as one of the prewriting techniques. Ackley et al. (1988:20) reveal that prewriting is the first step of the writing process which includes three techniques: Freewriting, brainstorming, and charting. White (1997:63) states that there are five techniques writers have found helpful in developing their ideas about writing a topic which include: 1-Questions (the5W’s) 2-Reading and taking notes 3-Brainstorming (with others or by yourself) 4-Making an idea cluster or word web 5-Focused freewriting. Dietsch (2003:24) explains that prewriting is the first stage of the writing process which includes six invention techniques: Freewriting , clustering , brainstorming , list -making , scratch outlining on a computer, and questioning. Buscemi (2005:7) reveals that there are seven techniques to gather facts, ideas, and

opinions for writing :Listing , focused freewriting, clustering, drawing a subject tree, brainstorming, interviewing, and summarizing.

From the previous presentation, it can be noticed that linguists differ in their view of the word “brainstorming”. Fitzgerald (1993:2) and Langan (2005:22) use the word “prewriting” instead of brainstorming to mean gathering ideas for writing. Other linguists deal with this word as one type of prewriting techniques (White,1997;Dietsch,2003;Buscemi,2005). In this respect ,they show that brainstorming means making a list of ideas. On the other hand, Zemach and Rumisek (2003:6) and Zemach and Islam (2005:22) have another view. They show that brainstorming means gathering ideas which include different ways and this view is going to be adopted in this study because it is the best explanation of the word “brainstorming”.

As will be shown, linguists reveal that there are several different ways of brainstorming and the student is free to choose the way that works best for him/her. The brainstorming techniques are as follows:

### **1- Listing**

Listing is an effective way to move your brain . Here you think fast and without stopping . After you write the topic at the top of the page , list details that might be relevant using words or phrases , but don't write long

sentences .Write down as many ideas as you can about the topic and do not worry whether the ideas are good or bad and whether the ideas are placed in order or not (Zemach and Islam,2005:22).The following is an example of listing:

#### **The Sea**

water

cold air

people swimming  
 fish, bird  
 fishing  
 dangerous, families  
 cheap?  
 weekends  
 spend nice times  
 friends  
 summer  
 no school  
 many children

A double list can also be used for brainstorming when we compare two subjects. We use it to brainstorm ideas for the paragraph describing differences between two things like summer and winter, day and night ,etc. (Zemach and Islam , 2005:70). The following is an example of a double list:

### **Summer and Winter**

#### Summer

hot  
 dry and sunny  
 go swimming  
 a lot of picnics  
 school time  
 light clothes  
 I like it  
 go to the north  
 never study

#### Winter

cold  
 rainy and cloudy  
 go skiing  
 hide from rain  
 vacation  
 heavy clothes  
 I hate it sometimes  
 go to the mountains  
 study

do a lot of sports

few types of sport

travel abroad

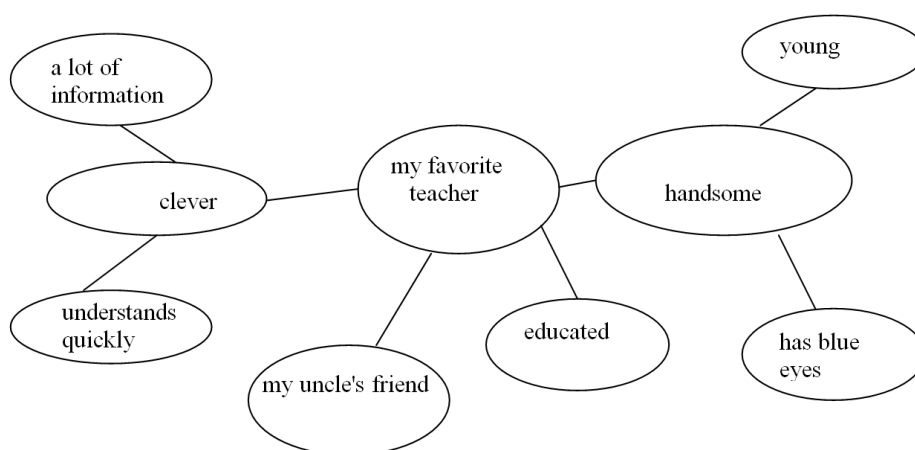
rarely travel

healthy

always catch cold

## 2- Mapping

Mapping is another type of brainstorming and it is also known as clustering, webbing, idea cluster, a word map, or diagramming. It is uncensored brainstorming combined with doodling (Dietsch, 2003: 27). It produces an overview of a subject and shows related ideas. It helps to generate ideas by showing how one idea leads to another. Here you use words or phrases. To start, write the topic in the center and circle it. Write another idea near it and circle it, then connect the two circles with a straight line to show that the two ideas are related. Repeat this procedure and add more ideas, circle them, and connect them. Here also do not worry about whether the ideas are good or bad and write as many ideas as you can (Langan, 2003: 27; Buscemi, 2005: 9). Below is an example of mapping:



**Figure 1: Mapping**

## 3-Freewriting

Freewriting means writing down whatever comes to your mind quickly and without stopping. Writing whatever you can think of

helps you to improve your writing fluency, and gives you ideas for your writing. Since no one else needs to read your thoughts now, do not worry about spelling , grammar ,or punctuation. If you make a mistake, just cross it out and continue writing using full sentences. Here jot down the thoughts and do not censor them and write continuously to keep a constant flow of thoughts because each idea may lead to another one.(Fitzgerald,1993:22).

White (1997:68) and Buscemi (2005:8) distinguish between focused freewriting and plain freewriting. Focused freewriting means that you already have a topic, so you do not let your mind wander freely. You keep it focused on a certain topic .While in plain freewriting , you do not have a certain topic to write about. Here is an example of freewriting:

### **The Sea**

There is water. The cold ear is nice. Some people swimming and There are birds and fish. It is dangerous for families .Is it cheap ? When do I go? In weekends to spend nice times. Usually go with my family or friends. We never get bored of playing . What about the sand? Can I make Castles ? When do I leave the beach and go home? My opinion .

### **4- Discussion**

Talking with others is a good way to gather and share new ideas with different people. Opinions may be different , but it is important to respect others' opinions. In a group, choose a topic and form opinions about it. In this way of brainstorming, which is also called "team brainstorming" (Zhao,2010:87), or "group brainstorming" (Brown and Paulus,2002:109) You can ask questions to help other students think more deeply. Someone in the group should write down all the opinions given by the members of the group (Zemach and Islam,2005:45).

## 5- Interviewing

Here we ask people appropriate questions to gather details (Buscemi,2005:13). Asking questions generates ideas about the topic like: Why? When? Where? Who? and How? (White,1997:20; Langan,2005:25).This technique has other names like ‘questioning’ (White,1997:24;Dietsch,2003:20;Langan,2005:25) or ‘pair interviews’ (Zemach and Islam, 2005:77).

### 5.2 Paragraph Development

Paragraph development means that each sentence in a paragraph must add some information until the controlling idea ( the central idea in the paragraph ) is fully explained (Chaplen, 1970:3; Zemach and Rumisek, 2003:17). So by adding more information, the writer can explain the main idea of the paragraph. To get a clear idea about how to develop a paragraph, the features of the good paragraph should be explained first, and then the means of paragraph development are going to be shown.

#### 1-The Paragraph

The paragraph is a group of 6-12 sentences about one main idea which is called the controlling idea or the central idea and all the sentences in the paragraph are related to it ( Chaplen, 1970:1; Zemach and Islam,2005:9;Crssley et al.,2011:45). Every paragraph must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Furthermore, the writer must choose a good topic sentence , i.e, a sentence which contains the main idea of the paragraph (Chaplen, 1970:8). Then the writer must develop his paragraph by adding more sentences to explain this topic sentence considering that every sentence should support it and should be related to it.

#### 2-Elements of the Good Paragraph

The good paragraph has three basic elements: the topic sentence, the supporting sentences, and the concluding sentence.

### **A-The Topic Sentence**

If the main idea is contained in one sentence, this sentence is called the topic sentence because it contains the topic which will be developed in the rest of the paragraph (Chaplen, 1970:8; Buscemi,2005:55). The topic sentence can be put in any position in the paragraph: at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end. Nevertheless, it is better to place it at the beginning of the paragraph to be a good guide for both the writer and the reader. In this position, the writer can decide what information to include or exclude in the rest of the paragraph .The reader can also expect what information he\she is going to read.

### **B-The Supporting Sentences**

Support sentences talk about or explain the main idea of the topic sentence and they are more detailed ideas that follow the topic sentence. They supply evidence in the form of facts, definitions, reasons, examples, or illustrations to convince the reader of the soundness of the claim, assertion, or opinion in the topic sentence (Dietsch, 2003:79 ; Zemach and Rumisek , 2003:17).

### **C-The Concluding Sentence**

Many paragraphs have a concluding sentence. The concluding sentence is usually the final sentence of a paragraph and should not introduce a new idea. It can finish the paragraph by: restating the topic sentence in a different way, summarizing the paragraph, giving advice, making a suggestion or prediction connected to the paragraph's topic( Dietsch, 2003:79 ; Zemach and Rumisek , 2003:19 ; Zemach and Islam,2005:29).

### **3-Features of the Good Paragraph**

Every paragraph must have two important features which are unity and coherence (Buscemi,2005:89):

### **A-Unity**

The good paragraph should contain one main or central idea and all of the sentences should be related to this idea. So the paragraph is unified if it contains only those details that help develop, explain, or support the central idea. Therefore, the paragraph must not have irrelevant ideas nor missing information (Chaplen , 1970:1; Buscemi,2005:89).

### **B-Coherence**

A paragraph is coherent if the sentences it contains are connected clearly and logically in an order that is easy to follow. There should not be gaps between ideas and the words and phrases should be arranged in the right places. Logical connections between sentences can be achieved by: using transitional devices or expressions like furthermore, then , and making reference to words, ideas, and other details the writer has mentioned earlier (Dietsch,2003:81; Buscemi,2005:91).

## **3-Methods of Paragraph Development**

There are many methods to develop a paragraph and these methods depend on its purpose. For instance, the writer can use the method of description to give details. If the writer wants to tell a story, he can use narration. Thus, the purpose can be descriptive, narrative, explanatory, persuasive, or any combination of these (Buscemi, 2005:22). Radaskiewicz (2002:65) shows that there are ten methods for developing a paragraph. They include the following:

## **1-Narration**

Narrative paragraphs tell a story or show events. The narrator usually tells who is the character in the story, what happens, when and where something is going on. It can include description and conversations between the characters of the story. The events in the story are usually arranged in a chronological order ,i.e. , what happens first is stated first (Dietsch,2003:86).

## **2-Description**

Sometimes the writer needs to give description details to explain a person, place, or thing to help the reader understand the physical object. The easiest way to gather details for description is to use the five physical senses :sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch (Forlini et al, 1990:466; Buscemi, 2005:123). A descriptive paragraph explains how things look, feel, taste, sound, or smell using adjectives (Zemach and Rumisek, 2003:25).

## **3-Process Analysis**

Process analysis is an explanation or description of sequential actions to show how to do something or how something happens. Here the sentences are arranged chronologically (Radaskiewicz,2002:70 ; Zemach and Rumisek, 2003:25).

## **4-Exemplification**

Ideas can be developed by presenting one or more specific examples that illustrate the main point (Radaskiewicz,2002:68). Dietsch (2003:163) mentions that a paragraph of exemplification or illustration presents a series of examples to support the main idea. An example is a specific person, place, thing, or event that supports an idea (Zemach and Rumisek, 2003:18).

## **5-Comparison and Contrast**

To develop a paragraph, the writer can use comparison by showing the similarities between two different things. If the writer wants to contrast, he/she shows the differences between two different things (Dietsch, 2003:186; Zemach and Rumisek, 2003:40).

## **6-Cause and Effect**

A paragraph can be developed by using cause and effect. The causes are the reasons for the outcome and the effects are the consequences or the results. Here we can identify the effect in the topic sentence and write about its causes. Or we write the causes in the topic sentence and then write about their effects ( Radaskiewicz, 2002:68).

## **7-Division**

Some ideas can be developed by explaining how something can be divided into smaller parts. An entity or concept can be easier understood by breaking it into its components or stages and then examining each in detail ( Radaskiewicz, 2002:69).

## **8-Classification**

The writer here demonstrates how the subject can be explained in terms of categories because classification places things in groups on the basis of characteristics they share. The word “type” often appears in classification paragraphs ( Radaskiewicz, 2002:70).

## **9-Reasons**

The development here involves explaining the reasons why something is true or should be true ( Radaskiewicz, 2002:70).

## **10-Problem / Solution**

Here the paragraph mentions or explains a problem, then discusses one or more solutions. Such paragraphs often include other means of development; for instance, description can be used to help the reader understand the problem. This type of writing mostly requires more than one paragraph(Radaskiewicz,2002:71 ; Zemach and Rumisek, 2003:50).

## **7.Results and Discussion**

As regards gathering ideas for writing, not all the brainstorming techniques mentioned above are suitable for examinations. Discussion and interviewing demand more than one participant to share ideas for writing a paragraph. As a result , the two techniques are not dealt with in the present study.

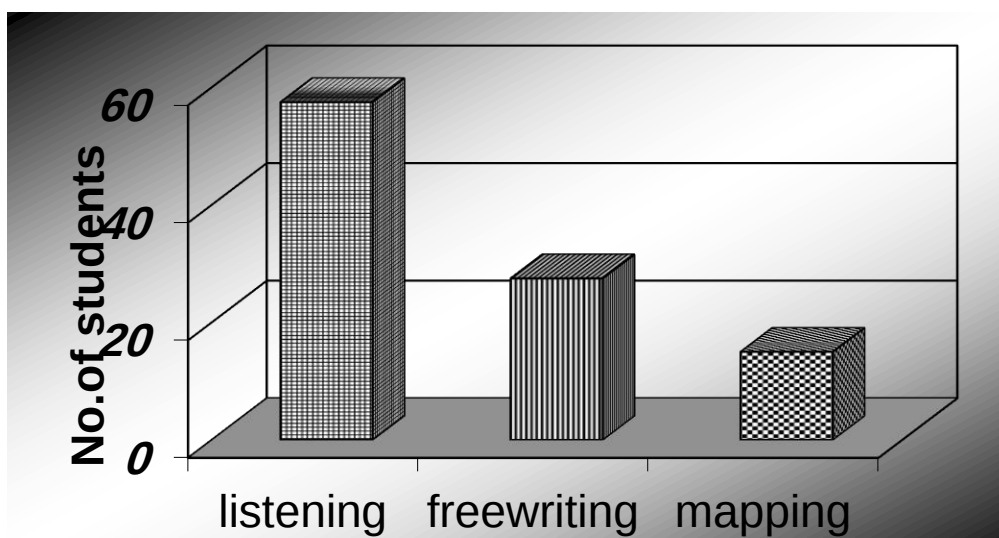
Therefore, the 40 students chosen for this study were asked to choose one of the following three brainstorming techniques: Listing, mapping, or freewriting . These techniques need only one person to generate ideas for writing and the students were already aware of these techniques since they had studied them previously in the first and second year.

After analyzing the students' writings ,and as it is shown in Table 1 and Figure 2 , 23 students (57.5% of the 40 students) chose listing. While 11 students (27.5% of the 40 students) chose freewriting and only 6 students (15% of the 40 students) chose mapping. Now if we look at the students' wrong performance in Table 1, we notice that 14 students (61% of the students who chose listing) used it in a correct way, while 9 students (39%) used it in a wrong way. Students who used this technique should have used words, phrases, or short sentences, whereas these 9 students used long sentences only, and this is wrong. Moreover, if we move to the other technique , i.e freewriting , we notice that 8 students ( 73 % of the

students who chose freewriting) used it in a correct way , while 3 students (27%) used freewriting in a wrong way . These 3 students wrote only one paragraph. Thus , they did not write the final version of the paragraph. In freewriting, students must have used complete sentences to write the first draft of the paragraph. Then they should re-write this paragraph again making the necessary changes and this is the second draft or the final version of their writing. As regards mapping, 6 students (100% of the students who chose mapping) used it in a correct way, while no one (0%) used mapping in a wrong way.

**Table 1: Students' preference for brainstorming techniques**

| Brainstorming Techniques | Number&Percentage of Students | Number&Percentage of Correct Performance | Number&Percentage of Wrong Performance |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Listing                  | 23 (57.5 %)                   | 14 (61 %)                                | 9 (39 %)                               |
| Freewriting              | 11 (27.5 %)                   | 8 (73 %)                                 | 3 (27 %)                               |
| Mapping                  | 6 (15 %)                      | 6 (100 %)                                | 0 (0 %)                                |
| Total                    | 40 (100 %)                    | 28 (70 %)                                | 12 (30 %)                              |



**Figure 2 : Students' preference for brainstorming techniques**

Regarding paragraph development, choosing a method to develop the paragraph depends on the topic sentence which restricts the information that the writer will add to explain this sentence. In addition, the writer can combine more than one method to develop the paragraph (Radaskiewicz, 2002 ; Zemach and Rumisek, 2003). Thus, the 40 students chosen for this study wrote different topic sentences to start their paragraphs. Therefore , they used different methods of development.

## **8. Conclusion**

Brainstorming is a good technique used for gathering ideas for writing in educational settings. It is an enjoyable exercise that is well received by participants. The study gave an answer to how well the different techniques of brainstorming are used by Iraqi EFL students and which type is the most preferable. The study showed that linguists explain that there are 5 brainstorming techniques: Listing, mapping, freewriting, discussion, and interviewing. The first 3 techniques require only one participant and this would be suitable for academic exams. Therefore, these 3 techniques were chosen to investigate which one is preferred most by students .

The study revealed that 57.5% of the students chosen for this study used listing, 27.5% used freewriting , and 15% used mapping. In addition, the study showed that 39% of the students who chose listing used it in a wrong way, 27% of the students who chose freewriting used it in a wrong way, while all the students who chose mapping used it correctly. These findings proved the hypothesis which has been put that some writers use brainstorming methods in a wrong way.

Concerning paragraph development, the study presented 10 methods and the writer's choice of the method depended on the topic sentence. In addition, the writer could use more than one method of development.

## 9.Suggestions

The techniques that require group interaction like discussion and interviewing are in need for further study. Moreover, the use of the internet for brainstorming can also be another field of investigation. The factors that affect the writer's choice of the suitable method of development is an important field of study which deserves a lot of attention.

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### ملخص البحث

تتناول هذه الدراسة طرق تجميع الأفكار لكتابة الأنشاء من قبل الطلاب العراقيين دارسي اللغة الانكليزية كلغة أجنبية. وعلى وجه الخصوص ،فهذا البحث يقوم بدراسة العصف الذهني ووسائله. تهدف الدراسة إلى عرض هذه الوسائل وإيجاد المفضلة منها لدى الطلبة. إضافة إلى ذلك، فالدراسة تلقي الضوء على الإستعمال الخاطئ لهذه الوسائل من قبل الطلبة. كما تبين الدراسة وسائل تطوير فقرة الكتابة التي يستطيع استعمالها الطلبة. أظهرت الدراسة أن طلاب اللغة الإنكليزية العراقيين يستخدمون وسيلة القائمة أكثر من باقي الوسائل.