Stuck?

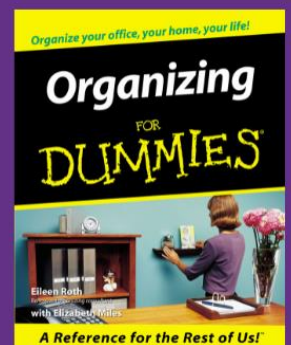## Breakthru Mental Blocks with

3 Methods to Develop Content

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Stuck?
Breakthru Mental Blocks with
3 Methods to Develop Content

Are you stuck trying to decide what to write about for your next blog or article?
Do you have a topic or idea but don't know how to fully develop it?

Here are 3 different techniques to unleash your logical and your creative side
to break through your mental blocks.

Technique 1 - Brainstorming

What is brainstorming?
Brainstorming is a free-form type of thinking that can take you in all kinds of directions. That's the whole point of brainstorming, to come up with different ideas.

It's a great technique when you need new ideas. And it's probably the easiest to do too.

What Tools do you Need?
The first tool is people. It's usually best to do with two or more people, because you can play off everyone's responses. The important thing is there is no commentary. That means brainstorming can be rapid fire.

So you might want to video record it to capture every idea. Zoom® is a free video service that makes it easy to do this, plus you can see each other. So it will be more fun.

In a large group – Brainstorm by groups sitting at the same table or put flip charts on the wall with 1 word. *(see below)*

If you brainstorm by yourself, write on a blank piece of paper – lined or unlined.
If you can't read your handwriting, use a computer to type quickly without thinking about any one word.

How to Brainstorm
Start with a topic. Someone says a word associated with the topic. The next person responds with a word related to the second word, etc. You are only allowed to say 1 word and the faster each person expresses their word after hearing someone else's word, the more fun it becomes. And when it's fun, you're more creative.

No explanations or comments are allowed during a true brainstorming session.
This is a rapid-fire session. Just say the next word that comes to your mind.

Below is an example.

>The first person says "dog".
>Someone else says "dish".
>Someone says "food".
>Someone else says "meat".
>Someone says "hot dogs".   (2 words – 1 item)
>Someone else says "hamburger".
>Someone says "corn on the cob".   (4 words – but 1 item)
>Someone else says "barbeque".

The conversation above strayed away from the word "dog" to "barbeque". That's the point of brainstorming-- thinking of different ideas.

Brainstorming is usually done out loud, but I've done it in a large group of people using flip chart paper hung on a wall. Everyone walked around the room from 1 paper to another adding their word to the ones already on that flip chart paper.

You can brainstorm by yourself by doing the same thing. Make a list of words going down a page and see where you end up. It doesn't matter if the paper is lined or unlined. Do not stop on any word, just keep writing.

 It's just better to have at least one other person to "play off of". Otherwise,
 you may limit your thinking.
(Would you believe I was an English major ending a sentence with "play off of"!)

Some people believe that brainstorming is logical and left brain. I beg to differ.
I think this is much more creative and right brain -- you are bouncing ideas off another idea, even if you are just bouncing off your own ideas.

Technique #2 - Mind Maps

This is a technique you may have heard about and even seen it, but you don't really know how to do it.

What's a Mind Map?
A mind map helps you see different alternatives so you can explore various options. When you are working with a mind map, it is as if you are outside of yourself looking in. Let's call it a bird's eye view. There's no judgment, your mind map might not even seem very relevant at first.

I was laid off twice within 8 months from two different association management firms. I was at a loss as to what type of job I wanted, but I knew I wasn't going to try for another layoff by staying in the same industry.

That was the first time I ever used a mind map, and it helped me discover that I wanted to change directions from being an executive assistant to becoming an organizing expert based on my strengths at previous jobs. It really helped me see things in a different light.

What Tools do you Need?
1. Blank piece of paper

2. Colored pencils or pens
   If you don't have either, you could use crayons.
   If you're not a crayon person, don't worry, you can do it all in one color.
   For some people, the color helps them. So if you want, you can use highlighters later.

3. Free Mind Map Software - optional
   Free Mind
   XMind
   Coggle
   MindMeister

How to Mind Map
This explanation will be a paper version so anyone can use a mind map. There are free software programs listed above. Some people prefer to draw their mind map on paper and others prefer a computer program.

Step 1:
Turn a blank piece of paper sideways or landscape. You can do it portrait, but I find landscape gives you more space away from the center oval.
Draw an oval on its side in the center of the blank piece of paper.
Make it about 2 inches wide.

In the middle of the oval write what you want to decide about in one or
two words, if possible. It could be "blog post", "article" or a specific topic. What's your
expertise in? That topic could be in the center oval.

Here's two examples:
After I was laid off twice in a row, I wrote JOB in the middle for my topic.
I wanted to decide what type of job I wanted to do next. For 3 of my favorite jobs, my sub-
topics were what I liked about that job. The fourth section was
about the importance of being home when school was over at 3pm.

I've also done a mind map with the word VACATION to decide where I wanted to travel next.
Follow along with the colors mentioned as you do each step. See the complete Mind Map of a
vacation at the end of the six steps to follow along.

Step 2:
From the oval, draw 4 separate lines outward toward the corners of the paper.
If you're using color, choose a color for these lines. This is the first tier. i.e., red.
The red lines should be from 4 – 6 inches angling towards the corners of the paper.
You may want more or less than 4 *red lines.*

*(Feel free to use your own colors. I'm just matching the Vacation example below so it's easy for
you to follow*.)

What ideas do you think about or what large categories fall under the word/s in the center
oval?   Put an idea or category on the top edge of the 4 red lines.

In the VACATION mind map – the red lines.
       Line 1 - Europe
       Line 2 - Cruises
       Line 3 - Riverboat
(I didn't have a 4ᵗʰ line when I made this example years ago.)

Step 3:
Concentrate on **one** of the 4 key topics you chose in Step 2.
Delve deeper and split one of the key topics into subtopics.
Choose a new color for these lines – i.e., blue.
Under each red line, add your subtopics with blue lines and name them.

In the Vacation example – the blue lines
     Europe (red line)   > Mainland
                >United Kingdom

Step 4:
Stay with this one red idea and blue subtopics before doing the other red lines.
 Can you break these subtopics down farther?
If so, choose another color, i.e., yellow.

In the Vacation example – the yellow lines
        Mainland > France, Germany, Italy, etc.
        U.K.   > England, Scotland, and Ireland.

Step 5:
Can you break your subtopics down even further?
Choose another color, i.e., white

In the Vacation example – the white lines
        France > Paris and Nice   (cities)

Step 6:
If you can break it down farther, do so now, OR
Start another breakdown with one of the other main red lines.

Review the diagram to see how each step works in the Vacation example.

Color
Many people prefer to create a mind map by hand to free their thinking and have fun by using different colors for variety. I think color also helps understand the hierarchy, and/or having things parallel (all the same levels).

When I first made this mind map, I did it with only one pen color. Color coding showed me where my hierarchies were not correct. I originally put Alaska and Hawaii in blue lines from the red Cruise line and skipped the U.S. It wasn't until I color coded, that I noticed I had missed the bigger country category.

 So if you do use one pen, I suggest color coding with highlighters to see if you missed any levels compared to the other "red lines."

It's harder to move things in a Mind Map, especially on paper. You have to white things out, start over, or cover up with a new piece of paper and tape. So you may want to use a software program to easily shift items and change colors easily!

Is Mind Mapping creative?
Some people think that mind mapping is more right brain and for creatives. I beg to differ.
I believe it's the exact opposite! I feel more linear doing a mind map because items are falling under other items.
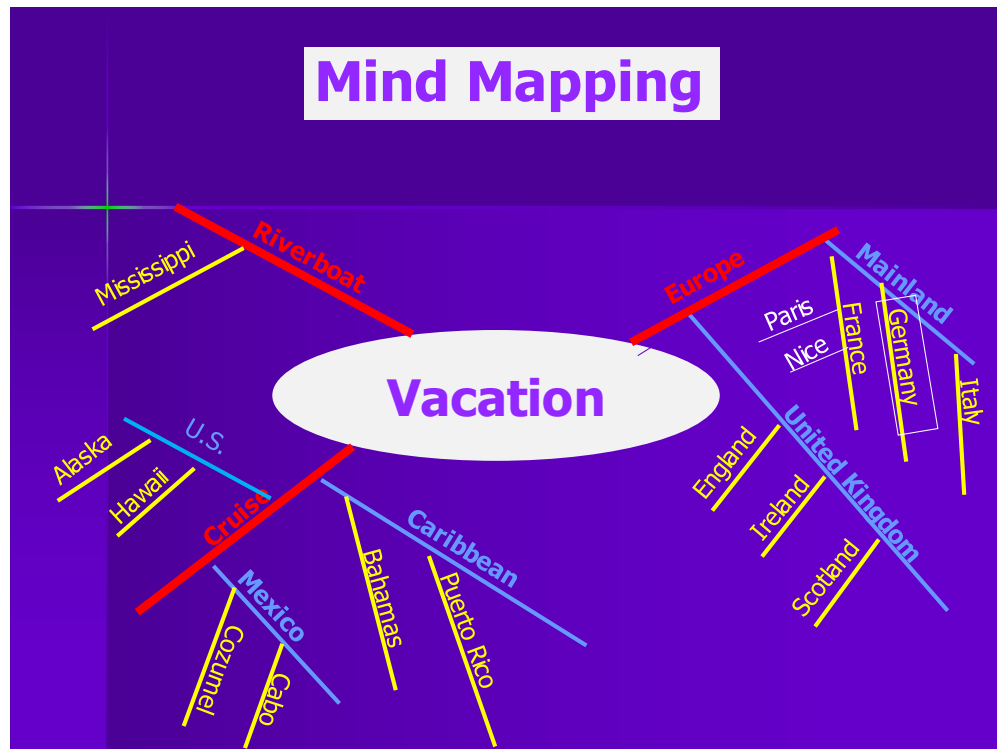
Technique #3 - Outlines

What is an Outline?
If you already have an idea or direction of where you are going, then use an Outline technique. This technique is very logical and linear.

If you choose to handwrite an Outline, you may find lined paper easier.

On the next page you will find an example of "the old-fashioned" Outline with Roman Numerals, the alphabet and numbers. It's an outline of this guide.

What Tools do you Need?
You can easily write this on a lined piece of paper. However, if you make a mistake or want to shift something into a different category, you will need to use whiteout or possibly start over.

A second way is to do it on the computer in a Word or even Power Point program. At least then it's easier to insert, delete or move items around.

A better, faster and more efficient way is to use a spreadsheet - Excel or Google Sheets. Even adding columns for subtopics can be helpful, and it's easier to keep items aligned.

How to Outline
The Roman Numeral outline example is "old school" but the idea is very useful. In writing this report, it kept me consistent by always talking about the 3 key items under each of the 3 methods.

> What is it?
> What Tools?
> How do you do it?

Instead of doing Roman Numeral I, II, III, IV, start an Outline using either a Word Program or Excel or Google Sheets which are spreadsheets.

There are several advantages to using the computer, the main one may even be that it's not easy to read your handwriting!

- ❖ You can move items up and down.
- ❖ You can drag an item to where you want it to be.
- ❖ You can easily change headings, groupings, or their order.
- ❖ You can add rows or columns for subtopics.

Make the main headings first and then you can add the items under them if you are using the computer. You can easily make changes afterwards.

Roman Numeral Outline

Intro
- **I.   BRAINSTORMING**
    - A.   What is it?

    - B.   What Tools?
        1. people
        2. paper
        3. flip charts

    - C.   How to Brainstorm
        1. two people
        2. group - flip chart
        3. by yourself

- **II.   MIND MAPS**
    - A.   What is it?

    - B.   What Tools?
        1. paper
        2. colored pencils or pens, crayons
        3. software - free
            a. Free Mind
            b. XMind
            c. Coggle
            d. MindMeister

    - C.   How to do it
        1. step 1 - oval
        2. step 2 - 4 red lines
        3. step 3 - blue lines
        4. step 4 - yellow lines
        5. step 5 - white lines
        6. step 6 - more subtopics or start over with the next red line

    - D.   Color Coding

- **III. OUTLINES**
    - A.   What is it?

    - B.   What Tools?
        1. lined paper + whiteout
        2. word program on the computer
        3. spreadsheet

    - C.   How to Outline
        1. paper or Word program with Roman Numerals: I, II, III
        2. Excel or Google Sheets spreadsheet program
        3. caps- initial caps – lowercase

Conclusion

To view the Outlines faster and easier, try some of these techniques:

TOPICS: All caps, bold and centered on the spreadsheet version
Leave 1-2 blank lines between each main topic.

Subtopics: **Initial caps**
Leave 1-2 blank lines after Subtopics with specific items underneath them.

specific Items: **all lowercase**
indented under the Subtopics   OR
in a separate column

The next page has an Outline of this guide in a spreadsheet format.
You can see how the items above are utilized in different ways. Some are indented and others are in a separate column so you can see the difference.

The spreadsheet is also much easier to move items around to change the order or add or delete items than using a handwritten outline or even a Word program where you have to watch for alignment too.

The red notes on the spreadsheet are not actually part of the spreadsheet but comments about the style used in that area.

Spreadsheet   Outline

INTRO	**RED are comments**
BRAINSTORM	
What is it?	
What Tools?	
people	indents
flip Charts - large group	
paper - by self	
How to Brainstorm	
MIND MAP	
What is it?	
What Tools?	
paper	indents
colored pencils or pens or crayons	
free software - optional	
Free Mind	2nd indents
X Mind	
Coggle	
MindMeister	
How to Mind Map	
step 1 - oval - main topic	separate column
step 2 - 4 main lines	red
Step 3 - subtopics	blue
Step 4 - subtopics	yellow
Step 5 - subtopics	white
Step 6 - subtopics	OR Step 1 new red line
Color Coding	
OUTLINE	
What is it?	
What Tools?	
paper -lined	indents
Word program	
spreadsheet	
How to Outline	separate column
paper or Word program	I,A,1,a
Excel or Google Sheets	
caps - initial caps - lowercase	TOPIC - Subtopic - specifics
CONCLUSION	

Conclusion

If you have no idea where you are headed,   choose the Brainstorm technique.
If you have some idea of where to go,   choose the Mind Map technique.
And if you know where you're going,   choose the Outline technique.

Brainstorming is more creative.
Mind Mapping is a combination of logical with creative.
Outlining is completely logical.

It's nice to have options to come up with ideas or content. If you try one and you're still having difficulty to develop new ideas, try a different one.

So what are you waiting for?   **The train is leaving the station!**

Jump on whichever train you want:

    The blue train is for Brainstorms.
    The maroon train is for Mind Maps.
    The orange train is for Outlines.

One is always at the train station. Choose one today and a different one tomorrow.
Just pick one and start chugging down the track!

<center>

Have fun organizing your ideas!

Eileen Roth

</center>

PS
This logical, organizing expert just created a color-coding system by talking about colors. That was creative brainstorming in my head.   I've never used this phrase before - "The train is leaving the station" … and suddenly I had the idea of
color-coded trains with alliteration. (and yes I have a model railroad train hobby).

<center>

Logic meets Creativity - or is it -   Creativity meets Logic?

</center>

Everything in its Place®

Eileen Roth
Your Tour Guide for Success

Author

As the author of **Organizing For Dummies®,** Eileen Roth demonstrates how to be more productive, reduce your stress, and save time and money   Eileen named her company Everything in its Place® because she truly believes that you can find a place for everything.

Eileen is a national speaker, trainer and productivity expert in the areas of:

| Office Organization | Home Organization |
| Time Management | Student Organization |

She helps people learn how to put everything in its P.L.A.C.E.™ This reduces stress and people find things WHEN they need them. In fact Eileen Roth's organizing principles are simple to remember, easy to implement, and maintenance is minutes a day to stay that way.

Eileen Roth's background stems from over 15 years in office and association administration. Clients include corporations, associations, and research facilities such as: Argonne National Labs, Northwest Airlines, the Paper Industry Manufacturer's Association, Wisconsin Bankers Association, ABA-New England and TAP Pharmaceuticals.

Major National Media		*Business Publications*
Today Show	Real Simple	Fast Company
Oprah	Self	Successful Meetings
	Reader's Digest	Office Pro
	Self	Event Solutions
	Men's Health	ASTD's Training & Development (ATD)

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