

Nuts and Bolts

It Was a Dark and Stormy Night . . . In Your Brain!

Now that it's time to get down to it, let's begin at the beginning, shall we? Seems a reasonable thing to do.

Picture this: lightning strikes. Thunder booms. Rain pours. Wind howls. Cats and dogs claw and nip at each other as they plummet from the sky. People run about with folded newspapers held above their heads, cursing their stupidity for not bringing an umbrella, even though the weatherman warned of showers. (But when is the weatherman ever right?)

Now picture this pandemonium happening *inside your head!*

It's called brainstorming, but don't worry, you don't need to wear rubber boots to do it. Brainstorming is the act of freeing your imagination to think of as many story ideas as you can while your hand records these ideas on a piece of paper. It's a great place to start before you begin writing, whether you already have a great story idea or have no idea what to write about at all. Ideas, after all, don't grow on trees. People often ask me,





But that's not really true: Walmart's selection of ideas is sadly lacking these days, so I brainstorm. Here's how you can, too!

What you need:

- ✓ Your imagination (pretty much a necessity at every stage of writing).
- ✓ A quiet, comfortable room, or the superhuman ability to block out the crying baby seated next to you on the bus.
- ✓ Pen/pencil/marker/crayon/lump of coal.
- ✓ Paper (writing on the walls is not a good idea — just ask the four-year-old me, or my mother).
- ✓ A stopwatch. Yes, a stopwatch. Okay, a regular old watch will work, too. What do you need a stopwatch for? Hold on — you'll see soon!

How to do it:

1. Get comfy in your quiet room, or block out the crying baby on the bus.
2. Decide on a reasonable amount of time to brainstorm. Five to seven minutes is usually sufficient. Set a stopwatch (see?), or jot the end time down on the top of your paper as a reminder.
3. Write a topic for your story in the centre of the paper and circle it. This can be very short ("vampires") or a little more detailed ("female high school student falls for male vampire"). It can even be a quick drawing, like mine:



4. Clear your mind. This is easier for some people than others. For me, it's remarkably easy. For a smart cookie like you, it's probably staggeringly difficult. Sit back, close your eyes, take a few deep breaths and feel all your cares and concerns and crying babies slip away.
5. Now, here's the fun part. Pick up your pen and write down anything that comes to mind. Draw lines and circles to connect related ideas. Do this as quickly as possible, using abbreviations and shorthand, and whatever you do don't stop to think about what you've jotted down — in fact, don't think at all! Just write, write, write.

JOEL'S
BRAINSTORM!



What is it?



I'm not sure. It must be modern art.





- Once the time or your ideas run out, you're all done. Take a look at what you've written. It won't all be perfection (or even make sense), but I guarantee you'll find something in your brainstorming that will spark your creative lightning!

Now, while you enjoy a silly interview with Adrienne Kress, I'll be writing a best-selling novel about a water-skiing, Canadian Idol-watching, giraffe-loving vampire and the girl who falls for him despite the fact that he's, um, a water-skiing, Canadian Idol-watching, giraffe-loving vampire.