

Beyond Brainstorming: Stirring Stories in the Creativity Cauldron

Creating a template for an effective brainstorming group.

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I. Why brainstorming?

*Useful at all stages of career.

- Good for broadening story ideas when new
- Speeds up the creative process later on
- Kicks the Muse out of a rut
- Provides focus
- Expands the knowledge base by accessing experiences of several people

*Distinction between brainstorming and critiquing

- Critiquing is narrowing focus, looking for ways to improve
- Brainstorming is expansive, broadening, opening unexpected doors
- Keep these functions separate, even if you do both with the same people!

II. What can brainstorming help with?

- Basic ideas
- Developing plots and characters, story arcs, series
- Developing a germ of an idea into a whole story
- Motivations and goals
- Conflict
- Theme
- Pseudonyms
- Getting characters in and out of situations
- Group project themes (like joint blogs)
- Promotion ideas, publishing issues

III. Suggestions for Building a Brainstorming Group

*Start with several fairly harmonious, committed writers. Three to five is a good number—enough to avoid slipping into polarity, not so many as to be overwhelming.

*Develop ground rules for the group

- Respect each other's ideas
- Respect the story and its originator
- Decide what people should bring, whether it's written pages or vague ideas
- Start by each participant stating what she hopes to achieve from the session
- Think in terms of parity so everyone gets equal attention for her project
- When energy starts to flag, drop that project and move on to the next
- Take breaks to rejuvenate the energy:
 - Meals, tea breaks, jug wine,
 - Walks—park, beach, labyrinth,
 - Fun stuff like beading, on-line tarot readings (try www.facade.com),
 - Baking cookies, making soup, et al.

Beyond Brainstorming (Putney & Rice)

*It's useful to know your group strengths and weaknesses:

- You may be stronger on character, weaker on plotting, or whatever. Work at filling in the gaps, either consciously for current members, or bring in someone who is good with the weaker areas of the others.
- Be happy with each other's successes—writing is not a zero sum game
- Recognize that it's serious work, no matter how much you're laughing
- Be flexible and respectful of whatever project is on the table

IV: Techniques

Verbally kick one person's story or element around. She's responsible for taking notes.
Conference call for telephone storming session
E-mails to all. (This seems to work particularly well for storming book titles.)
Online live in a chat room
Free writing

V: History and Resources

--In 1941 Alex Osborn, four stages of brainstorming APPLIED IMAGINATION, 1953

- No criticism of ideas-- deferring judgment
 - Go for large quantities of ideas-- striving for quantity
 - Build on each others ideas-- seeking combinations
 - Encourage wild and exaggerated ideas-- freewheeling
- <http://www.skymark.com/resources/leaders/osborne.asp>
<http://www.brainstorming.co.uk/tutorials/historyofbrainstorming.html>

--Right brain/left brain:

<http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,22556281-661,00.html>
spinning dancer image

Many more techniques that we don't have the time to mention here, but here's a website, if you're curious: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/brainstorming.html>

www.maryjoputney.com

www.patriciarice.com

www.sarahgabriel.com

www.susanfraserking.com

www.wordwenches.com