



# BRAINSTORMING TECHNIQUES

## INPUT EXERCISES

An input exercise is one that asks brainstormers to focus on one area of the problem at hand in an effort to provide something to which participants can then react. The most effective input exercises focus on the human component of the problem. Below are a few input exercise ideas, but feel free to develop your own as you delve into the unique problem you are solving.

### AUDIENCES

Collectively, create a list of all of the different audiences that solving the problem will affect. Be specific as to who they are and what they do. Don't just list traditional demographics like "men over 40" or "upper middle class"; list occupations, belief systems, associations, or behaviors.

### BEHAVIORS

Write out the current behaviors of your audiences and then list how those behaviors WILL, MIGHT, and WON'T change after experiencing the solutions you will generate. These are subjective lists, so be open to opposing perspectives and suggestions. Let the list spark the conversation.

### DESCRIPTIVE WORDS

List words that describe the central object of the problem you are solving. Use adjectives to give that object more meaning, verbs to give it action. List the human characteristics of the object, like how it makes your audiences feel or what it may feel itself.



# IDEA WEBS

Creativity thrives on taking disparate ideas and mashing them together into something new. To get to a place where you can start to see disparate ideas and their potential together, try an idea web.

- 1 Take the central theme or subject of your problem and write it in the center of a whiteboard or large piece of paper. Circle the word and draw lines coming out of the circle.
- 2 At the end of each line, write a word that has something to do with the word in the center. This can be a descriptive word or it can be a supplementary term—it just has to have a relationship to the word it is connected to.
- 3 Do this a number of times until you have a few words surrounding the center word. Circle each of those and do the same thing to them.

Use the words as inspiration for singular ideas or find connective threads between seemingly disparate ideas by asking what the problem would look like through the lens of two ideas combined.





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## PERSPECTIVE CHANGES

When a problem is presented and ideas are forming, they are typically forming from one point of view. As that point of view begins to exhaust itself and the ideas start to wane, try changing the perspective:

What would the problem look like from the view of the different audience types?

What would the problem look like from any of the physical objects associated with the problem?

What would the problem look like from a broad perspective (the 10,000-foot view) or from the closest possible perspective?

## SMALL GROUP BREAKDOWNS

To get the most out of each individual in your brainstorm, break down the big group into 2- or 3- person groups. Their goal is to create solutions around one part of the problem, then bring those solutions back to the larger group for discussion and building. Here are a few potential breakdown activities:

If you engaged in an input exercise of behaviors or audiences, create natural groupings for responses and then ask small groups to solve the problem through the filter of those groupings.

If you engaged in an input exercise of descriptive words, identify a few interesting words and then ask small groups to solve the problem with that theme in mind.

If your problem has natural sub-sections built in to the problem, ask the small groups to each take one sub-section and solve just that part.

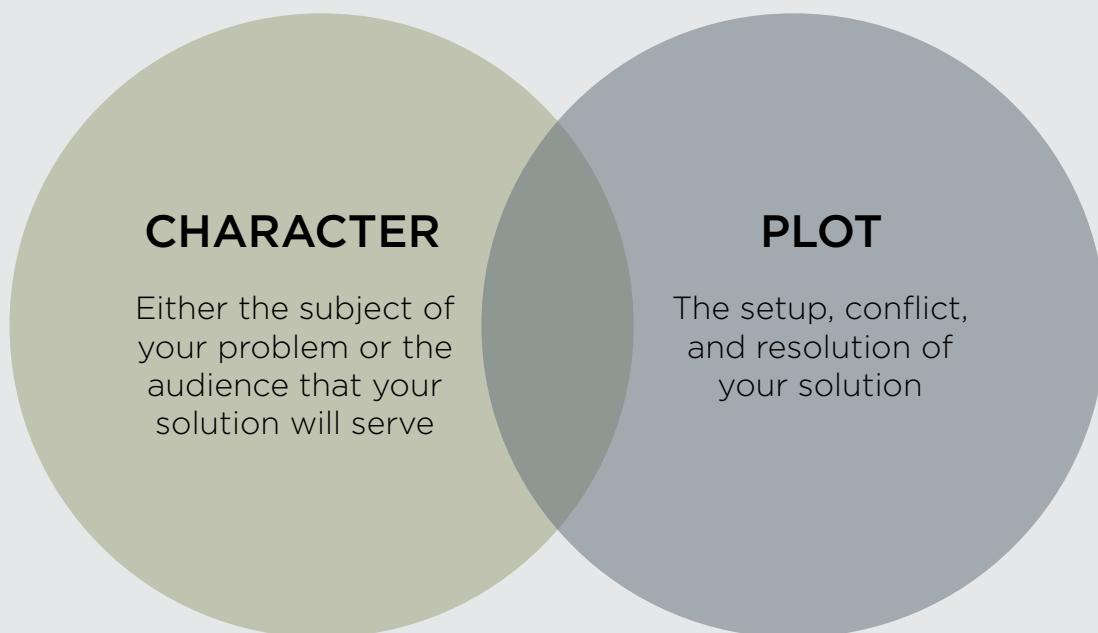


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## STORY STRUCTURES

When we struggle to understand a concept or idea, we ask for an example—a story. Since the structure of a story is universally understood, you can use that structure to inspire ideas.

### BASIC COMPONENTS OF A STORY



Have your stormers write the premise of a story using the character you provide. The plot is up to them, but it has to revolve around the problem you are solving. The natural tendency is simply to reiterate the problem in terms of setup, conflict, and resolution. This is a fine start, but using a filter to dive deeper can introduce new idea handles for the group.

Imagine the setup as the problem you are facing. The conflict is the thing that is keeping you from achieving your goal. The resolution is how you overcome the conflict and ultimately win.

You could also combine this with a small-group breakdown and have each group write a story through the eyes of a different character.