

Brainstorming

A. The brainstorming session

Brainstorm is a sudden idea or impulse.¹ In business, brainstorming is a meeting / conference technique of solving specific problems, amassing information, stimulating creative thinking, developing new ideas, etc., by unrestrained and spontaneous participation in discussion. It is a technique that can be used, for example, by marketers during **product naming** to find new names for products, or during product development to find new products and to generate ideas.

There are three roles for participants in a brainstorming team: **leader**, **scribe** and **team members**. Before the session, the leader needs to define a **problem statement** - for example, 'how to sell more of our biscuits'. The problem statement needs to focus on the aim of the session, but it must be open enough to allow **innovative thinking**.

The leader must also set the ground rules for brainstorming:

- All ideas are welcome. During brainstorming sessions, no **judgements** or **criticisms** should be made of ideas. Do not **criticize ideas**. Do not **evaluate ideas**. They can be modified later.
- Change involves **risk-taking**, so it's important to be open to original ideas. The **quantity of ideas** (*how many there are*) is more important than the **quality** (*how good they are*).
- There is **no ownership of ideas** - the ideas belong to the group. Participants should **'hitchhike'** on, or **build on**, other people's creative ideas.

The scribe needs to write down, or **note down**, every idea - clearly, where all the team members can see them.

Culture point - Participation

In some cultures, there is a strong tradition of participation in meetings – especially in brainstorming, which needs everybody's full involvement to work properly. In other cultures, participants are less willing to share their ideas unless specifically asked to do so. What is it like in meetings you go to or have been in?

B. Brainstorming techniques.

You may need to **get the creative juices flowing**² (*get people thinking more creatively*), and encourage people to **think out of the box** (*look at a problem from a new or different angle*).

One common technique is to use a **random word** as a **starting point** for possible solutions.

There are many **random word generators** on the internet.

Michael Michalko is a creative thinking expert. He uses a technique called **combinatory play**. Random words are listed and then put together. You play with the **combinations** until you find a promising new combination. For example, suntan lotion and insect repellent **combine** to form a new product - one lotion that protects against both the sun and insects.

One final technique is to **ask novel questions** (*new or different questions*) that will stimulate creative answers, for example: 'Which noises do you associate with pencils?' or 'What other uses do people have for pencils?'

C. Suggesting and building on ideas

During a brainstorming session for the name of a new toothpaste, the brainstorming team say the following things:

► *This is probably crazy, but what about using an animal name for the paste?*

← Interesting suggestions. **Let's go back to Sally's idea** about using the word 'cool'.

⇒ *'Cool White' it makes me think of white teeth.*

↪ It's a bit obvious, isn't it? **Just a suggestion – could not we try** a different colour? Blue perhaps?

► **I've got it!** I have the perfect solution. **If we combine your idea with Sally's**, we'll have 'Cool Blue'.

...

¹ Le **brainstorming** est une idée ou une impulsion soudaine.

² **10 Simple Ideas to Get Your Creative Juices Flowing:**

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 1. Quantity leads to quality; less isn't more when it comes to ideas, | 3. Scribble ideas when they arrive, | 6. Have a go, don't give up, |
| 2. Look within, | 4. Look without, | 7. Experience something new, |
| | 5. Stop being a creature of habit, | 8. Stop thinking (judging /evaluating). |

Exercises / Homework

- Choose the correct bracketed words to complete the brainstorming rules. Look at **A** and **B** above to help you.
 - Brainstorming, developing, and commercializing new ideas is (*required* / *doable* / *vital*) for our economy, and for our society at large.
 - It's a (*brainstormer* / *brainstorming* / *brainstorm*) session. The purpose is to (*generate* / *evaluate* / *generalize*) ideas.
 - Officially, this was a "brainstorming session," but we knew that it was all about getting Paul's (*agreement*¹ / *argument* / *agreement* /)
 - Please don't (/ *define* / *diagnose* / *criticize*) or judge the quality of other people's ideas; this may (*persuade* / *discourage* / *urge*) the attendees from saying anything altogether.
 - We're looking for quantity, rather than quality. We can (*modernize* / *moderate* / *modify*) ideas later.
 - To brainstorm is to build (*up* / *over* / *on*) each other's ideas. It is this building of ideas that leads to (*outer* / *out of* / *over*) the box thinking and fantastic ideas.
- Complete the sentences (1-4), and then match each sentence with the participant who says it in a brainstorming session (**a-c**). Look at **C** above to help you.

1.

Hey, I've it!

a. the leader
b. the scribe
c. a team member

2.

Thanks, John. Let's go to Peter's idea about the ...

3.

I've noted all the ideas.
Thanks, everyone.

4.

OK everyone, try to stay focused the problem.

- Match the two parts of the sentences from a brainstorming session. Look at **A** and **B** overleaf to help you.

- I'd like to remind you all of the ground
 - I hope you've been thinking about the problem
 - Today, we need innovative
 - Don't be afraid to take
 - So, the random
 - Thanks for a very productive brainstorming

- risks - no one will criticize you.
 - session.
 - word is 'butter'.
 - statement I emailed you.
 - rules before we start.
 - thinking for a new product name.
- A company called Speechmark is brainstorming ideas for the title of their internal newsletter. Complete the sentences. Look at **C** overleaf to help you.
 - Today we're looking for a two-word title for the newsletter. You all know the rules - let's get started.
 - Here's a list of keywords to get your creative flowing.
 - we use the company name in the title?
 - Good suggestion. What. the other word?
 - Just a - couldn't we try 'inside'?
 - I like that - it me think about being at home.
 - So, if I those two ideas, we'll have 'Speechmark Inside'.
- It is clear that brainstorming is a useful way of generating creative ideas in meetings. Now, decide which tips below are good advices and which ones you disagree with. Then compare your answers with a partner.

- Ask each person to speak in turn, starting with the most senior.
 - Avoid criticising or judging ideas during the session.
 - Encourage ideas, however unusual they may be.
 - Don't interrupt when people are offering suggestions.

- Explain the purpose of the meeting clearly.
 - Announce the time limit for the meeting.
 - Make sure everyone keeps to the point.
 - Don't spend time on details.
- Brainstorm a new product for the twenty somethings.² Use a random word generator from the internet to help you get your creative juices flowing.

¹ **Agreement** (Old French *agreement*; equivalent to *agree* + *-ment*; **agréments** / **a-gré-mens**): the official approval by a government of a proposed envoy from a foreign government.

² Age group market segment – twenty to twenty-nine years old.