

# A Brainstorming Activity for ESL/EFL Students

Hall Houston  
City University of Hong Kong, English Language Centre (Hong Kong, China)  
hallhouston ( at ) yahoo.com  
[www.hallhouston.com](http://www.hallhouston.com)

## Introduction

While brainstorming is a commonplace activity for generating new ideas, many students have not had guided practice. This lesson will enable them to brainstorm more effectively.

## Lesson

1. Ask the class, "How do artists and businesspeople come up with new ideas?" Give them a couple of minutes to think, then call on a few students to give you their answers.
2. Tell the class you are going to do an activity called brainstorming. Ask students to raise their hands if they have ever participated in a brainstorming session before, then call on anyone with their hand up to describe their experience.
3. First, put the students into two groups, Team A and Team B. Assign one student in each group to be a leader. Give the team leaders the following slips:

### Team A - Leader:

Your job is to encourage the other students to contribute ideas on how to improve this English class. However, you do not want to waste any time. If a student states an idea which seems useless, tell the student "That's no good" or "Bad idea", then move on to another student.

### Team B - Leader:

Your job is to encourage the other students to contribute ideas on how to improve this English class. Ask one student in the group to write down all ideas. Offer praise for everyone's contributions and don't criticize any of the ideas. Make sure all ideas are written down.

4. Give students ten minutes to do the brainstorming activity.
5. Now ask for feedback. Which group produced more ideas? Which group enjoyed the activity more?
6. Ask both group leaders to read out their slips of paper. Ask the class to guess which one was brainstorming the right way.
7. Write these rules of successful brainstorming on the board:
  - write down all ideas
  - the more ideas, the better
  - wild, unusual ideas are welcome
  - feel free to take someone else's idea and expand on it
  - save criticism until the end of the session

8. Now have the students do the same activity again with the rules on the board, but with a different topic. Some suggested topics are "How to save money" or "How to make friends".

9. When they are finished, have both groups choose their three best ideas and write them up on the board. Ask a few students how they feel about brainstorming.

10. Now, tell the class you want to arrange a brainstorming activity for a future lesson. (Note: While it might be tempting to turn this discussion into another brainstorming activity, I would recommend changing the format to add variety to the lesson.)

Give each student an index card and tell them you want them to write the answers to the following questions:

- **Topic:** Which topic should we work on?
- **Location:** Where should we have our brainstorming activity?
- **Time:** When should it take place?
- **Duration:** How long should we spend brainstorming?
- **Number of groups:** How many brainstorming groups will we have?
- **Participants:** Who will be in each group?
- **Leader:** Who will be the leader of each group?
- **Secretary:** Who will take notes in each group?
- **Other considerations:** What else would make our brainstorming activity more productive (music, pictures, snacks, etc.)?
- **End product:** How should we present our best ideas (poster, presentation, role play, short essay)?

Ask one student to lead the class in a discussion in order to decide on answers to all the questions.

11. Take notes and mark your calendar for the brainstorming session.

12. After the students' scheduled brainstorming session, ask for some feedback. What did they like about the brainstorming session? What could have been improved? Would they like to do more brainstorming in a future lesson?

## Conclusion

Brainstorming is just one of a wide range of creativity exercises you can use to develop students' thinking skills. If you are interested, you can look into other variations of brainstorming such as rolestorming (students role play different characters to brainstorm), brainwriting (students write down ideas and pass them on to other students who expand on them) and reverse brainstorming (students come up with ideas for producing a problem instead of solving it). Better yet, you might come up with your own twist on brainstorming.

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