

Introduction

Brainwriting is simple. Rather than ask participants to yell out ideas (a serial process), you ask them to write down their ideas about a particular question or problem on sheets of paper for a few minutes; then, you have each participant pass their ideas on to someone else, who reads the ideas and adds new ideas. After a few minutes, ask the participants to pass their papers to others, and the process repeats. After 10-15 minutes, collect the sheets and post them for immediate discussion.

Credit: <http://www.smashingmagazine.com/author/chauncey-wilson/?rel=author>

Interactive Brainwriting basic steps

1. Introduce the procedure.
2. Hand out paper for each person to write down ideas.
3. Provide a clear and legible problem statement. (You could print out a page with the statement at the top, project the statement on a slide, or write it on a board.)
4. Describe the timing of the brainwriting (for example, three minutes for the first round, and two minutes for four subsequent rounds) and the process for passing the pages (for example, counterclockwise around a table). A page-passing process that is not clear could undermine the credibility of the method and waste time.
5. Ask if anyone has any questions about the problem statement or the brainwriting process.
6. Remind people to read the ideas quickly before entering their own ideas and to feel free to add, modify and combine ideas. Let people know that extra paper is around the room if they run out.
7. Begin the rounds. Announce the end of each round, and ask people to pass their paper to another person.
8. At the end of the session, collect the brainwriting pages and post them for comment, additional ideas or review.

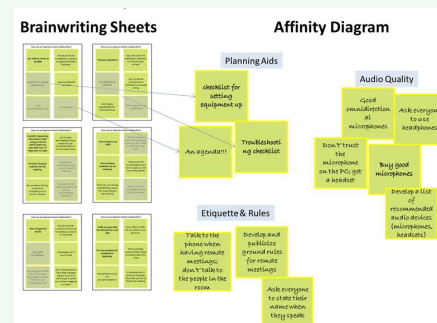
Brainwriting 6-3-5

In brainwriting 6-3-5, six people are given a form and asked to provide three ideas for solving a problem in five minutes. Participants are invited to consider out-of-the-box ideas and to combine ideas with others. The ideas are written in silence to prevent participants from influencing each other. After the first five minutes, each participant passes a form like the one below to the adjacent participant, who then reviews the ideas and adds new ones. Repeat the process six times, with a potential for $6 \times 3 \times 6$ (104) ideas. In practice, people often come up with more than 3 ideas in 5 minutes, so you could create a 6-6-5 Grid

6-6-5 Form

Person	Idea 1	Idea 2	Idea 3
# 1	Filters to reduce the size	Search	Elliptical browsers
# 2	Tagging	Concordance feature	feature Automatic clustering of related data
# 3	Break the list up into categories	Provide a birds-eye view and zoom	Most recently used feature
4
5

Diagram



If you want to create an affinity diagram from the ideas, you could prepare pages with sticky notes and then remove them when you are ready to diagram. The image above shows six pages from a brainwriting session on the topic of how to improve remote collaboration. Each page would have six sticky notes on which participants can write ideas for the topic. After the brainwriting is complete, the notes can be organized into categories using the affinity diagramming method.

Idea Cards

This approach to brainwriting gets participants to write ideas continuously on sticky notes or cards and, as they finish a card, to place it off to the side. When other participants need inspiration, they can take a few cards from their colleagues and continue. Each card would hold only one idea.

A variation on this approach is the "one idea, quick pass," whereby each person lists one idea on a sheet and then hands the sheet to another participant, who adds one more idea. If participants don't have any sheets to look at, they can grab one off of a pile and continue writing. This continues until the leader of the session declares "The end."

The Spreadsheet Technique

If you want to conduct remote brainwriting, you can use Google Spreadsheet as a brainwriting tool. You'll need to set up a list of people who will participate and then ask each of them to enter ideas in a single column of the spreadsheet. As each person enters an idea in a cell, others would see the idea and use that as inspiration for new ideas. This process can foster a bit of mild competition if done in real time and can also be fun.

Tips

- Ask participants to do some easy homework to prepare for brainwriting. Homework can make the sessions more productive. One example of homework would be to send your problem or question to participants and ask them to jot down or think about three ideas.
- Be clear about the rules for sharing idea sheets. If you have people pass them to others, designate the direction of passing the pages to avoid confusion.
- Mix brainstorming and brainwriting with other ideation methods. Brainstorming may generate few ideas, but sometimes the social aspects of brainstorming generate a sense of teamwork and creativity.

