Clustering: Organized Brainstorming
Clustering is a type of prewriting that lets you explore many ideas as soon as they come to you. It’s like brainstorming or free associating, and allows you to begin writing without having to know everything at once.

**Step 1: Create Cluster**

1. Choose a word that is central to your assignment (e.g. if you’re writing about the value of a college education, you might start with the word “expectations” in the center of the page)
2. Circle that word, then write words all around it, any that occur to you related to that chosen word
3. Write down all the words that come to you, even if they seem random, and write quickly
4. Connect your new words to previous ones with lines
5. When you have exhausted a particular avenue of associations or connections between words, go back to the central word and start again

Here’s what a cluster might look like:
Step 2: Start Writing

Write your answers to the following questions here or on a separate sheet of paper and use them as a checklist for drafting your paper:

- What question(s) must I answer in order to fulfill the assignment?
- What “code words” does my assignment contain? (These could be abstract terms like “system of belief” or they could be terms that demand a certain task of you, such as “analyze,” “compare,” “explore reasons for,” etc.)
- Which areas of my readings or sources are still unclear to me? How necessary are they for writing a first draft?
- Who is the audience for this paper? What are the most important things that my audience needs to know?
- What are a few main points that I want to convey in this paper?
- Are any of these points contradictory or overly vague? Are they too broad?
- Can I refine any of these goals or points?
- Can I support my main ideas?