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Strategies for Reading Comprehension

## ABC Brainstorm



### What Is An ABC Brainstorm?

Before having your students talk about a major topic, it's essential to activate their background knowledge about it. One way to do this is the ABC Brainstorm. The idea is meant to be fairly simple. Students try to think of a word or phrase associated with the topic, matched to each letter of the alphabet.

### How Does It Work?

Have students list all the letters of the alphabet down a sheet of paper (or use the printable ABC Brainstorm sheet available through ReadingQuest), leaving room beside each letter to write out the rest of a word or phrase. Let them work individually at first, thinking of as many words as they can that could be associated with the topic you identify. Do note: The topic should be big and general enough that students can actually think of a lot of possible terms. Then, in no particular order, let them begin filling in the blanks beside each letter of the alphabet. For instance, if the topic were **World War II**, students might list **Allies, Bombers, Concentration Camps, D-Day, Europe, French Resistance, Germany, Hitler, Italy, Japan**, and so on.

It seems to work well if you give students enough time to think of a lot of ideas, but then let them pair up or work in small groups to fill in blanks for letters they had not yet completed. In this way, you can let the brainstorming function like a Think-Pair-Share. This would be the "Pair" phase. Then, go around the room or get students to report out ("Share") possible terms for the different letters of the

alphabet. Be open to a wide range of possibilities! Make sure students know that you're not looking for exact answers, just justifiable and relevant ones.

## What Sorts of Topics Are Good for an ABC Brainstorm?

I say, keep it more broad and relevant. Topics like government, Islam, war (or a specific war), the Great Depression, or a broad geographical region are probably pretty fertile for an ABC Brainstorm. Topics previously studied, about which students know much, can be good recap brainstorm. This might include topics like The Gilded Age, Progressivism, a given decade (the Sixties or the Roaring Twenties, for instance), or capitalism. It's doubtful whether a narrow topic (Saddam Hussein, Circular Flow Diagram, the Constitution) would provide enough latitude for a good ABC Brainstorm, but you won't know until you try.

## What Variations Are There?

An idea that has been credited to Janet Allen is AlphaBlocks. Rather than brainstorm ideas for all 26 letters of the alphabet, students brainstorm ideas within groups ("blocks") of letters (ABC, DEF, GHI, and so on). This simplifies and speeds up the brainstorming, while still causing students to turn their attention to and think about the topic at hand.

Another variation of ABC Brainstorm involves turning the topic on its side, and writing the letters of the topic down in the same was a name poem or an acrostic. Students then brainstorm a word or phrase associated with the topic, one for each letter of the topic starting with each letter of the topic. For example, if the topic were COMPETITION in Economics, students might think of: Compete, Options, Monopoly, Perfect, Economy, Trade, Imperfect, TV ads, Inside information, Oligopoly, Natural.

## Download and Print:

- [ABC Brainstorm](#)
- [AlphaBlocks Chart](#)



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This site was created and is maintained by [Raymond Jones](#). This page was last updated on Sunday, 26-Aug-2012 04:41:48 EDT.

# A B C Brainstorm

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