

Clustering for Prewriting

From the SWG 1995 Edition

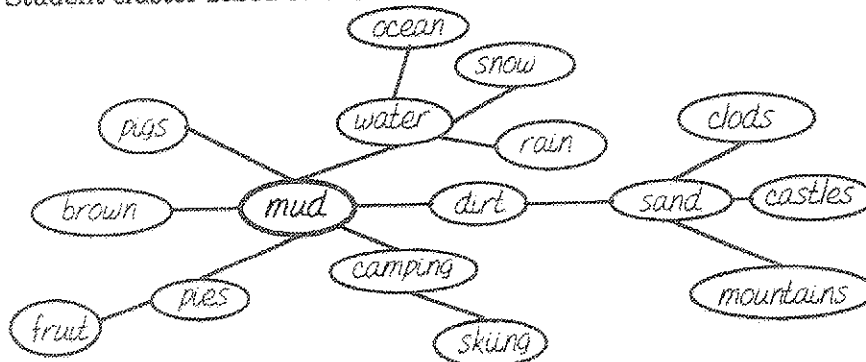
CLUSTERING

CLUSTERING--free or directed--is an excellent first step to any written work because it generates ideas. Any concrete or abstract topic can be used for clustering such as colors, holidays, or emotions. Clustering may be used before or after reading short stories, novels, essays, or poems. This technique may also be used before or after listening to music or viewing art or film. Clustering is an effective brainstorming technique which can lead to a piece of writing.

Directions:

- Write a word or phrase on the board and circle it.
- To teach students the process, first do a class cluster on the board using this word or phrase. Ask students to brainstorm, and what they come up with will radiate from the center circle. Each new word will be circled.
- After seeing examples on the board, students will cluster on a different topic individually or in groups.
- Discuss the ideas that come from these clusters.
- Each student should choose one idea from the cluster or several ideas from the cluster to build into a piece of writing.
- As the student gains confidence with clustering, s/he may want to personalize his/her clusters.

EX: Student cluster based on the word "mud"--

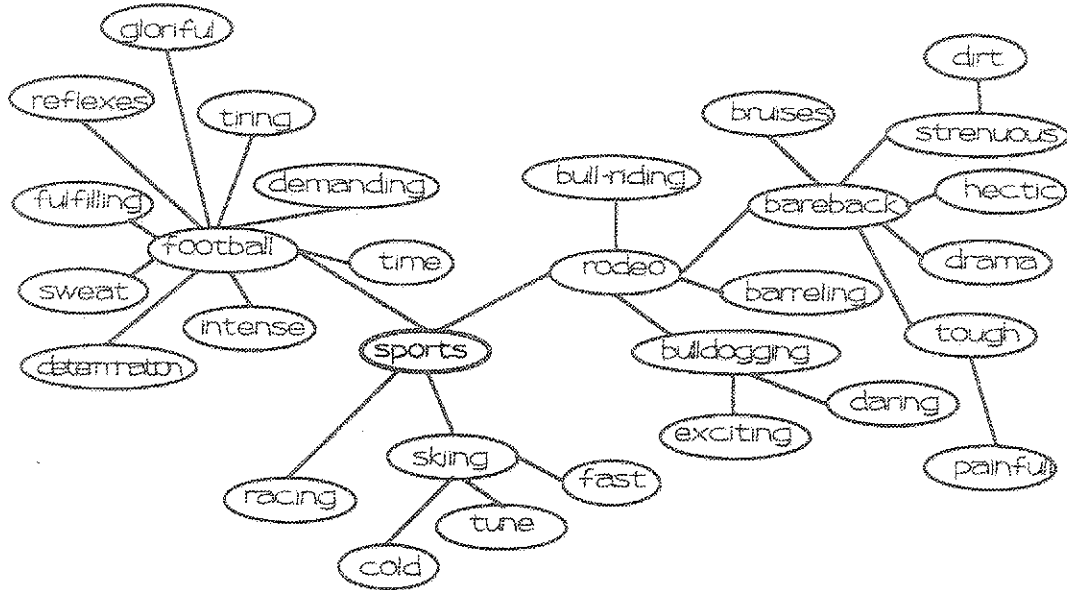


Student writing developed from the above cluster--

I'll never forget the first sand castle I built. It had all the details I could think of to put on the outside of the castle. I was so proud of my castle, I ran up to my mom and brought her over to see it. When we came to my castle, it was gone. Then I remembered that maybe I built it a little too close to the shore.

--Sarah

EX: Student cluster based on a class discussion of "sports"--



Student writing developed from the above cluster --

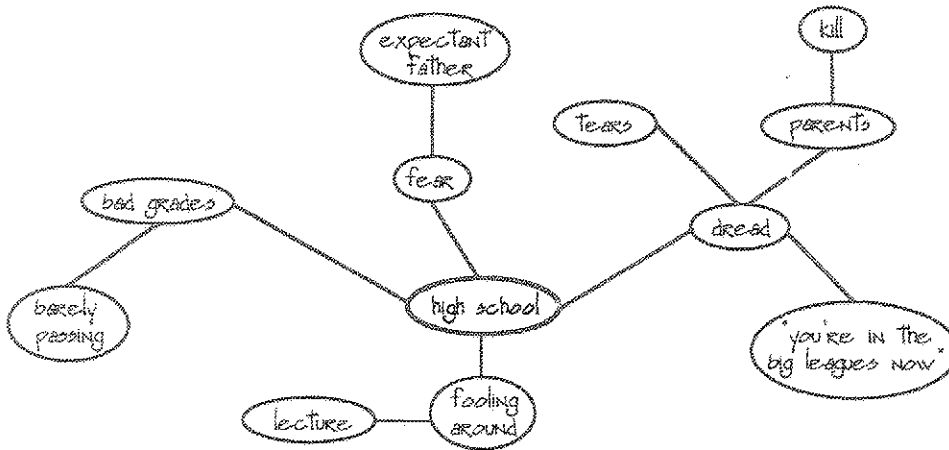
Bull-riding is full of good and bad, pain and ecstasy. It's good when you ride a bull, stay on him, and not get hurt. Most of the time when you get hurt, fall off, and get stamped on, it's bad. Sometimes when you get hurt and stumble to your feet trying not to show pain, it's gloriful to walk out of the arena, even wobbling. That's all part of the mystique that draws me to rodeo.

--Ron

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Directed clustering uses the same process but restricts the writer to the subject at hand. That subject becomes the nucleus word.

EX: Student cluster based on a class discussion of "high school"--



First-draft student writing generated by the above cluster--

"You're in the big leagues, now," commented my father one day about a week before I started my freshman year at Reed High School.

"No problem. I can handle it," I thought naively. Little did I know when the day came, I was more nervous than an expectant father. For a while, school wasn't as bad as I thought it would be, but then "bang"-- it all happened at once. All my life, I've had excellent grades, mostly A's and B's. But when I realized I was barely passing my classes, I broke down.

I always thought that if I brought anything bad home, my parents would kill me. But when I told them what was happening at school, I was surprised at the answer they gave me.

"We understand," they said in unison.

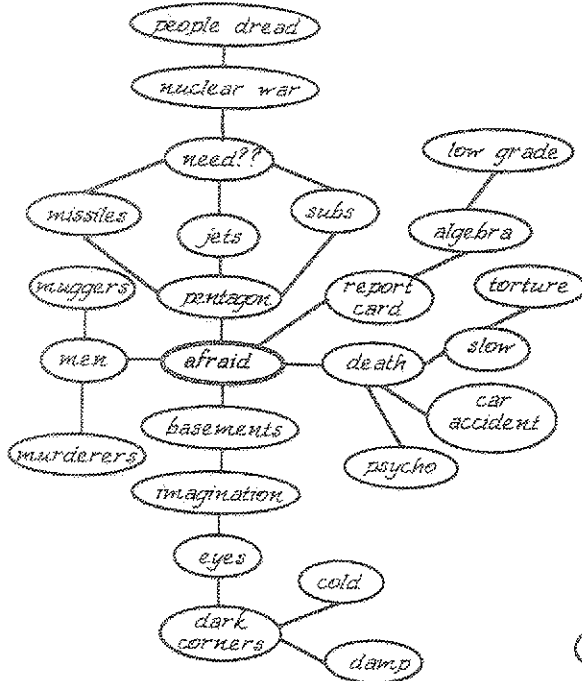
"Like I told you earlier, it is going to be tough. You're playing a whole different ball game now. All we want you to do is try your best," my father explained very cautiously.

"Now, that doesn't give you permission to fool around in class. Just try your best."

--Gina G.

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EX: Student clusters and first-draft writings based on a class discussion of *Flowers for Algernon* and the film *Charly*--



I am afraid of people laughing at me. I hardly ever talk for fear that I will say something stupid. I don't like to talk to people I don't know because I'm afraid that I will make a bad impression. Charlie never feared this until he became a genius, because he really wasn't smart enough to. The first time he realized this was when he saw the busboy drop the dishes. He realized then that he had once been laughed at for the same reason and just went along with it, though he eventually got mad at himself for doing so. Just like Charlie, I am afraid of people laughing at me.

--Tony W.

Charlie and I both fear being yelled at. Being yelled at makes you feel dumb and useless. We also don't pass tests very well, even if we make a huge effort to get a passing grade. We're also afraid of not being liked or accepted into something . . . feeling dumb. We're afraid of death. Will it hurt? Will it be fast? How old will I be? Where will I be? Charlie is superstitious; I am not. Charlie is out to learn, determined because he wants to be smart. I am, too.

--Amy S.

