1. Freewriting

Freewriting is nothing more than non-stop writing. Set aside ten minutes or so and simply write whatever comes to you. Do no worry about spelling, word choice, or even meaning; the only rule for freewriting is that you keep your pencil moving. If you can’t think of how to begin, just write about having to write; if you get stuck, write about getting stuck.

College. write about college. being away from home for the first time. it seems kind of scary.
what if I’m not ready to leave home? I’ll miss my sister. i think she’ll take over my room when i’m gone; she’s probably been planning to for years now. What if my roommate doesn’t like me? maybe she listens to country music. I hate country music. What if she doesn’t like my music... what if we have absolutely nothing in common? She might not like me. then again, I might not like her either. Write for ten minutes... I’m stuck already! OK, college. college. academics – what if I don’t do as well in college as I did in high school? There are a lot more pressures in college. I don’t even know what my major is yet? What if I can’t handle all the stress? What if I’m not ready? hum, college can’t be all stress and no fun. i’ll probably go to parties. order pizza at 3:00am and watch reruns of 90210. i wonder if my roommate watches melrose place... she’ll have to put up with it...

2. Brainstorming

Brainstorming is much like thinking aloud; simply list all of your ideas about a particular topic in the order in which they occur to you.

being away from home
missing my high school friends
living with a roommate
what if we don’t get along?
will I like the people on my hall?
academic pressures
will I get good grades?
stress
studying
hanging out with friends
fraternity parties...

If you get stuck, return to the top of the list and reread what you have written; this may help you think of more ideas. Keep listing all the ideas that come to you until you think you’ve exhausted all the possibilities.
3. Clustering

This technique is best suited for unstructured writing assignments when you are responsible for coming up with your own topic. Clustering is different from other techniques because it produces a visual design or map of your thoughts. Simply start with a specific word or phrase placed in the middle of the page and branch out in as many directions as you want to go.

Each branch from the word “college” takes your thinking in a new direction. Keep branching out until you feel you’ve exhausted all the possibilities.

4. Tree Diagramming

Similar to clustering, tree diagramming provides you with visual evidence of the way your thoughts connect. Begin with a general word or phrase, and as you branch out, try to become more and more specific. A tree diagram usually has an overall coherence which is lacking in the clustering technique.