

MAKING A LIST

We all make lists in order not to forget. What about making lists in order to discover? List-making can be a valuable first step in many writing situations, especially those that require you to recall or realize something you already know. For example, you might list the steps in a process—how to make a bookshelf—or list arguments for or against something. As you settle down to write, a list can:

1. give you a definite purpose and activity to get you started
2. cause you to have associations and thereby to think of something you might not have thought of before
3. provide you with a framework for your thinking at that moment

You hardly need any rules for list-making, but you might want to remember these suggestions:

1. Put a title at the top of your list so you will stay on purpose and always know why you are making a list. (“Why I deserve a raise” or “Things our town could do for young adults.”)
2. Write as fast as possible and use short words or phrases.
3. Don’t be critical of any item on the list at this point; just collect as many things on the list as you possibly can in a limited time.

When you have finished the list, you can do several things: select the items on the list that seem to have the most promise for your writing; put the items on the list in some order—say, most important to least important; cross out items that you don’t like; expand one or two items; add new items. The important thing is for the list to serve as a source of ideas for you as you begin to write your paper.