

General Heuristics

These questions were created by Elizabeth Cowan Neeld to help develop preliminary ideas and gather information for research-driven essays. I only chose a few of them for you to use, so you'll notice some numbers are not in the right order. Simply fill in the blanks with ideas related to the topic you're writing about. For example: "advertising," or "commercials," or "marketing." Be creative and use a variety of terms. Use your critical thinking skills, and you'll find that this is a great way to generate ideas to use in your essay.

Definition

1. How does the dictionary define _____?
3. What do I mean by _____?
5. What parts can _____ be divided into?
6. Did _____ mean something in the past that it doesn't mean now? If so, what? What does this former meaning tell us about how the idea grew and developed?
7. Does _____ mean something now that it didn't years ago? If so, what?
8. What other words mean approximately the same as _____?
9. What are some concrete examples of _____?
10. When is the meaning of _____ misunderstood?

Comparison

1. What is _____ similar to? In what ways?
2. What is _____ different from? In what ways?
3. _____ is superior to what? In what ways?
4. _____ is inferior to what? In what ways?
5. _____ is most unlike what? (What is it opposite to?) In what ways?
6. _____ is most like what? In what ways?

Relationship

1. What causes _____?
2. What is the purpose of _____?
3. Why does _____ happen?

Circumstance

5. Who has done or experienced _____?
6. Who can do _____?
9. What would prevent _____ from happening?

Testimony

1. What have I heard people say about _____?
2. Do I know any facts or statistics about _____? If so, what?
3. Have I talked with anyone about _____?
4. Do I know any famous or well-known saying (e.g., "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush") about _____?
5. Can I quote any proverbs or any poems about _____?
6. Are there any laws about _____?
7. Do I remember any songs about _____? Do I remember anything I've read about _____ in books or magazines? Anything I've seen in a movie or on television?