

## LEFT AND RIGHT BRAIN WRITING STRATEGIES

Using both sides of our brain is something many of us do naturally when writing papers. Both modes of brain functioning are useful in problem solving, and the writing process incorporates both the logical and the creative aspects of thinking. From the left brain, writers use skills that help them adhere to an understandable and logical progression in order to help readers follow the ideas and arguments presented. From the right brain, writers call upon creativity and inspiration to foster engagement and to develop new insights and questions. Many writers use these two modes without thinking much about them, but some people find they are more comfortable with one mode of functioning over the other.

Distinguishing between the two sides can be useful; for example, when might right-brain strategies be more effective for the task than left-brain strategies? When is the opposite true? Can a deliberate shift in brain-modes help the writing process? How can a writer strengthen or switch into the other mode of brain functioning?

Right-Brain Mode: Global, Perceptual	Left-Brain Mode: Linear, Sequential*
Nonverbal: Using nonverbal cognition to process perceptions.	Verbal: Using words to name, describe, define.
Synthetic: Putting things together to form wholes.	Analytic: Figuring things out step-by-step and part-by-part.
Nontemporal: Ignoring time and chronology.	Temporal: Keeping track of time, sequencing one thing after another.
Nonrational: Not requiring a basis of reason or facts; willingness to suspend judgment.	Rational: Drawing conclusions based on reason and facts.
Intuitive: Making leaps of insight, often based on incomplete patterns, hunches, feelings, or visual images.	Logical: Drawing conclusions based on logic, one thing following another in an order: for example, a mathematical theorem or a well-stated argument.
Holistic: Seeing whole things all at once, perceiving the overall patterns and structures, often leading to divergent conclusions.	Linear: Thinking in terms of linked ideas; one thought directly following another, often leading to a convergent conclusion.

### Right-Brain Mode:

Because the right brain is often underused in school systems where logic, verbal, and language skills are emphasized, some suggestions for shifting to right-brain thinking might not feel comfortable initially. The right brain, being primarily nonverbal, functions well with multiple intelligence strategies. Try using different intelligences to spark ideas or stir the imagination:

- Use visualization, guided imagery, or other imaginative strategies.
- Doodle or daydream.
- Attend to sensory details, engaging all the senses and freeing perception.
- Look for a *felt sense* of what engages and moves you about the material.
- Listen to or play music.
- Move: walk, dance, or play sports.
- Foster kinesthetic art making: work with physical mediums, such as collages, blocks, or even cut-up paragraphs from the paper to play with meaning, ideas, and structure.
- Try the unusual or unexpected: mix up words, paragraphs, ideas; write from another perspective; take on another viewpoint.
- Act out the paper: Who would the main characters be? What would be the personality, tone, movement, and message? Who is the ideal audience?
- Engage in other activities that take you into a state where you lose track of time and engage deeply.
- Take breaks: set aside the paper for a short time to refresh.

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In right-brain mode, inspiration and intuition can take over the reins and provide insight. This can benefit writers in many stages of the writing process: coming up with topics, forming thesis statements, freeing the writer to follow divergent thoughts, approaching the topic from new perspectives, and finding new organization strategies. Right-brain functioning can make the writing process more engaging, fun, and creative.

### Left-Brain Mode:

Inevitably the right-brain insights will need to be incorporated into the paper with left-brain logic. The left-brain is necessary to transform thoughts into comprehensible ideas to present to others. If you need help creating a focus, developing a logic, or articulating ideas in concrete ways, try engaging the left-brain with more verbal, language-oriented, and analytical strategies:

- Make meaning of feelings or images by forming opinions.
- Substantiate opinions with research or examples.
- Analyze each idea to clarify its connection to the thesis and remain open to setting aside ideas that might not be relevant to your current focus.
- Cultivate and articulate logical ties and connections between ideas.
- Create a point-by-point or step-by-step map of your paper. Outlining, listing, or categorizing main ideas and supporting points can be done throughout the writing process to help refine the paper.
- Review your paper with a reader's eye: anticipate what the reader might need to follow your ideas. What ideas are redundant? Where is more clarification needed?
- Discuss your ideas with another person or have another person read your paper to provide feedback.

In left-brain mode, logic brings your unique perspective and thoughts into a form that your audience can understand. Making the transition from right-brain inspirations to left-brain verbalizations might take a few attempts, so be patient. The act of writing itself may lead to new connections and ideas. Allow your thoughts to continue to develop and your paper to become refined. In left-brain mode, be prepared to cut, edit, distill, and hone ideas.

\*The contents of this table excerpted from: Edwards, Betty. *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*. New York: Penguin Putman, 1999. Print.