



Get BACK ON TRACK!

WRITING: HOW TO START A PAPER

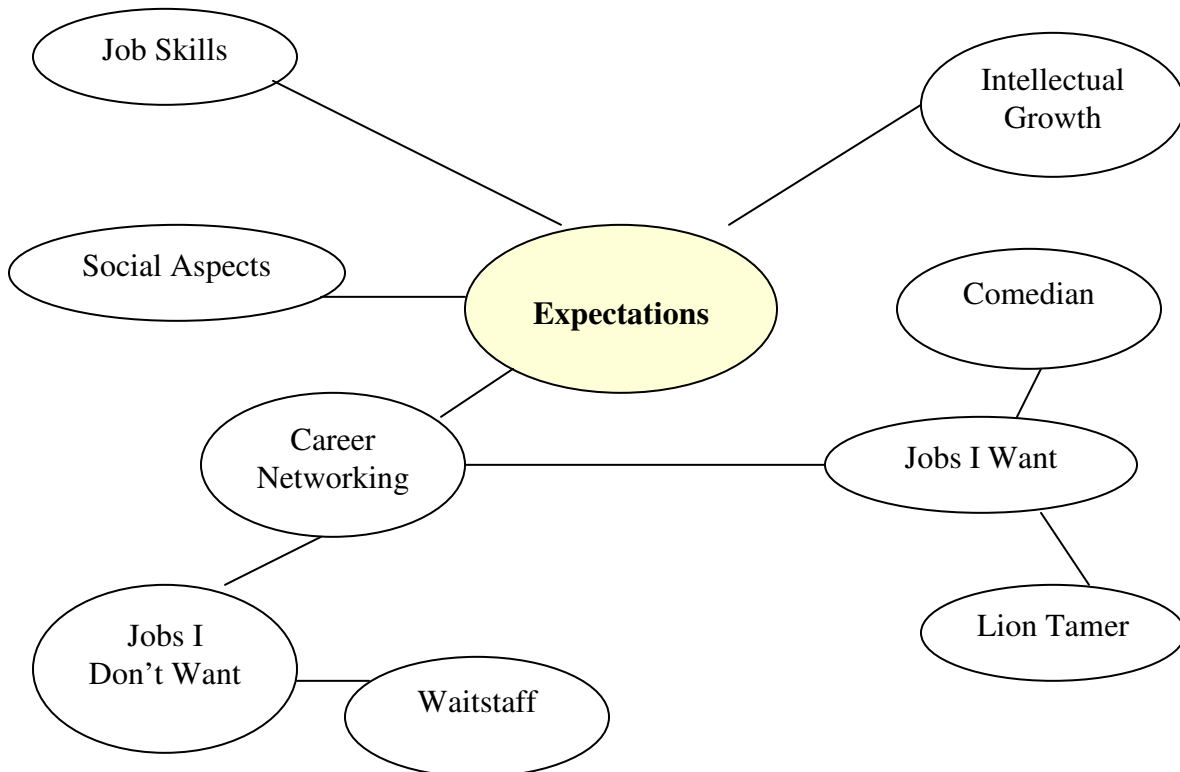
Clustering: Organized Brainstorming

Clustering is a type of prewriting that lets you explore many ideas as soon as they come to you. It is like brainstorming or free association. This allows you to begin without having clear ideas about what you are writing on.

To get started:

1. Choose a word that is central to your assignment (e.g. if you are writing about the value of a college education, you might start with the word “expectations” in the center of the page).
2. Circle that word, then write words all around it, any that occur to you related to the chosen word.
3. Write down all the words that come to you, even if they seem random, and write quickly.
4. Connect your new words to previous ones with lines.
5. When you have exhausted a particular avenue of associations or connections between words, go back to the central word and start again.

Here is what a cluster might look like:



Remember:

- Some words will take you nowhere.
- Some words you may discover are related to other words you have written.
- Random associations become patterns of logic the more you write and look over your work.
- Have fun with this, explore!

Next: How to Start Writing

Write your answers to the following questions here or on a separate sheet of paper and use them as a checklist for drafting your paper.

- What question(s) must I answer to complete the assignment?

- What “code words” does my assignment contain? (These could be abstract terms like *system of belief* for they could be terms that demand a certain task of you, such as *analyze, compare, explore reasons for*, etc.).

- Who is the audience for this paper? What are the most important things that my audience needs to know?

- What are a few main points that I want to convey in this paper?

- Are any of these points contradictory or overly vague? Are they too broad?

- Can I refine any of these goals or points?

- Can I support my main ideas?