

Brainstorming

Brainstorming can be done alone or in a group. The participants suggest ideas, which are all captured where everyone can see. Brainstorming sessions should follow these guidelines:

- **A specific question.** The session should be focused on a well-defined problem.
- **No criticisms.** Brainstorming focuses on generating ideas, not assessing them. Participants should feel safe suggesting wild ideas without fear of judgement.
- **Aim for quantity.** Brainstorming works best when it results in more ideas, not just a few good ideas.
- **Build on ideas.** Participants should take suggested ideas and elaborate on them.

When the time is up or the ideas have been exhausted, the brainstorming phase ends. Participants assess the ideas either then or at a later date.

Brainstorming is based on a few principles. One is that the best ideas aren't always what first come to mind. Brainstorming is designed to allow other ideas to emerge.

Another principle is that people often self-censor unusual ideas. Only when they feel safe, do people only offer thoughts that are different from what they think the group expects. These new ideas are often what are needed to address the issue. As Einstein said, "we can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."

The third principle is that the best ideas are often the result of combining two or more ideas. Brainstorming, when run effectively, encourages this mixing of ideas.

Nominal group technique

Nominal group technique is a variant on brainstorming. It follows a similar format, with a slight change to the process. Participants are told the specific question. They then research the problem individually and think of solutions. Finally, participants share these solutions with the group.

This technique works best when participants follow these guidelines:

- **A specific question.** The session should be focused on a well-defined problem.
- **No criticisms.** Participants should feel safe suggesting wild ideas without fear of judgement.
- **Work alone, then as a group.** Before meeting to share ideas, participants should work alone. They should not discuss ideas or ask for help from each other.
- **Build on ideas.** Participants should take suggested ideas and elaborate on them.

These ideas then form the basis of a brainstorming session, as above.

Nominal group technique has the same benefits as brainstorming. One issue with brainstorming, though, is that louder personalities can dominate the discussion. This technique gives all participants equal time to share their ideas.

