

PREWRITING AND FREEWRITING

Cube It!

Denise C. Mussman

Levels	<i>Any</i>
Aims	<i>Develop and expand ideas</i> <i>Overcome writer's block</i> <i>Promote critical thinking and instill confidence</i>
Preparation Time	<i>10 minutes</i>
Class Time	<i>30–45 minutes</i>
Resources	<i>A white box, or one wrapped in white paper, and a marker for each student (or create the sides of the box on a handout for students to cut out and tape)</i>

Cubing as a teaching technique has been used widely in many subjects because it is useful to generate ideas on any topic. It's an extension of Bloom's Taxonomy.

PROCEDURE

1. Write one of these instructions on each side of the box:
 - Describe it. Try to use all five senses. How does it look, feel, taste, smell, or sound?
 - Analyze it. What is it made of?
 - Apply it. How can you use it? What effects does it have on people?
 - Associate it. What does it remind you of? Make a list.
 - Compare and contrast it. What is it similar to? How is it different from other things?
 - Argue for or against it. List reasons why it is good or should exist. What are reasons against it?

2. Ask a student to lend you a quarter or any coin used in the country where you teach. Hold it up and ask students whether they can write an essay about it. If they shake their heads, promise them that it can be done.
3. Now, we “cube” it. Using the sides of the box (or the board, if the questions are written there), students discuss answers to each side in pairs and then write nonstop for 10 minutes. Pass the box around the room or show each side one at a time in front of the class. Afterward, students share their ideas with the class. It is fun how much we can write about a quarter. Typical discussions include the following:
 - *It is round, hard, and made of silver.*
 - *There is a copper lining.*
 - *It has a picture of George Washington on it and words that say . . . and mean . . .*
 - *We can use it to buy things, do laundry, and pay for parking, vending machines, candy and toy machines at grocery stores, rides for children, arcade games, etc.*
 - *It is similar to a nickel; its size is too close to a dollar coin; it is being replaced with cards.*

At this point I tell students that if they can write that much about a quarter, there is much more they can write about their topics.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Schultz, T. (2010, November 29). *Cubing: A teaching strategy to promote critical thinking*. Retrieved from <http://voices.yahoo.com/cubing-teaching-strategy-promote-critical-thinking-7290314.html?cat=4>
- Spack, R. (2006). Cubing. In *Guidelines: A cross-cultural reading/writing text* (3rd ed., pp. 57–59). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.