***\*\*Adapted from The Writing Center at The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill\*\****

**Getting Started**

A series of short writing activities designed to help a student with the first draft of an essay:

*Free-writing*. Choose a topic, idea, question you would like to consider. It can be a specific detail or a broad concept-whatever you are interested in exploring at the moment. Write (on paper or on a computer) for 7-10 minutes non-stop on that topic. If you get stuck and don’t know what to say next, write “I’m stuck and don’t know what to say next…” or try asking yourself “what else?” until another idea comes to you. Do not concern yourself with spelling, grammar, or punctuation. Your goal is to generate as much as you can about the topic in a short period of time and to get used to the feeling of articulating ideas on the page. It’s ok if it’s messy or makes sense only to you. You can repeat this exercise several times, using the same or a variety of topics connecting to your subject. Read what you have written to see if you have discovered anything about your subject or found a line of questioning you’d like to pursue.

*Clustering/Webbing*. Put a topic you’d like to explore in the center of a piece of paper and put a circle around it. As fast as you can, free-associate or jot down anywhere on the page as many words as you can think of associated with your center word. If you get stuck, go back to the center word and launch again. Speed is important and quantity is your goal. Don’t discount any word or phrase that comes to you, just put it down on the page. Jot words for between 5-10 minutes. When you are finished you will have a page filled with seemingly random words. Read around on the page and see if you have discovered anything or can see connections between any ideas.

*Listing.* On a piece of paper list all the ideas you can think of connected to subjects you are considering exploring. Consider any idea or observation as valid and worthy of listing. List quickly and then set your list aside for a few minutes. Come back and read your list and do the exercise again.

*Cubing*. This technique helps you look at your subject from six different points of view (imagine the 6 sides of a cube and you get the idea). Take your topic or idea and 1) describe it, 2) compare it, 3) associate it with something else you know, 4) analyze it (meaning break it into parts), 5) apply it to a situation you are familiar with, 6) argue for or against it. Write at a paragraph, page, or more about each of the six points of view on your subject.

*Journalistic questions*. Write these questions down the left hand margin of a piece of paper: Who? What? Where? When? How? And Why? Think about your topic in terms of each question.

*Defining terms*. Although this suggestion is simple and may seem obvious, it is often overlooked. Write definitions for key terms or concepts in your own words. Find others’ articulations of the terms in your course readings, the dictionary, or through conversations and compare the definitions to your own. Seek input from your instructor if you can’t get a working definition of a term for yourself.

*Summarizing positions*. Sometimes it’s helpful to simply describe what you know as a way to solidify your own understanding of something before you try to analyze or synthesize new ideas. You can summarize readings by individual articles or you can combine what you think are like perspectives into a summary of a position. Try to be brief in your description of the readings. Write a paragraph or up to a page describing a reading or a position.

*Personal response*. Sometimes ideas come clearest when you can put them in a frame that is meaningful to you. Take a concept from your reading assignments and apply it so a situation in your own life or to a current event with which you are familiar. You may not end up using this application in your final draft, but applying it to something you know will help you to understand it better and prepare you to analyze the idea as your instructor directs.