

# PAPER WRITING STEP 1: BRAINSTORMING A TOPIC

## Paper Writing Steps:

1. Brainstorming
2. Identifying Sources (Primary & Secondary)
3. Thesis Construction
4. Outlining
5. Drafting
6. Revising
7. Formatting

Before you start brainstorming you need to fully understand the assignment:

Length: 8-10 pages (not including your bibliography)

Topic: You choose- anything relating to early Western colonialism.

Sources: *At least 6 sources (At least one primary source)*

When you are in charge of picking your own prompt for a research paper, the process of defining a worthwhile topic can be overwhelming. **Brainstorming is a multi-step process that involves the free flowing of ideas and the refinement of these ideas into usable research questions that will help you define a clear thesis statement.**

**This is NOT a descriptive paper.** In other words, you cannot simply write about a biography, an account of an event, or tell your reader everything there is to know about Jamestown. **Instead this assignment requires you analyze primary and secondary sources by scholars in an attempt to answer a specific or a set of questions in relation to a particular colonial topic.** You must present an **argument**.

What does a “**good**” paper topic look like?

- Importance of economy vs. evangelization in English
- Effect of creolization in New France
- Most important western technology for colonization

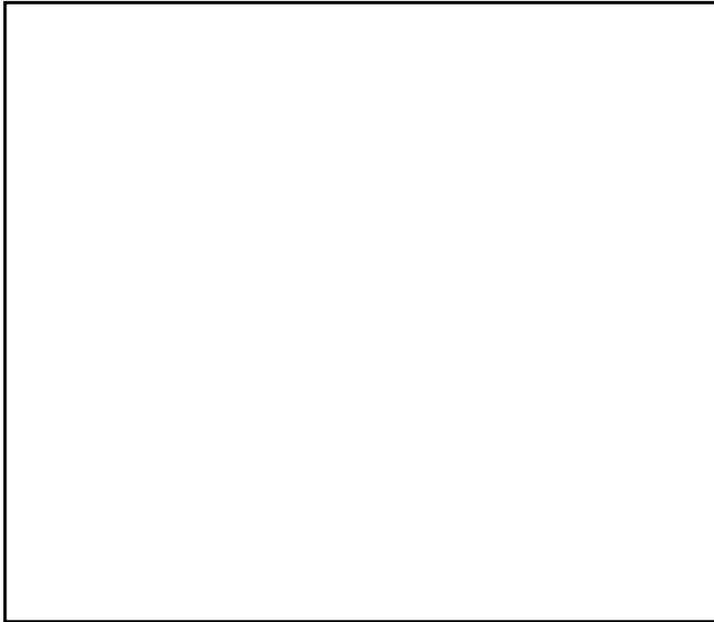
What does a “**bad**” paper topic look like?

- A biography of Christopher Columbus
- A detailed history of the establishment of colonies in Canada

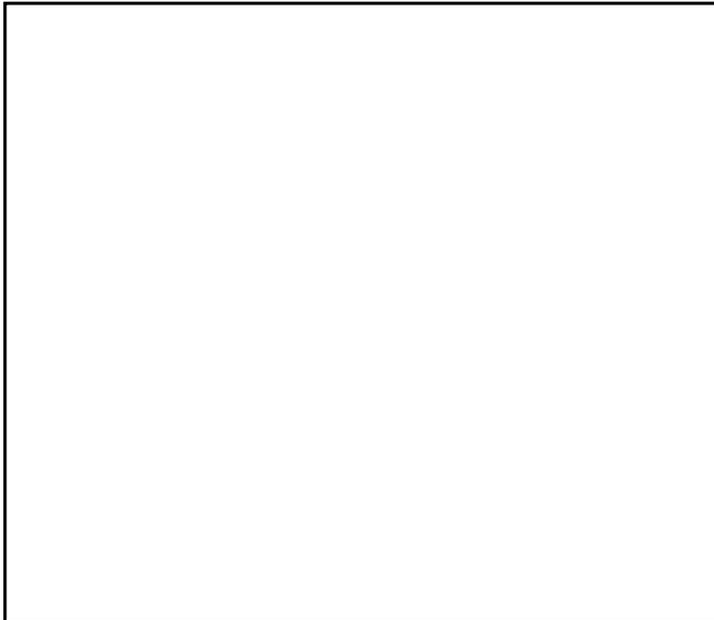
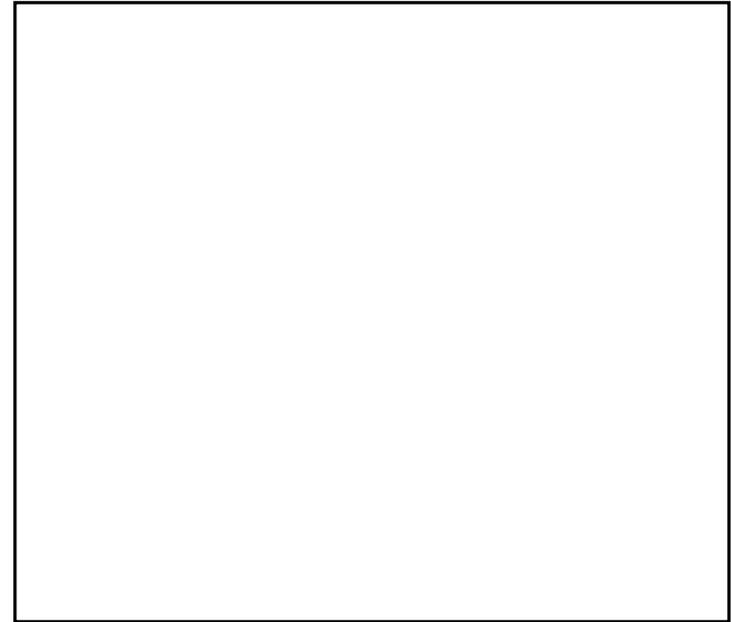
Keeping this in mind, let’s get started with brainstorming!

In this box, write down everything that comes to your mind in relation to the medieval period. Don’t evaluate, just write.

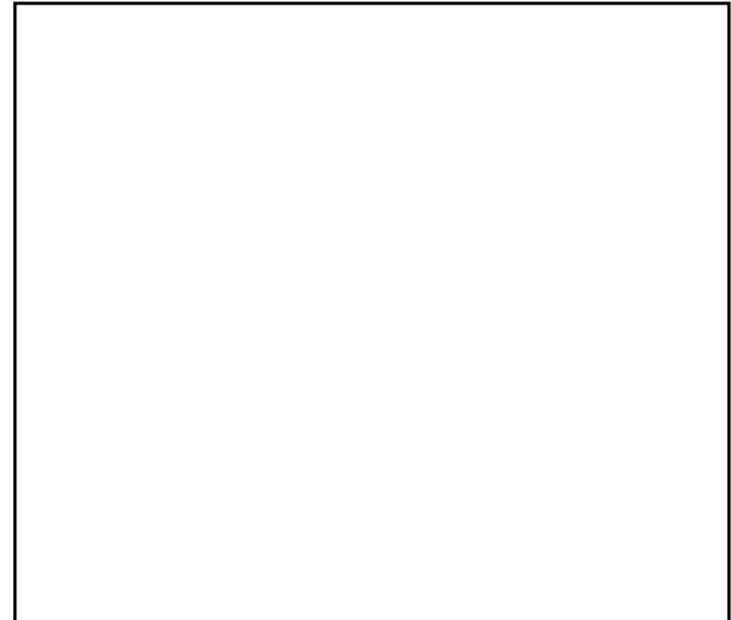
## **PAPER WRITING STEP 1: BRAINSTORMING A TOPIC**



Look at your big box.  
What are the four  
most appealing things  
you wrote down?  
Circle them.



Each topic gets a box.  
Write down anything  
that comes to mind  
when you think about  
that topic. (EX:  
“Technology”-  
navigation,  
cartography,  
gunpowder, medical  
warfare)



## **PAPER WRITING STEP 1: BRAINSTORMING A TOPIC**

### **What do I go from here?**

- 1. Familiarize yourself further with these topics.** You can find out a lot about a topic from Wikipedia. Pay particular attention to the “Additional Readings” sections and the “References” sections. Look at those articles- follow the links. Check the library catalog (lib.utexas.edu)- look at the titles and table of contents of books- what themes do they generally convey? Are there questions that are being consistently raised from one source to another? Is there a controversial issue? Keep good notes.
- 2. Make a choice.** Looking at your notes from step 1, which topic do you like the most? Does it have sufficient source material? You want to choose a topic that has easily accessible sources. Ask yourself: Can I work on this topic for the rest of the semester? That’s your topic.
- 3. Start listing questions that you could answer about topic.** Can you compare aspects of your topic (indentured servants vs. slave power)? Is there a historical debate (Was Christopher Columbus *really* the discoverer of the New World?) worth exploring? Does one aspect of the topic overshadow the others and is that justified and why?

Use the rest of this page and the back for notes about your topic and/or other ideas you might get: