

What is Clustering?

Clustering is a brainstorming technique with which ideas and associations on a certain topic can be collected and developed without evaluating them yet. Interrelations between individual ideas and association bundles on the initial topic (cluster core) can be made visible in this way. Similar to a mindmap, a cluster has a non-linear network structure. Different from the strongly structuring, reflected approach to a mindmap, however, clustering requires rapid, associative and creative access to ideas and is in this way rather similar to freewriting.

What is clustering suitable for?

- Collecting ideas on a topic
- Exploring possible sub-items on a topic
- Identifying key topics you would like to pursue
- Narrowing down the topic
- Creating a keyword list for literature research
- Preliminary work for a first rough outline



How does it work?

- Set yourself a concrete time frame (7 – 10 minutes).
- A3 sheets in landscape format are particularly suitable for this exercise.
- Note a central term (cluster core) in the middle of the sheet. This can also be the topic of the paper or a question.
- Starting from this core, you write terms or parts of sentences spontaneously, encircle them, and connect them with lines to the cluster core.
- Further associations can be noted for each term or half-sentence. If you think of something new about the cluster core, you can start there again.
- Work fast and put everything on paper that comes to your mind spontaneously. The pen should always be in motion. If you cannot think of anything else, circle a term again and again until the next thought comes.
- Delete, change or correct nothing while clustering.
- As soon as the time has elapsed, you can take your time to look at your cluster, comment on it or highlight interesting aspects.

How to continue working with the cluster?

- What becomes clear about the initial topic? Where are (surprising) cross-connections? Where are the main topics? On which aspects do you already have extensive knowledge, on which not?
- At which point is it worth to continue writing or doing research?
- Use some ideas as starting points for further clusters.
- Develop a mindmap or a first rough outline based on your cluster.