

11 Reverse thinking

What?

Are you stuck in your problem solving or caught in a negative thought spiral? Then this is the tool for you. To be able to use it you need to know how to conduct a brainstorming session (see the tool “Make your brain rain”). You also need to express the problem you will be starting with clearly. The tool is called reverse brainstorming.

Time?

30-60 minutes.

Why?

One of the reasons for using reverse brainstorming is to avoid getting caught up in thinking that solutions have to be realistic or feasible. This tool will help you to open up your mind, to think big and not allow yourself to be limited by what is possible. To give an example, let's say that a teacher is struggling with students who are not showing up to scheduled lectures. By reverse brainstorming this problem you will get the following question: “How will I get even fewer students to attend lectures?”

What is needed?

You will need post-its (if you want them), pens, paper, and a whiteboard or a wall to put notes on. Bring a camera to document your results. A problem, question or subject needs to be clearly stated before beginning.

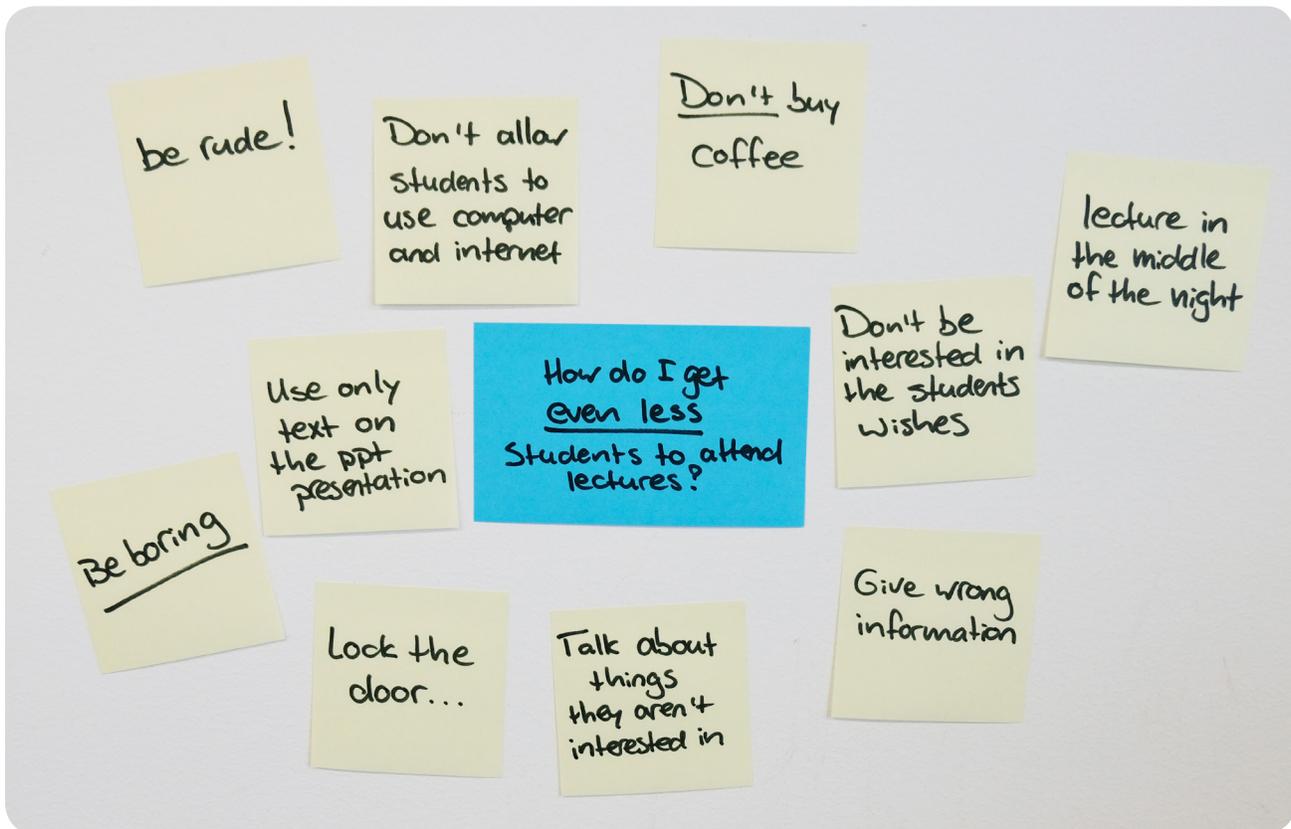
How?

1. Identify the problem, it should be clear what it is. Write it down on a paper or on the board.
2. Reverse the problem by asking the question “How can I make the situation even worse?”
3. Use regular brainstorming to develop different suggestions and solutions to your reversed problem. Allow for different ideas and don't question the participants' ideas.
4. When the brainstorming session has finished and you feel satisfied with the number of suggested solutions, you will reverse the suggested solutions and they will become solutions to your initial problem.
5. Look at the suggestions produced by the reverse brainstorming. Ask yourselves if there are any possible solutions to your problem.



Hints!

Create a good atmosphere in the group. Crazy ideas and suggestions are okay. Really.



Read more

You can find a lot of information about brainstorming online. Here are a couple of suggestions, both on how to facilitate a workshop and on Alex Osborn, the father of brainstorming:

MindTools. (2015). *Reverse Brainstorming*. Retrieved 2015-10-02 from https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCT_96.htm

Osborn, A.F. (1963). *Applied Imagination: Principles and Procedures of Creative Problem Solving* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Osborn, A.F. (1948). *Your Creative Power*. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.