



## **The “Best Results” Rules: Brainstorming with a Partner**

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### **The benefits of brainstorming with a partner are:**

- You get to see your ideas from different angles
- You can see how you could add other elements that FIT into your story
- You can get alternative directions in which you could take a given character, scene, setting, or conflict
- You can quickly move past or move around areas where you were getting stuck
- You get useful reactive feedback on what's good

### **The dangers of brainstorming with a partner are:**

- A bad partner can crush your ideas or your enthusiasm
- A bad partner can push you to write work you won't like
- A bad partner can destroy your confidence in your work
- A bad partner can convince you not to write at all

## **GENERAL RULES**

### **Brainstorming Rule #1: No Bad Partners**

Don't be one. Don't work with one.

If you find yourself with a partner who refuses to follow these rules, quit and walk away.

## **Brainstorming Rule #2: Work with someone who likes you, and likes your work**

Under no circumstances do you brainstorm with someone who doesn't like what you're already doing, or who thinks he or she could "help you figure out what you're doing wrong."

The world is full of people who find destruction fun, who like being seen as authorities, and who, though they aren't doing what you're doing themselves, will be delighted to tell you how they think you ought to do it.

You can partner up with:

- An enthusiastic reader of your work (VERY GOOD), or...
- With a fellow writer whose work you like and who likes yours (BEST ARRANGEMENT), or...
- With a family member or loved one who has read this sheet, and who wants to help because you don't yet have fans or know any other writers (OKAY)
- NEVER partner-up with a critic

Anyone who says "I'm don't write, but I'm a great critic....?"

Is telling you, "I don't actually have any skills myself, but I'm going to tear apart everything you do because that's how I have fun."

Say, "No thanks," remove this person from every part of your life that your creativity touches, and move on.

## **Brainstorming Rule #3: Pick a project (and a side)**

**Only brainstorm one story at a time.** It's very easy to get sidetracked into other projects. You'll hear Becca mention other stories in the world in which we're brainstorming, and how the story we're working on could tie into them, but while it's tempting to pursue bigger directions, you'll see us get back to the story we're actually doing.

If you're working with another writer and both of you are going to be brainstorming projects in the same session, flip a coin or pick for a high card to see who goes first, and the person who wins decides to either be the ball or the wall.

The Wall asks questions.

The Ball answers them.

## WALL RULES

### Rule #1: Walls Don't Move

The analogy of the handball court is important. The ball (and the person playing the ball) are always moving.

The wall stands there and reflects the ball back to the player, changing its direction, its speed, its spin. But it does this by NOT MOVING and NOT CHANGING.

***Being the Wall is a Tao experience.***

You have to take what the writer throws at you, and send it back in ways that push the writer to run, to jump, to work harder. You want to make the writer build up a good sweat, you want make the writer to step up his game, but...

You can only do this with what the writer throws at you.

You'll probably have brainstorming worksheets your partner has filled out that have some interesting words and phrases, some questions and answers, some ideas the writer has already come up with.

For the writer, any of these things can be changed in any fashion at any time.

***For you, the content of the worksheets is the unchangeable stone you're made of.***

## Rule #2: Walls Ask Questions

Your job is to familiarize yourself with your partner's worksheets, look at what's there, and think up questions you can ask your partner. Questions like:

- How does [worksheet word] relate to [worksheet topic]?
- Do you see any connection between [worksheet idea] and [other worksheet idea]?
- Do you see any conflict between [worksheet character] and [other worksheet character]?
- Could anything happen with [worksheet character] and [worksheet idea]?
- Who..?
- What...?
- When...?
- Where...?
- Why...?
- How...?
- Protagonist...?
- Antagonist...?
- Conflict...?
- Twist...?
- Setting...?

If it's on the sheet, you can ask about it.

It is absolutely acceptable to work out some questions in advance and write them down. As the Wall, however, you have to be able to see when the Ball

is finding its game, and you have to be able to come up with other questions that help the Ball more deeply explore those ideas.

So if you do a LOT of prep, a lot of it will go unused.

If the writer comes up with a new idea during the session, or MENTIONS it in relation to other questions you've asked, you can ask more about it.

If it's not on the worksheets and not mentioned in the session, you can't bring it up.

### **Rule #3: Walls Don't Have Ideas**

I'm going to come at this from a couple of different angles, because this is a big, destructive problem. If you think of something cool the writer could do with the story, you cannot offer this.

You'll hear me in the audio connecting the "talking in clicks and scratches" detail from one of Becca's worksheets to the dead grandfather's love of the ocean, and mentioning that dolphins talk in clicks — I almost went off the rails here, because **I had an idea** that was pretty cool, and I almost brought it up.

But I squelched it, because it wouldn't have fit Becca's story, and it would have derailed our session.

Instead, I dropped it and circled the questions back to the grandfather, and Becca's setting, and refocused on asking questions that helped her get where she needed to go.

She didn't end up anywhere near where I imagined she would, and the story went in an unexpected direction for both of us. But it got where she needed it to go.

**IMPORTANT: Keeping your mouth shut when you've just had a cool idea is tough.** Having ideas is so fun that going, "Oooh, oooh, I just had this really cool idea where you could..." would make you feel like a hero, and show off how smart you are and how awesome your idea is.

**My idea would have broken the path** that took Becca to finding her villains.

Remember that your idea WILL NOT help your partner. It will interject alien crud into a closed system that needs to stay closed to survive.

## **Rule #4: Walls Don't Have Opinions or Input**

No matter how terrific a writer you might be, your job as the wall is to help your partner develop his or her idea. Period.

**You NEVER get to say:**

- You SHOULD...
- You COULD...
- If I WERE YOU, I WOULD...
- You NEED TO...
- You OUGHT TO...
- WHY DON'T YOU...
- If I WERE WRITING THIS, I WOULD...
- If THIS WERE MY STORY...

***When you're the wall, here's what you have to remember...***

It **isn't** your story.

You **aren't** the writer.

And what you would do is *what you ought to do in **your own** work*, but it is utterly meaningless to the person you want to help.

***There are no exceptions to this.***

There is no time, EVER, where any of the phrases above are appropriate, and if someone uses them with you, close your session and walk away, right then and right there.

## **BALL RULES**

### **Rule #1: Bounce**

Consider every question seriously, even when it brings together elements you hadn't considered together, and even IF you can't immediately figure out how they might work together.

### **Rule #2: Spin**

Come up with at least one answer for every question, even if it sounds stupid coming out of your mouth. If you can come up with more than one answer for any question, say each one out loud to make it real, to let both sides of your brain hear it.

Try on things that don't fit perfectly, because you cannot make a mistake here. You are playing a game, getting some exercise, pushing your brain to move in ways it doesn't expect to move, and your only objective is to come away from the game with a clearer idea of the story you want to write than you had going in.

**If you get even ONE keeper idea out of the session, it has been a success.**

### **Rule #3: Rebound**

If you feel yourself going in a wrong direction, let it go. Don't be afraid to change up any part of your story. But don't be afraid to toss ideas that you come up with during this session because they don't fit your overall picture, even if they're cool standing alone.

A genuinely good idea that you can't use in this story will come back to you later, generally tied to a story that it will fit.