

# UCLA WRITING PROGRAMS

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## **“Speed Dating”: A Research Paper Prewriting Exercise**

*Time: 15-20 minutes*

This exercise is best when students have had a short time to think of possible topics for a research paper, but are unlikely to have developed it to a very sophisticated point, found a lot of sources, etc.

Announce to students that they are going to undertake a “speed dating” exercise centered on their research paper topics. Explain the procedure: they will sit across from a series of classmates for short sessions in which they take turns presenting their research paper topic as they currently understand it. In the time they have during each session, they should explain what they want to research and what they’re hoping to learn or argue about it, as well as any questions or concerns they currently have. Their partner is encouraged to ask questions or make suggestions during this explanation. Once the time elapses, you (the teacher) will announce that it’s time for the other person to speak, and the same process will repeat, with the students switching roles. Then, students will have new partners and will begin again.

Explain that the goal of the assignment is to force the students to focus their minds on the task of crafting a coherent research topic that they and others find interesting. As they speak about their topic again and again, they may think of additions and refinements, and may find themselves describing the project with more specificity and clarity than they did previously.

Require students to get out note-taking materials. Arrange the desks such that every one is facing another, then start a timer for the first student to make their pitch. (I recommend something that’s short enough to create time pressure but long enough to get somewhere—two minutes has worked for me.) When the time is up, tell them to switch so that the other person makes their presentation; when that time is up, have them both take notes on anything they liked from the presentation, then one member of each pair should get up and move to the next desk. (I recommend specifying which member should do so—“whoever’s closest to the door,” etc.). Do this with three or four sets. Leave plenty of time at the end for more detailed notetaking—perhaps segueing into a more thorough pre-writing exercise.

If there’s an odd number of students, you can be one of the stations, in which case the student has somewhat longer to pitch their project to you.