Brainstorming template for teams

A brainstorming template gives a group one clear question, a quiet way to write ideas, a board to group them and a simple way to choose. This kit has five sheets, from the question to a shortlist with owners, blank and filled in for a fictional support team, and a 50-minute script with words to say.

50 minutes | 4–12 participants | Online and adaptable in person

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The outcome

In 50 minutes a group of 4–12 people agrees one question, numbers and groups its ideas, votes, checks the top ideas and leaves with up to three ideas to try, each with a first step, an owner who said yes and a date.

Before the session

- For facilitators, trainers and team leads who run an idea session with 4–12 adults at work. The group must already know its problem and be able to act on the answers.
- Fill in the question sheet with the person who owns the topic, a day ahead: one or two facts with a source, the limits, and who decides after the session.
- Print one silent idea sheet per person and one of each other sheet, or share the Excel board on screen. Bring paper slips for the vote.
- Ideas and votes are written, anyone may pass, and nobody has to walk to a wall or tell colours apart. Read each idea aloud; online, keep captions on and cameras optional.

Included in this kit

A facilitator run of show, participant worksheets with real tables, reference tables, debrief questions, adaptation notes and a follow-up plan. Use the editable Word copy to tailor examples and prompts before delivery.

Original material by Superglue. Timings are suggestions; adjust them to your participants. This resource has not been independently evaluated.

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Brainstorming question sheet

Fill this in before the session with the person who owns the topic. A clear question does more for the session than any rule about how to write ideas.

Part	What to write	Your notes
The topic in one line	The situation you want ideas about. No solution yet.	
What we know	One or two facts with a number, a date and a source.	
Who the ideas are for	The people whose work or experience should change.	
What is fixed	Limits the ideas must respect: budget, rules, dates, tools.	
The question	One sentence that starts “What could we try so that…” and names one aim.	
Check the question	No solution inside? One aim only? Could this group act on an answer within a month?	
After the session	How many ideas go forward, who decides, and where the other ideas are kept.	

Silent idea sheet

One sheet per person. Write one idea per row and start each with a verb. Small and unusual ideas count. Do not write your name.

Our question: _____

Tick	My idea	A detail that makes it clear
☐		
☐		
☐		
☐		
☐		
☐		
☐		
☐		

Tick the ideas you want on the board. You may keep any idea to yourself, and you may pass when the ideas are read out.

Idea board

The facilitator writes each idea here as it is read out, or on a flipchart with the same columns. Add the cluster letter when the group sorts the ideas, and the votes after the count.

#	Idea (starts with a verb)	Cluster	Votes
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			
18			
19			
20			

Grouping board

Give each cluster a name of two or three words and list the numbers of its ideas. An idea may stay on its own. Fill in the votes after the count.

Letter	Cluster name	Ideas in the cluster (numbers)	Number of ideas	Votes
A				
B				
C				
D				
E				
F				
—	Not grouped			
	Total			

People voting: _____ **Votes per person:** _____ **Votes available:** _____ **Votes cast:** _____

Selection sheet

Write the four to six ideas above the line, with their votes. Score each from 1 to 3 for its effect on the question and for how easy it is to try within two weeks (3 = easiest). Check score = effect + ease, from 2 to 6. Decision: try now, ask for a decision, or park.

Idea #	Idea	Votes	Effect 1–3	Ease 1–3	Check score	Decision

Shortlist and next steps

Up to three ideas to try. An idea goes on the shortlist only when its owner has said yes.

#	What we will try	From ideas	First step	Owner (said yes)	By when
S1					
S2					
S3					

Review date, who attends, and where the full board and the parked ideas are kept

Filled example: brainstorming question sheet

A fictional customer support team of eight people works in two shifts. The facilitator and the early shift lead filled in the question sheet the day before the session on Tuesday 3 November.

Part	What the team wrote
The topic in one line	The handover of open cases from the early shift to the late shift in the customer support team.
What we know	From Monday 5 October to Friday 30 October the late shift contacted an early-shift colleague after 14:00 about a handed-over case 23 times. Source: the late shift's own tally. Handover notes are free text in the team channel.
Who the ideas are for	The eight people on the two shifts. All eight take part in the session.
What is fixed	The shift times, 06:00 to 14:00 and 14:00 to 22:00, change only if the support manager agrees. No new software.
The question	"What could we try in the next two weeks so that the late shift can pick up every open case without contacting the early shift?"
Check the question	No solution inside: yes. One aim: yes. Within our reach: yes, except any change to shift times, which needs the support manager.
After the session	Up to three ideas go forward. The two shift leads decide what to try. The other ideas stay on the board in the team folder.

Examples of good and weak brainstorming questions

A useful question names one aim, holds no solution and asks for something this group can act on. Use these five pairs to test your own question.

Weak question	Why it is weak	A stronger version
"How can we improve communication?"	Too wide. Nobody knows which situation to think about.	"What could we try so that a colleague who was absent on Monday knows by Tuesday 10:00 what was decided?"
"Should we buy a new handover tool?"	A yes or no question with one solution inside it.	"What could we try so that the late shift can pick up every open case without contacting the early shift?"
"Why do people skip the handover note?"	Asks for causes and blame, not for ideas.	"What could we try so that writing the handover note takes less than five minutes?"
"How can we cut errors and save time and keep customers happy?"	Three aims. Ideas for one aim will compete with the others.	Pick the aim that matters most this month and ask about that one.
"What could head office do about our rota?"	The group cannot act on the answers.	"What could we try within our own team so that a rota change reaches everyone a week ahead?"

Filled example: idea board

The eight people wrote 21 ideas in six minutes. Five were the same as another idea and were merged with the writers' agreement, which left 16. Each person had three votes, so 24 votes were cast. Equal votes share a rank.

#	Idea (starts with a verb)	Cluster	Votes	Rank
1	Use one handover note with four fixed fields	Handover note	5	1
2	Write the next step for each open case, not only its history	Handover note	3	3
3	Mark the three cases most likely to come back today	Handover note	2	5
4	Finish the note by 13:45, before the shift ends	Timing and overlap	1	8
5	Overlap the two shifts by 15 minutes	Timing and overlap	4	2
6	Hold a five-minute spoken handover at 14:00	Timing and overlap	2	5
7	Add a "handover" tag to open cases in the ticket tool	Tools and tags	3	3
8	Pin today's handover note at the top of the team channel	Tools and tags	1	8
9	Build a saved view of cases touched today and still open	Tools and tags	1	8
10	Name one handover lead on each shift	Roles and checks	2	5
11	Ask the late shift lead to read back the priority cases	Roles and checks	0	11
12	Rotate the handover lead each week	Roles and checks	0	11
13	Tell the customer who takes over, and from when	Customer contact	0	11
14	Send a short holding message for cases that wait on us	Customer contact	0	11
15	Take no new complex case in the last 20 minutes of a shift	Timing and overlap	0	11
16	Keep a one-week list of the questions the late shift had to ask	Roles and checks	0	11

Filled example: grouping board

Five clusters. "Handover note" holds three ideas and ten of the 24 votes. "Customer contact" drew no votes; its two ideas stay on the board.

Cluster name	Ideas in the cluster (numbers)	Number of ideas	Votes
Handover note	1, 2, 3	3	10
Timing and overlap	4, 5, 6, 15	4	7
Tools and tags	7, 8, 9	3	5
Roles and checks	10, 11, 12, 16	4	2
Customer contact	13, 14	2	0
Total		16	24

Filled example: selection sheet

The votes drop from three to two after the fourth idea, so the team drew the line there and checked four ideas. Idea 5 scored 1 for ease because shift times are fixed unless the support manager agrees.

Idea #	Idea	Votes	Effect 1–3	Ease 1–3	Check score	Decision
1	Use one handover note with four fixed fields	5	3	3	6	Try now
5	Overlap the two shifts by 15 minutes	4	3	1	4	Ask for a decision
2	Write the next step for each open case, not only its history	3	2	3	5	Try now
7	Add a “handover” tag to open cases in the ticket tool	3	2	2	4	Try now

Filled example: shortlist and next steps

Ideas 1 and 2 became one thing to try. Review: Tuesday 17 November, 20 minutes, both shift leads and the facilitator. The board with all 16 ideas is in the team folder.

#	What we will try	From ideas	First step	Owner (said yes)	By when
S1	One handover note with four fixed fields: case, state now, next step and who the customer expects to hear from	1 and 2	Draft the note and use it at Thursday’s handover	Early shift lead	Thu 5 Nov
S2	A “handover” tag on every open case that changes hands	7	Add the tag in the ticket tool and write one line on when to use it	Ticket tool administrator	Mon 9 Nov
S3	A two-week trial of a 15-minute overlap between the shifts	5	Ask the support manager for a decision, with the tally of 23 contacts	Late shift lead	Fri 6 Nov

Facilitator run of show

1 Open and agree the question | 6 minutes

Read the question sheet aloud for two minutes: the topic, what is known, what is fixed and the question. Say: “For the next 50 minutes we collect ideas, group them and choose up to three to try. Nobody judges an idea before the vote.” Take three minutes for one check: “Is there a word in the question you would change so that it is clearer?” Change one word or phrase at most. Use the last minute for three working rules: one idea per row, no comments while we write or read, and anyone may pass.

2 Write ideas in silence | 7 minutes

Hand out the silent idea sheets. Say: “Write one idea per row and start each with a verb. Small and unusual ideas count. No names on the sheet.” Give six minutes of silent writing. After four minutes say: “If you have run dry, read the question again and write an idea for a different person or a different moment in the day.” In the last minute each person ticks the ideas they want on the board. They may keep any idea to themselves.

3 Read out and number the ideas | 8 minutes

For seven minutes go round the group: each person reads one ticked idea per turn, or says “pass”. Write each idea on the board with the next number. If people prefer, collect the sheets and read the ideas yourself without names. Say: “Questions to understand an idea are welcome. Opinions wait for the vote.” Merge two ideas only when both writers agree that they mean the same thing. In the last minute, count the ideas and say the number.

4 Group the ideas and name the clusters | 9 minutes

For five minutes ask: “Which ideas answer the question in the same way?” Write a cluster letter next to each idea, or choose the cluster in the Excel board. An idea may stay on its own. For three minutes name each cluster with two or three words that say what its ideas are about, such as “Handover note”, not how good they are. In the last minute read the cluster names and the ideas in each aloud and ask: “Is any idea in the wrong place?” Aim for three to six clusters.

5 Vote in silence | 5 minutes

Take one minute to explain the vote. Give each person one vote for about every five ideas, with at least two and at most five: for 16 ideas, three votes each. Say: “Write the numbers of the ideas you most want us to try on your slip. One vote per idea. Vote for ideas, not for clusters.” Give two minutes of silent voting on paper slips, or by private message online. Count the slips and write the totals on the board for two minutes. Check that the votes cast equal the number of people times the votes each, less any passes.

6 Check the top ideas and choose | 9 minutes

Take one minute to draw the line where the votes drop, so that four to six ideas stay above it. Say: “The vote shows what we prefer today. Now we check the top ideas against two questions.” For six minutes, about one minute per idea, agree two scores from 1 to 3: the effect on our question, and how easy the idea is to try within two weeks, where 3 is easiest. Each person writes a number first; if the numbers differ by two points, hear one reason from each side. In the last two minutes decide for each idea: try now, ask for a decision, or park. Choose up to three. Say: “The votes and the scores order our talk. They do not decide for us.”

7 Agree next steps and owners, and close | 6 minutes

For four minutes fill in the shortlist: what we will try, the first step, the owner and the date. The owner says yes aloud or in writing; an idea without an owner is not on the shortlist yet. Take one minute to set the review date and to say where the full board and the parked ideas are kept. In the last minute read the shortlist back and ask each person for one word about the session, or a pass.

Reference tables

What to say when the session gets stuck

When this happens	Say this
Someone comments on an idea while it is read out	“Hold that thought for the vote. For now, only questions that help us understand the idea.”
The writing stops after three minutes	“Read the question again. Write one idea for a different person, or for a different moment in the day.”
An idea fits two clusters	“Where would you look for it next week? Put it there. It can move later.”
A cluster name is a judgement, such as “Quick wins”	“Let us name what the ideas are about, not how good they are.”
The most senior person’s idea draws every vote	“Votes are written and counted together. Senior colleagues, please hand in your votes last.”
Several ideas tie at the line	“We take all the tied ideas to the check if that gives six or fewer. If not, one more vote each, on the tied ideas only.”
Nobody accepts a next step	“Without an owner it is not on the shortlist yet. Who would take only the first step?”
Someone asks why their idea was dropped	“Nothing is dropped. Every idea stays on the board, and we look at the parked ideas again at the review.”

Debrief and next steps

Questions for reflection

- Which idea on the board surprised you, and what made it possible to write it down?
- Which cluster drew few votes: are its ideas weak, or only hard to picture?
- Where did the check score change the order that the votes gave, and which do we trust here?
- What would make us stop one of the shortlisted ideas early, and who would notice first?

Adapt the session

- For 4 or 5 people, keep the silent writing at six minutes and ask for at least four ideas each. Skip the round and read all the sheets yourself. Two votes each are usually enough.
- For a 30-minute version, agree the question beforehand, give five minutes of writing, group into clusters without naming every one, and let the vote alone choose the top three. Fill in the shortlist as usual.
- Online, share the Excel board or a plain document on screen. People send ideas and votes to the facilitator by private message, and the facilitator reads each idea aloud. Keep cameras optional.
- For quiet participants and people who use a screen reader, collect the ideas in writing a day ahead, read them out without names and send the numbered list as plain text.
- When a manager takes part, ask them to hand in their votes last. If the manager decides afterwards, say in the opening that the shortlist is a recommendation.

After the session

Send the shortlist and the full board on the same day, as plain text or as the workbook. At the review date, look at each shortlisted idea: what was tried, what changed, and whether to keep, adapt or stop it. Then read

the parked ideas once more. If the question needs a check of causes or a test with a measure, continue with the problem-solving workshop kit; for a fuller plan, use the team action plan template.

Questions people ask

What should a brainstorming template include?

A question sheet, a place for each person to write ideas alone, a board that numbers and groups the ideas, a way to select and a shortlist with owners. This template has those five parts, blank and filled in, and a 50-minute script with words to say.

How do you write a good brainstorming question?

Name one aim, leave out any solution and ask about something the group can act on. “What could we try so that the late shift can pick up every open case without contacting the early shift?” works. “How can we improve communication?” is too wide, and “Should we buy a new tool?” already holds an answer.

How many votes should each person get?

One vote for about every five ideas, with at least two and at most five: two votes for 12 ideas or fewer, three for 13 to 17, four for 18 to 22 and five for 23 or more. This is a rule of thumb written for this kit. A vote shows what the group prefers today, not whether an idea will work, so do not use it to decide about people, safety or legal matters.

Where does brainstorming come from, and what is brainwriting?

Brainstorming is a general word for collecting many ideas before judging them. It is usually credited to the advertising executive Alex F. Osborn, who set it out in his book Applied Imagination (1953). Writing ideas in silence before any discussion is often called brainwriting. This template uses its own sequence of silent writing, reading out, grouping and voting. It does not reproduce a named method, and it does not claim that one way of collecting ideas gives more or better ideas than another.

How is this different from the problem-solving workshop kit?

The problem-solving activities kit is a 90-minute workshop that sorts facts, states the problem, checks causes and compares options with weighted scores. This template is only the idea step: generate, group and select, in 50 minutes, with a vote count and a two-question check. Use it when the problem is already clear. For a wider look at the situation first, use the SWOT analysis template.

What is included in the free and editable files?

The open PDF has the blank sheets, a filled example of each, five pairs of weak and stronger questions, the 50-minute script and a table of words to say when the session gets stuck. Subscribers also receive the editable Word file, an Excel workbook with a board that counts ideas and votes per cluster, ranks the ideas and reads the top six into a selection sheet, and a CSV of the example idea board.

Use and sharing

Free to use and adapt in your own training sessions, including paid client work. Do not resell or redistribute the unmodified download as a standalone product. Share the resource page instead.