Speedy Techniques
Plus, Minus, Interesting
Beyond binary brainstorming

CATEGORIES: BRAINSTORMING, DIVERGENT THINKING, DECISION-MAKING

PMI is a very simple but effective brainstorming tool, created by Edward de Bono, which encourages students to think beyond binary pros and cons when evaluating an idea, text or object.

Steps

At its most basic, the PMI tool is simply a three-column brainstorming sheet. The first column is headed **"Plus"**; the second column is headed **"Minus"**; and the third column is headed **"Interesting"**. Students can use it as a frame to assess anything from a set text to a series of rival proposals for a design task. It is the addition of the final, "Interesting" column that stimulates creative thinking.

Variations

1. Students can use the tool **individually, in groups or as a whole class**. A group or whole-class setting often generates the most activity in the "Interesting" column – which is generally what you are looking for.

2. It can be useful in the first instance to lead students through the process step-by-step without revealing the headings of the subsequent columns. Start with "What are the pluses [about X]?" and end with "What are the interesting things [about X]?" Again, this tends to generate more activity in the "Interesting" column.

3. To turn PMI into a systematic **decision-making tool**, after the brainstorming is complete ask students to weight each entry in each column. "Minus" entries obviously get a minus value and "Plus" entries get a positive value (you may want to give fixed parameters: scores could range from -3 to +3). "Interesting" entries can be scored plus, minus or neutral – a process which will require some further thought. The totalled score could be used to guide a course of action, particularly if PMI is being used to think about two or more competing ideas or proposals.

ONLINE? YES – THIS WORKS IN ANY SETTING

PHYSICAL RESOURCES? NONE REQUIRED, THOUGH YOU MAY WANT TO PROVIDE A PMI TEMPLATE SHEET