



Overcoming Writer's Block

Overview

Do you ever get stuck in your writing? Have you ever felt paralyzed by a blank page? Or worse yet – do you feel you are the only one who experiences this? In Writing Support, we hear complaints about writer's block on a daily basis. It happens to even the most experienced writers. There are different reasons why writer's block might occur: not having enough writer's strategies, perfectionism, and lack of sufficient information on your topic, trying to say too much in one essay/paragraph, or simply being completely out of ideas.

How We Can Help

In Writing Support, we can help you identify the reasons you might be stuck and recommend a variety of possible strategies to address them. But until we see you in person, check out some strategies our own Writing Support Consultants use when they feel writer's block sneaking up on them. See if any of them work for you:

1. Take a break

This seems to be the number one trick. If your ideas stop flowing, take a 15-minute break to make some tea or coffee, cook, watch something, move around the apartment, or go for a walk or a jog. If you go for a walk, don't forget to bring a pen and paper – you never know when ideas (and words) might start flowing again! It is important to differentiate between the idea of taking a short break and constantly interrupting your work to browse online or check your Facebook account. This is a subtle form of procrastination.

2. Talk to someone

If you have a chance, try talking to someone about your ideas. This can be your sibling, roommate, someone in your class or your program, even your grandmother. Try explaining your main points to them. This might help you find the right words and clarify what you want to say. If you are having difficulty understanding your assignment, you can even email your professor and ask for clarification.

3. Take stock of your ideas

If you happen to be stuck and there's no one around to talk to, try using a cell phone to record yourself talking about your ideas and later write down the parts that you liked. You can also make a list of key words and phrases and their synonyms first, and then slowly expand them into sentences and later, into

paragraphs. Another fun and creative way to take stock of your ideas and the connections among them visually is to draw diagrams of your ideas.

4. Read

There are many things you can read to jump-start your writing: You can read and re-read related articles and course materials to remind yourself of the key concepts you are trying to discuss. You can go over your assignment outline and make a list of specific goals you are setting out to accomplish in your essay. This will help keep the writing process more focused. You can also read completely unrelated materials, like a newspaper article or a few pages of your favorite book. This can be especially helpful when you are struggling to find the right words to phrase an idea or to really hit a point home. Reading a style of writing other than your own can be refreshing and inspiring.

5. Free write

If you have trouble finding the right words to express your ideas, try writing long-hand with a timer (10-20 min). You can write whatever comes to mind without any concern for form or coherence. Don't worry about grammar and try not to censor yourself or your thoughts and ideas as they come to you. You can write about your topic and then type up what you have written. But you can also write about the frustration and difficulty you are having with this particular writing project and speculate about the reasons and possible solutions. This can be surprisingly helpful in getting you into the flow of words and ideas again.

Resources

You can find a wonderful analysis of writer's block symptoms and cures in the [Online Writing Lab](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/567/01/) at Purdue University
(<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/567/01/>)