

THE WRITING CENTER

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Overcoming Writer's Block

Writer's block is a common occurrence, with several different possible causes. Although writer's block is extremely frustrating, it *can* be overcome with a little patience.

The first step in overcoming writer's block is always to figure out what is causing your block. It may be that you and your topic are not connecting *or* even something that is not related to academics at all, such as an argument with your best friend. Once you locate the cause of your writer's block, you can then begin to overcome it.

Here are a few common causes of writer's block and some suggestions for getting past them.

Cause: *I'm having trouble coming up with ideas.*

Try:

- Brainstorm. Lay out all your ideas on paper, anything even remotely related to your topic that pops into your head. Then look them over for connections.
- Talk through your ideas out loud with a friend or into a tape recorder if you work better verbally. If you can, record the conversation with your friend. That way, you're not trying to remember everything that was said whenever you have time to work on the paper next.
- Visit the writing center and talk about your paper with a tutor.

Cause: *I'm unenthusiastic about my topic..*

Try:

- Talk about your topic with someone else (friend/classmate/professor). Often they will have a different view of the topic than you have. They just might have some insights that will help you.
- Look for an interesting or unusual angle to your topic. Try looking at it from a different point of view than your own to get perspective, or change the audience.

Cause: *I don't understand the assignment.*

Try:

- Talk to your professor.
- Read over your syllabus and/or the textbook if relevant.
- Visit with a tutor in the writing center.

Cause: *I need to make every word perfect the first time/I can't get past this particular point.*

Try:

- Start writing, whatever comes to mind, and force yourself not to stop and edit until the entire idea is written down. Then go on to the next idea/paragraph. Once you have a general draft down, you can always go back and edit later.
- Break the assignment up into smaller steps instead of thinking of it as one large step.
- Start writing somewhere in the middle, or even your conclusion. You don't have to start at the beginning. Often, good introductions are those revised after the rest of the paper has been written.

Cause: *I hate my work being criticized or evaluated by my peers or my professor.*

Try:

- Think of this draft as practice. As mentioned before, once you've written it out once, you can go back and revise later.
- Show it to a friend first. Ask him/her for an honest evaluation and for suggestions.

Cause: *I have writing anxiety.*

Try:

- If you know you become stressed when you write, give yourself several days to compose. Work in small sections, such as an outline one day, your intro and thesis the next. Keep it manageable.
- Check out the writing center's handout, "Dealing with Writing Anxiety," for helpful tips

Cause: *I'm completely stressed out this semester.*

Try:

- Sometimes writer's block is caused by stress that isn't related specifically to the assignment on which you are having trouble. Often it is caused by pressures elsewhere, such as relationships, work, money worries, lack of sleep, or having fallen behind due to illness to name a few.
- If you've been sitting at your computer for hours with little progress, take a short break. Get a drink, go for a walk, or take a shower --anything that you normally find relaxing.
- Get enough sleep. Writing is less stressful when you're awake, and your brain is fully functioning.

***If you still find yourself stuck, after trying a few or all of these suggestions, stop by the writing center to visit with a tutor. We are more than happy to help you find ways to start—and continue—your writing.**