

Overcoming Writer's Block

Sometimes the most difficult part of writing is getting started. Staring at a blank screen or blank sheet of paper can get frustrating—and make you feel as if your ideas are “blocked.” To work through writer’s block, try the following:

Just Write!

One good tip is to just start freewriting. Put your pen to the paper and don’t pick it up. If you are using a computer, turn off the monitor so you can’t see what you are writing and just go. Don’t try to make yourself stick to the topic or transition from idea to idea—just write! You can go back and look at what you wrote later. As you freewrite, try:

- › Listing/writing about everything you know about your topic
- › Listing/writing about everything you wish you knew about your topic
- › Writing about what you want readers to know/feel/do upon reading your paper

Get to the “Meat” of the Paper

Skip thinking of a title or composing the perfect introduction. Dive right into the main parts of the paper/essay/story—the meat of it. Introductions can be daunting and composing them can limit your freedom in discovering what you need and want to say about your topic. Besides, they are often easier to write after the rest of the assignment is drafted!

Turn Off Your Internal Censor

Allow yourself to write without worrying about perfection. You can revise your writing later, before you ever show it to anyone. For now, just get your ideas on the page. Making the writing sound good is something to worry about in future drafts and during the revision process—don’t worry about it when you are just starting to write a paper.

Try Writing an Outline, Drawing a Map, Sketching a Plan

Planning ahead of drafting gives you a plan to stick to. Try plotting your basic points and giving your essay/paper/story an overall structure. You might find, after outlining, that filling in your sketch goes quite quickly for you. However, don’t worry if you veer from your plan—it is there as a guide, not an absolute.

Create a Mission Plan or Abstract

Abstracts are short summaries of exactly what your paper or essay is going to say. They are most often used in professional journals. Mission statements are essentially the same idea—they are a brief idea of what it is you want to say or do within your paper. These help you to figure out exactly what it is you want to say.

Stop Writing—Just Talk!

Meet with a writing consultant, a friend, a classmate, or an instructor to discuss the assignment. Sometimes just having a conversation about the assignment in general or about your topic in particular will get your writing juices flowing.