



Center for Writing and Speaking

E NO. 9 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES

Getting Past Writer's Block

Writer's block can be a source of great frustration, but these strategies can help get those wheels turning.

Read.

Sometimes you get so involved in a particular assignment that you lose track of your direction. After going over the material again, you will often feel confident and clear enough about your topic to begin writing again.

- *Review your thesis.* You'll either return to your focus with a good sense of direction or decide to rewrite it. Don't be afraid to alter your thesis; you might be "blocking" yourself by refusing to do so.
- *Look over previous drafts (if you have them).* Remind yourself of your original plan and pursue it or change it.
- *Review class notes or reading notes.* These sources can give you ideas for your assignment.

Rethink.

Try reframing your perspective on your paper.

- *Make an outline.* Looking at the most important points of your paper can help you see how to tie it all together, and you may think of points to add or change.
- *Make a chart or draw a picture.* If you're a visual learner, viewing your paper as an image can seem less daunting than looking over hundreds of words on a page.
- *Start somewhere else.* Work on the part of the paper that comes easiest to you. This might be the conclusion or a paragraph in the middle. Starting with the easy part will help you spark ideas for other sections.
- *Try free-writing.* Just write whatever comes to mind about your topic, even if it's grammatically incorrect or you don't think it sounds good. Fresh perspectives may come to you during this exercise.

Move.

Leaving your workspace for a while can be a good thing.

- *Take a break.* This might sound counterproductive, but pausing to take a walk, make a phone call, or play frisbee gives your mind a chance to relax, allowing you to return to your writing refreshed. If taking a complete break isn't feasible, try working on an assignment for a different class. Then go back to the paper.
- *Describe your topic to someone else.* Go to the CWS or talk to a friend, and have that person take notes on what you say. Talking out your ideas can shed new light on what you think and what you can include.
- *Talk to your instructor.* He or she can give you advice on a focus for your paper and can sometimes help you determine what's really "blocking" your writing.

Back to the paper.

Some debate exists about whether writer's block exists at all; perhaps it's just the way we describe difficult moments in the writing process. In any case, whatever "it" is, it's curable. As with many other problems, admitting you're stuck is the first step to overcoming that block. Then you can get back to work!

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