

Writer's Block/ Anxiety

"Writing is easy. All you do is stare at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood form on your forehead."
- Gene Fowler, Novelist and dramatist

WHAT IS WRITER'S BLOCK?

No, you are not crazy. Just put the pen down and back away from the assignment. That feeling of blankness you are experiencing is typical of all writers, just as stage fright plagues those who perform. So unplug the shredder, un-crumple your paper, and take a deep breath. You know what? Stretch too.

Writer's block is the feeling you get when the blank computer screen silently laughs at you. Writer's block is the feeling you get when you look at a blank piece of paper and the tip of your pencil breaks from the mere taunt of filling up the empty lines.

Ask yourself...

So let's put this problem in perspective. Writer's block is a fear brought on by pressure. Take a moment to ask yourself the following questions:

- *Am I unclear about the assignment?*
- *Am I nervous about the grade I'll receive?*
- *Am I too focused on the deadline?*
- *Does the topic interest me?*
- *Do I have an outline or an idea prepared?*
- *Is there a problem unrelated to school that is sidetracking me?*
- *Am I self-conscious about my writing?*

Helpful Tips

Think about your answers to these questions. There is most likely something preventing you from doing the assignment at hand. However, no matter what your particular trigger may be, there are easy ways to work around it.

- ***Talk yourself down.*** Do not allow yourself to get worked up about a fast approaching deadline or the grade you will receive. Instead, allow that pressure to fuel you. A little bit of adrenaline can actually help you to get going. Dive right in to any part of your paper and *free write*. Get anything and everything down on paper and then go back to organize or omit information.
- ***Gather your thoughts.*** If you are unclear on the assignment, starved for an idea, or stuck with a topic that does not interest you, fix it. No one is expected to be a master on all topics from the start. Set aside a couple of moments to clarify the assignment by asking the teacher, a friend, or a tutor. Once the topic is defined, find an interesting direction by discussing it with someone. Research comes into play here. Take time to become an expert on your topic and create an outline or a simple idea sheet. These efforts will get you started when it comes time to face the blank paper.

- ***Don't pick yourself apart.*** People tend to be their own worst critics, but rough drafts are meant to be imperfect; no one is expected to get it just right the first time. When you find yourself deleting every line you type, take a break. Take a walk, play video games, surf the Internet, read a book; do something you enjoy. However, before you walk away from the assignment, set a specific time to get back to work. Once your free time is up, revisit the assignment and make yourself write everything you think of. Take another short break after you have written down all of your ideas. Approaching your rough draft with a fresh mind will enable you to revise your paper without tension and stress guiding your red pen.
 - ***Edit last.*** It is tempting to make each paragraph perfect before moving on to the next one. However, narrowing your focus to a single paragraph or sentence hinders you when you are trying to come up with a rough draft. Keep your eye on the big picture, and fight the urge to spend an hour staring at where your introduction should be. If you lack an amazing opening or the perfect thesis at first, it is not the end of the world; no one will know it but you. Once you make it through a draft of your paper, print it out. Oftentimes, reading the paper out loud to yourself will help you see what areas need to be changed. At this point you will be able to indulge the urge to focus on specific paragraphs or sentences. It will be easier to do so at this time because as you write the draft you will see the direction in which your paper is going and be able to rework your introduction, clarify your thesis, and fix transitions. Getting worked up about finding the perfect quotes or nailing your introduction before you have a full draft of your ideas will only stress you out and prolong the writing process (something I'm sure you want to avoid at this point).
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