



Overcoming Writer's Block

Writer's block is a struggle that nearly everyone faces at some point in the writing process. Sometimes it is difficult to transfer one's thoughts into well-structured, cohesive elements in a paper. Writer's block can be experienced in many different stages; for assistance in getting the paper started, see the UWC's handout, "Brainstorming Techniques." The following tips will be useful in situations where the student does not know what else to write or include in his or her paper.

1. Verify that the paper has a very clear structure or outline. Some people prefer creating an outline that lists the main ideas of each paragraph, surrounded by the introduction and the conclusion. Outlines can be structured in many different ways, so the student should format it in a manner that is most helpful to him or her. The UWC also has a handout called "Outlining: Structuring a Paper" that may help.
2. Talk to someone else about the topic in order to gain a different perspective and get creative juices flowing. Also, it may be helpful to read other people's research; if this is the chosen approach, be very careful **not to plagiarize**.
3. Read the paper aloud and backwards, starting with the last paragraph written and backing up towards the start. This will help the student see any "plot holes," missing links, or repetitious language. It can also show the student any possibilities of missing elements in the argument.
4. The student should ask him or herself this question: "How can I think about this topic differently?" This could mean thinking "outside the box" (creatively), thinking unconventionally, or thinking from an opposing viewpoint. It may help the kinesthetic learner to get up and move around while doing this step; an auditory learner may want to talk through the topic aloud, either to someone else or to one's self. The visual learner can write out the possible thoughts and viewpoints so that he or she can see them.
5. If all else fails, take a break. It is important to give one's brain a rest; if possible, get some rest, eat a snack, get some exercise, or think about something else for a while. Hopefully, this rest will give the student a fresh perspective when he or she comes back to the paper.
6. After resting, return to the assignment and do some free writing. This will help mentally connect the dots as well as bring to light any new ideas. Free writing can be especially helpful to kinesthetic and visual learners. The kinesthetic learner may want to free write with a pen and paper instead of typing on a keyboard.

Disclaimer: The use of first person and informality is appropriate for free writing, however, when writing the actual paper, stay in third person and use formal language.

Learning Styles

Steps one and three would probably work best for visual learners. For kinesthetic learners, steps one and two would be most helpful. However, if a person is an auditory learner, steps two and three could be most effective. Step four has a multitude of different ways to aid creative thinking.