Description

Writing can be boring, hard, and stressful by itself. This coupled with deadlines, [peer review](#), grading, etc., can become a truly daunting process.

Writer's block is not a state of not knowing *what* to write but the state of conflict or fear over *how* to write it. Often writer's block is prompted by fear of not being perfect or of being uninteresting. Sometimes it arises from the fear of rejection and sometimes it is the result of feeling overwhelmed by information and having no idea how to put it together.

The most important thing for all writers to remember is that writer's block is normal and not a sign of inadequacy. There is no writer who hasn't struggled with his/her article at some point and there is no reason to panic. Writer's block, for many, is a normal part of the writing process.

The second key point to note is that there *are* bad strategies for dealing with writer's block that will only make a situation worse. Waiting until you "feel" ready or inspired is counterproductive and a waste of time. Equally, doing more and more research if you're already feeling overwhelmed will not solve the problem.

Here are some effective strategies that will help you overcome your writer's block and complete that draft!

Planning for Success

If you are prone to writer's block, planning is vital to help you through it, and there are various useful tips for planning that works.

- **Plan for procrastination:** if you know you will procrastinate, build that into your timetabling. Accept your tendencies to a certain degree and prepare for them, so you feel less guilt and still get your work done. Notice your inner demons and plan around them.
- **Give yourself breaks:** It is impossible to write at a high level for a long time without wearing yourself out. Give yourself planned rests to think about something else, go for a walk or a run or a coffee, and not worry about your writing task.
- **Set goals:** Setting small goals that are challenging but achievable will allow you to break down writing tasks into small manageable tasks. Writing a whole dissertation at once is impossible, but writing 1,000 or 2000 words each day is manageable.
- **Reward yourself:** When you meet your goal, when you are happy with a section you have written, or when you feel you have achieved something good, give yourself a reward.
- [**The Pomodoro Technique**](#): This is one of the most successful and simplest techniques for time management, goal setting, and rewarding yourself. It breaks your days into 25-minute chunks of distraction-free, goal-focused activity, punctuated by breaks and rewards.
- **Eliminate distractions:** If you're prone to check your emails or your phone a lot when you should be writing, try blocking apps that will prevent you from accessing your most common procrastination sources. [StayFocusd](#) (chrome) and [SelfControl](#) (mac) are both popular desktop apps that stop you from being distracted or procrastinating, and there are endless web and

mobile apps with similar functions.

Getting Words Written

Sometimes a blank page is the most terrifying sight of all. The need to fill the page, on a deadline and with perfection is overwhelming. But remember, editing is the process of perfecting a draft, drafting means just getting some words written. Here are some strategies that can help you get started with writing:

- **Free-writing:** Free-writing means simply writing whatever comes strikes you about the topic, with no thought for sense, logic, or structure, for ten minutes. The aim is to let your thoughts flow freely on the page. Online tools like 420fables or Write or Die (paid) can provide useful motivation for free-writing.
- **Note taking:** Simply take notes; write down ideas, disconnected thoughts, phrases, or quotes as they occur to you. Then build an outline of your essay or article from these notes. Based on this outline, you can fill in the gaps to prepare a draft.
- **Write multiple drafts:** There's no rule that says a draft must be written in a particular order or in one document. Write ideas on new pages or in new windows. These multiple drafts can be edited into a final version.
- **WIRMI**: WIRMI stands for "What I Really Mean Is." Writer's block sometimes means not knowing how to phrase or explain something academically. In these cases, switch to plain, informal writing; say "WIRMI…" Once this is done, you can edit it as per the formal writing style of an academic paper.
- **Write every day**: This is perhaps the most important point. Don't make writing a special occasion full of stress. Make it part of your daily routine. Even if it is just 100 words with your morning coffee or 2000 words every night. Write every day!

Get Support

Writing is a solo activity. So often we feel alone and as if we are the only person struggling. Reach out, find other people for inspiration and to share your pain. Support is vital to keep you going and get you through writer's block. Here are some resources that may help you.

- **Social media:** Twitter has emerged as a fantastic resource for struggling academic writers, with several hashtags that allow writers to find a common topic and talk about their writing. Try #acwri for academic writing support or #amwriting for inspiration. Another hashtag, #suwtuesdays, is a weekly communal writing activity that offers encouragement and inspiration to struggling writers.
- **Writing Groups**: The "Shut Up and Write" groups are also a growing phenomena. They involve like-minded academic writers coming together for coffee and sustained writing for a couple of hours. Writing in the presence of others shows that you're not alone and gives you accountability and makes writing a social, supportive activity. Find out if there's one in your area, or start one yourself!

Whichever strategy you choose for yourself, the plethora of tools and apps show that writer's block is a normal part of the writing process and one that can be overcome with a little perseverance. So don't be afraid. Just write!

Category

1. Career Corner
2. PhDs & Postdocs

Date Created
2015/06/29
Author
editor