Top 10 Tips for Overcoming Writer's Block

From Ginny Wiehardt, former About.com Guide

Most writers will have trouble with writer's block at some point in their lives. The possible reasons for writer's block are myriad: fear, anxiety, a life change, the end of a project, the beginning of a project . . . almost anything, it seems, can cause that debilitating feeling of fear and frustration. Fortunately there are as many ways to deal with writer's block as there are causes. The items below are only suggestions, but trying something new is the first step toward writing again.

1. **Implement a Writing Schedule.**
   Carve out a [time to write](#) and then ignore the writer's block. Show up to write, even if nothing comes right away. When your body shows up to the page at the same time and place every day, eventually your mind — and your muse — will do the same. Graham Greene famously wrote 500 words, and only 500 words, every morning. Five hundred words is only about a page, but with those mere 500 words per day, Greene wrote and published over 30 books.

2. **Don't Be Too Hard on Yourself.**

   In fact, don’t be hard on yourself at all while writing. Anna Quindlin wrote, “People have writer’s block not because they can’t write, but because they despair of writing eloquently.” Turn the critical brain off. There is a time and place for criticism: it’s called editing.

3. **Think of Writing as a Regular Job, and Less as an Art.**

   [Stephen King](#), a famously prolific author, uses the metaphor of a toolbox to talk about writing in [On Writing](#), intentionally linking it to physical work. If we think of ourselves as laborers, as craftsmen, it’s easier to sit down and write. We’re just putting words on the page, after all, one beside another, as a bricklayer puts down bricks. At the end of the day, we’re just creating things — stories, poems, or plays — only we use vocabulary and grammar instead of bricks and mortar.

4. **Take Time Off If You’ve Just Finished a Project.**

   Writer's block could be a sign that your ideas need time to gestate. Idleness can be a key part of the creative process. Give yourself time to gather new experiences and new ideas, from life, reading, or other forms of art, before you start again.
5. Set Deadlines and Keep Them.
Many writers, understandably, have trouble doing this on their own. You might find a writing partner and agree to hold each other to deadlines in an encouraging, uncritical way. Knowing that someone else is expecting results helps many writers produce material. Writing groups or classes are another good way to jump-start a writing routine.

Write about your anxieties regarding writing or creativity. Talk to a friend, preferably one who writes. A number of books, such as The Artist’s Way, are designed to help creative people explore the root causes of their blocks. (Studying the lives of other writers can also provide insight into why you're blocked.) If your writer's block continues, you might seek counseling. Many therapists specialize in helping artists and writers reconnect with their creativity.

7. Work on More Than One Project at a Time.
Some writers find it helpful to switch back and forth from one project to another. Whether this minimizes fear or boredom, or both, it seems to prevent writer's block for many people.

8. Try Writing Exercises.
As much as it may remind you of your high school writing class, writing exercises can loosen up the mind and get you to write things you would never write otherwise. If nothing else, they get words on the page, and if you do enough of that, some of it is bound to be good.

9. Re-Consider Your Writing Space.
Are your desk and chair comfortable? Is your space well-lit? Would it help to try writing in a coffee shop for a change? Without being too precious about it — or turning it into another form of procrastination — think about how you can create or find a space you'll look forward to being in.

10. Remember Why You Started to Write in the First Place.
Look at what you’re writing and why. Are you writing what you love, or what you think you should be writing? The writing that feels most like play will end up delighting you the most, and this is the writing your readers will instinctively connect with. At the end of the day, writing is too hard to do it for anything other than love. If you continue to touch base with the joy you first felt in writing, it will sustain you, not only through your current block, but through whatever the future holds.
Symptoms and Cures for Writer's Block

Summary: Help in overcoming writer's block and a short series of exercises to get you writing.

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Because writers have various ways of writing, a variety of things can cause a writer to experience anxiety, and sometimes this anxiety leads to writer's block. Often a solution can be found by speaking with your instructor (if you are in school), or a writing tutor. There are some common causes of writer's block, however, and when you are blocked, consider these causes and try the strategies that sound most promising:

Symptom

You have attempted to begin a paper without doing any preliminary work such as brainstorming or outlining...

Possible Cures

- Use invention strategies suggested by a tutor or teacher
- Write down all the primary ideas you’d like to express and then fill in each with the smaller ideas that make up each primary idea. This can easily be converted into an outline

Symptom

You have chosen or been assigned a topic which bores you....

Possible Cures

- Choose a particular aspect of the topic you are interested in (if the writing situation will allow it...i.e. if the goal of your writing can be adjusted and is not given to you specifically, or if the teacher or project coordinator will allow it)
- Talk to a tutor about how you can personalize a topic to make it more interesting

Symptom

You don't want to spend time writing or don't understand the assignment....

Possible Cures

- Resign yourself to the fact that you have to write
- Find out what is expected of you (consult a teacher, textbook, student, tutor, or project coordinator)
- Look at some of the strategies for writing anxiety listed below
Symptom

You are anxious about writing the paper...

Possible Cures

• Focus your energy by rehearsing the task in your head.
• Consciously stop the non-productive comments running through your head by replacing them with productive ones.
• If you have some "rituals" for writing success (chewing gum, listening to jazz etc.), use them.

Symptom

You are so stressed out you can't seem to put a word on the page...

Possible Cures

• Stretch! If you can't stand up, stretch as many muscle groups as possible while staying seated.
• Try tensing and releasing various muscle groups. Starting from your toes, tense up for perhaps five to ten seconds and then let go. Relax and then go on to another muscle group.
• Breathe deeply. Close your eyes; then, fill your chest cavity slowly by taking four of five short deep breaths. Hold each breath until it hurts, and then let it out slowly.
• Use a calming word or mental image to focus on while relaxing. If you choose a word, be careful not to use an imperative. Don't command yourself to "Calm down!" or "Relax!"

Symptom

You're self-conscious about your writing, you may have trouble getting started. So, if you're preoccupied with the idea that you have to write about a subject and feel you probably won't express yourself well...

Possible Cures

• Talk over the subject with a friend or tutor.
• assure yourself that the first draft doesn't have to be a work of genius, it is something to work with.
• Force yourself to write down something, however poorly worded, that approximates your thought (you can revise this later) and go on with the next idea.
• Break the task up into steps. Meet the general purpose first, and then flesh out the more specific aspects later.
• Try one of the strategies on the next page of this resource.