

# Writer's Block Strategies

Writer's block has often been defined as a non-fluent writing process, where a person gets stuck and loses their ability to write what they feel is good or effective (Lebel, n.d.). The writer can also feel uncomfortable in their position as a writer and struggle to finish their assignment (Huston, 1998; Boice, 1993). Writer's block is not a new phenomenon, and it affects people at all levels of experience.

## What Causes Writer's Block?

Writer's block is not the same for everyone; people experience it at varying degrees and for different reasons. Research has found that there are several underlying factors that influence writer's block in students (Huston, 1998; Boice, 1993; The University of Melbourne, n.d.).

- **Personal factors:** Anxiety, perfectionism, procrastination, low motivation or low confidence.
- **Interpersonal factors:** Competing with others, fearing criticism from others or being disconnected from the academic community.
- **Environmental factors:** Physical surroundings or personal health.
- **Skill development:** Issues with time management, inexperience with the writing process or limited knowledge of the academic discipline.

## Seven Writing Struggles and Strategies

### 1. Topic issues

- Take control of your topic. Pick one that interests you because you will be more committed to learning and writing about it than about a topic that should be easy to write.
- If you do not have control over the topic, discuss with your professor how you can personalize the topic and still follow requirements.

### 2. Can't get started

- Try different brainstorming or freewriting strategies to begin thinking about your topic.
- Start writing where you feel most comfortable. It can be difficult to begin by writing an introduction; try starting with the body paragraphs.

### 3. Confusing assignments

- Get clarification on your assignment instructions from your professor or teaching assistant, or [book a tutoring session with the Student Learning Centre](#).
- Be familiar with the type of writing required. Using the [Library website](#), you can access articles from the various disciplines to note their writing style.

### 4. Overwhelmed with information

- Narrow your topic. Sometimes your topic may be too broad for your assignment, with too much information to cover. With a specific topic, highlight the information that is most important to include.

### 5. Unsure of how you sound

- Create drafts of your assignment. It is hard to write and ensure you sound academic the first time. Your first draft should use simple language that is clear and concise. In later drafts, revise to include the academic tone and language.

## 6. Easily distracted and lacking motivation

- Downloading productivity apps can help limit distractions. Try writing your assignment using pen and paper, as often times technology and the Internet can be contributing factors to losing focus.
- Write no matter your mood. If you stop writing when you are unmotivated, it will be harder to progress. You do not need to make huge steps in your assignment, but it will help you get out of your writing rut.

## 7. Stress

- Get a planner, make a schedule and actively block your time to create space for writing. With a schedule, you can help reduce the stress of juggling personal, social and other commitments.

Remember that no matter what you are struggling with, there are ways to get help. Consider [booking a session](#) with a Writing Specialist or Peer Writing Tutor to get writing guidance. There are also appointments available with our Academic Study Skills Co-ordinator to help you manage your time better.

## Helpful Resources

Purdue Online Writing Lab. (n.d.a). *Other Strategies for Getting Over Writer's Block*. Purdue Owl. [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/the\\_writing\\_process/writers\\_block/more\\_writers\\_block\\_strategies.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/the_writing_process/writers_block/more_writers_block_strategies.html)

Purdue Online Writing Lab. (n.d.b). *Symptoms and Cures for Writer's Block*. Purdue University. [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/the\\_writing\\_process/writers\\_block/index.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/the_writing_process/writers_block/index.html)

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## References

Boice, R. (1993). Writing blocks and tacit knowledge. *Journal of Higher Education*, 64(1), 19-54. [https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A13857745/AONE?u=ko\\_acd\\_uoo&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=e5858d46](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A13857745/AONE?u=ko_acd_uoo&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=e5858d46)

Huston, P. (1998). Resolving writer's block, *Canadian Family Physician*, 44, 92-97. <https://www.ncbi-nlm-nih-gov.uproxy.library.utoronto.ca/pmc/articles/PMC2277565/pdf/canfamphys00047-0094.pdf>

Lebel, S. (n.d.). *Writer's Block*. University College Writing Centre. <https://www.uc.utoronto.ca/writers-block>

The University of Melbourne. (n.d.). *Writer's Block*. The University of Melbourne Counselling & Psychological Services. <https://services.unimelb.edu.au/counsel/resources/study-related-issues/writers-block>

## Student Learning Centre

Call: 905.721.8668 ext. 6578

Email: [studentlearning@ontariotechu.ca](mailto:studentlearning@ontariotechu.ca) Downtown Oshawa Location: 61 Charles St.

Website: [ontariotechu.ca/studentlearning](http://ontariotechu.ca/studentlearning) North Oshawa Location: Shawenjigewining Hall

