

Managing Writer's Block and Anxiety

Writing can be difficult! Oftentimes, writers can feel like they are unsure of themselves, which leads to feelings of frustration, anxiety, or distress. Both writer's block and writer's anxiety refer to **feeling "stuck" due to not knowing how to say something, not having a base idea, or not feeling confident in how something is being communicated**. While there is no direct fix for writer's block/anxiety, there are **several strategies for managing** it, which are outlined in this handout.



Why Does Writer's Block Happen?

Writer's block and anxiety vary from person to person, but there are generally a few different circumstances that can cause it:



- **Perfectionism:** Perfectionist writers like for their writing to be flawless the first time it is written, which can cause writer's block.
- **Writing for the Critical Reader:** If a writer is drafting a piece for a reader who has been critical of their work before, they may feel anxious and anticipate what their feedback will be on their new piece.
- **Limited or Unstructured Time:** If a writer is working against a tight deadline or does not use their time effectively, they can encounter writer's block.
- **Self-Criticism:** When writers are hyper-critical of their work, they can face writer's block because they think all aspects of their piece can be improved. While revision is important, writers should not be overly critical because it can prevent them from learning as they write.
- **Dislike of the Subject:** If writers are not interested in the content they are writing, they may not write as passionately as they do for other subjects.
- **Stressful Situations Beyond School:** If a writer is facing personal situations that can disrupt their writing process, they may feel a sense of writer's block and anxiety. Writers should remember that UNC Charlotte provides services to help students through such situations, such as [CAPS](#) and [University Omnibuds](#).

Strategies for Dealing with Writer's Block and Anxiety

Change Locations

When a writer feels stuck, moving to a different environment can help inspire new ideas. If you feel stuck writing in the library, try moving to another workspace or working outside.



Managing Writer's Block and Anxiety (continued)

Take Time Away From the Piece



When a writer is working on a piece for a long time, they can feel stuck with nothing else to say. When you take some time away from the piece, you return as a different writer with new ideas that can help manage writer's block. Depending on how much time you have for the assignment, taking a break for a few days or hours can help you understand the writing situation you are in.

Make a Plan

When you are working with a larger or complex writing assignment, it is helpful to make a plan of goals you want to accomplish throughout the process. Space your writing out across several days to avoid cramming. Ensure you break your assignments into parts to make goals more manageable.



Talk Through It



Oftentimes, writer's block occurs when writers don't feel like they have the proper words to describe something. Rather than waiting for these words to come to you, it can be helpful to talk through writing challenges with a tutor, friend, or record your own thinking. It can also be helpful to talk to someone who is outside of your field to ensure you are making sense to someone who is not an expert.

Black-Out Writing

Black-out writing is a strategy that can be particularly helpful for the perfectionist writer. To blackout write, writers can set up their document with black text color and black highlight to hide the words. For these writers, who feel that every sentence must contribute to the larger goal of their paper, black-out writing eliminates the "fear of the blank page" and allows writers to write freely without worrying about how it sounds/looks. Later in the writing process, writers can revisit the piece and revise.

Seek Assistance

Our team of tutors at the Writing Resources Center is a wonderful resource to writers who are struggling with writer's block and anxiety. Writers can come into the center and work with a tutor on any of the above-listed strategies and learn about more!



Handout made by
Meghan Reilly