

Overcoming Writer's Block

Reham Albakouni¹

Writing Across the University of Alberta, 2022²
Volume 3, pp. 13-15
Published December 2022

Introduction

All writers get stuck at times. In this insightful quick reference guide, **Reham Albakouni** provides suggestions for writers who are suffering from staring at a blank page. This guide was submitted as part of the requirements for WRS 101.

Keywords: ideas, freewriting, reading, writer's block.



This work is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>.

¹ Reham Albakouni is a fourth-year student in Computing Science at the University of Alberta. She also has a bachelor's degree in Economics from Damascus University.

² *Writing across the University of Alberta* (WAUA) publishes undergraduate student writing from writing studies courses and courses focused on writing studies practices and scholarship at the University of Alberta. You can find WAUA online at <https://writingacrossuofa.ca/>.

Do you know the plot, but you can't seem to get started? Or maybe you have an interesting beginning, but you're trying to get it perfect in your head before writing it down on paper. Are you afraid of being criticized by others? You're not alone! Every writer or creative person experiences this fear from time to time. The good news is that you've come to the right place. This guide will help you overcome the problem of writer's block and dive into your paper.

The first step is to know what kind of writer's block you have. Sometimes you have too many ideas, but you don't know where to start, so you start nowhere. This is called Too Many Ideas Syndrome (TMIS) (Jasheway, 2008). The name itself is overwhelming, but the solution is as simple as Jasheway describes to her students, "[A]t any party, there will be more women wearing black dresses than red ones—the red ones stand out and get attention. When faced with an overwhelming number of ideas, I try to evaluate them to see which one seems most like a red dress in a sea of black." All you need to do is to bring forward the best ideas and leave the others in the queue. You'll need them later.

Another kind of writer's block is not having an idea to write about. You stare at your blank page for hours and come up with nothing. The key here is to start writing anything that comes to your mind. Even if you think that your argument is weak or your idea is stupid, write it down and remember that you can always go back and fix it. According to Lamott (2005), "the only way [she] can get anything written at all is to write really, really shitty first drafts." No matter how hard you have tried or how long you have been stuck, just be patient and the world will give you the ideas you need and the words you want. The golden strategy that works for any kind of block is what author H. G. Wells famously said, "If you are in difficulties with a book, try the element of surprise: attack it at an hour when it isn't expecting it."

Recommendations for Students

W: Work on something else. After you've been stuck for a while, staring at your blank page, trying to force words to come, crumpling papers one after another, it's time to do something else! You need to feel productive again. Put your writing aside and go for a walk, solve a puzzle, wash the dishes, or do anything other than writing. Don't even think about your writing. Just let your subconscious do the work while you are distracted by another activity.

R: Read. The more you read, the better you write. If you don't have an idea to write about, read about the topic instead, and you'll get inspired by other writers' thoughts. If you have too many ideas but can't seem to pick the best ones, read anything, no matter what the

topic is. The point is to put yourself in the reader's shoes and see what attracts you most and what bores you. This will remind you to pay attention to your audience and think from their perspectives.

I: Imagine. When you make imagination your best friend, you'll have the capability to be creative. Imagination gives your brain the power it needs to make things up and form new ideas. Once you have a clear image in your head, it's easy to turn it into a story and put it down on paper.

T: Try free-writing. The idea of free writing is to write about any topic without any rules. Set a timer and start writing any word that comes to your mind without paying attention to spelling or grammar. Do not judge your ideas; just enjoy the process of writing. You won't like the result, but free writing can clear your mind. It's always easier to deal with a mess on paper than in your head.

E: Enhance your workspace. Find a place where you can be as productive as possible. Put on a comfy shirt, gather your writing tools, grab your favourite drink, and start writing. You will be surprised how your brain can respond in different environments.

Unanswered Questions

- What is the difference between writing anxiety and writer's block?
- If writer's block is a disease or a syndrome, is there any medication or cure for it?
- Can writer's block last for years?
- How can kids overcome writer's block?

Since understanding the problem is half the solution, you should think about the questions above and always find new questions.

Works Cited

Jasheway, L. A. (2008, March 13). *9 ways to overcome too many ideas syndrome*. *Writer's Digest*.
<https://www.writersdigest.com/at-work-on-first-draft/too-many-ideas-syndrome>

Lamott, A. (2005). Shitty first drafts. In P. Eschholz, A. Rosa, & V. Clark (Eds.), *Language awareness: Readings for college writers* (pp. 93-97). Bedford/St. Martin's.