

How to Overcome Writer's Block: Know the Roots of your Block

Are you having trouble to pursue your writing task? Knowing the roots of your block is key! This table may help you to find your personal solutions. First, identify your problem (or combination of problems):

- A You do not know where to start or how to proceed with your writing task.
- B You have no clear picture of your content - you do not know WHAT you have to say.
- C You do not know HOW to put your ideas into words, because: (see below).
- D Your time management is bad.
- E You feel incompetent or uncertain.

Then find your personal solutions below.

Underlying problem (the root)	Solution
<p>A. You do not know where to start or how to proceed with your writing task.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -> Identify the first and most tiny step you need to take. Then do it. Again, find the next tiny step. Take it. Repeat this. Tiny steps are to find here. - Keep the writing process in mind: is your problem one on the level of the CONTENT or on the FORM? In other words: is it the WHAT or the HOW that blocks you?
<p>B. You have no clear picture of your content - you do not know WHAT you have to say.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -> Talk about your project with your peers or supervisor. - Read the literature - but keep clear questions in mind, to not get lost in content of others. Check these Reading Tips. - Identify the questions you need to answer to find your content. - Text and reader's questions are helpful: Go to Question Tool Introduction or Question Tool Discussion.
<p>C. You do not know HOW to put your ideas into words, because:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You lack the vocabulary. 2. The ideas seem not to be connected: you do see small blocks, but no overall picture, or your message is very complex: where to start? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -> Listen to English audiobooks or podcasts to expand your vocabulary. Explore www.linguee.com; use google synonyms. -> Study the storylines for the Introduction and the Discussion (Question Tools). - Take an alternative route: draw a picture; create a Powerpoint, a flowchart, or prepare a talk; set up an explanation for someone outside your field; start out with the key message and put the supporting information in a mindmap; work with sticky notes, work on the whiteboard or create a storyboard.
<p>D. Your timemanagement is bad.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You procrastinate. 2. You are a perfectionist. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -> Eat that frog (video You Tube from Brian Tracey). -> Remember: perfection is the enemy of good (Voltaire). Search for perfect article, and find out that no such article exists.

<p>3. You write whenever it suits you (not often) without a sound planning.</p> <p>4. You do not write regularly because you wait for 'inspiration', and you get frustrated if the magic does not happen.</p> <p>5. You only write when you have at least half a day to spend.</p>	<p>-> Make a sound planning and stick with it; attend or organize Shut Up and Write sessions</p> <p>-> Write every day, albeit only 30 minutes. You do not have to write as in 'formulate': to write may also mean to review, to draw a table, check cohesion, draft key sentences, check grammar, or edit topic sentences. At the closure, define your next step as a preparation for the following session. This will help to make a flying start the next day.</p> <p>-> Very wrong; go to the Tiny Steps.</p>
<p>E. You feel incompetent / uncertain because:</p> <p>1. You fear your topic is not really that relevant.</p> <p>2. You are uncertain about your language skills.</p> <p>3. Your supervisor does not provide you with hands-on or clear feedback.</p>	<p>-> Talk with your supervisor and colleagues, give a presentation. Talking about your project helps.</p> <p>-> Most nonnatives are insecure. Take a course. Ask professional feedback. Listen to audiobooks and podcasts to pick up grammar and vocabulary in a natural and pleasant way.</p> <p>-> PhD life is hard. Find yourself a writing buddy or colleague for mutual support.</p>