

Overcoming Writer's Block

Write!

The first, best and last advice:

Write. Just write! Write anything at all.

Don't wait for inspiration or the muse—just write!

Don't stop. Don't think. Force yourself to write something.

Put words on the page even if they are not the words you want.

The cognitive skill of writing is so complicated that you need to get good enough at it that the act of writing doesn't get in the way of the act of creating.

Write "bla bla bla" if you have to. Trust me, you'll get bored with that soon.

Because the physical act of writing itself has an almost magical effect of inspiring a new stream of words that you can put on the page.

If you can't think of anything, just write "I am blocked" and describe your feelings about it. That's worth something.

If you don't know the answers, write the questions.

Regardless of what you write, the answer to feeling blocked is to write.

Just write!

Writer's Block Resources

The Midnight Disease by Alice Flaherty:

Summarizes modern research on block.

Writer's Block: The Cognitive

Dimension by Mike Rose: Real data!

Writers Block by Zachary Leader:

A psychoanalytic study of writer's block.

The Writer's Block Myth by Heloise

Jones: Practical tips for overcoming block.

On Being Stuck by Laraine Herring:

On the creative power of writers block.

When a Writer Can't Write edited by

Mike Rose: Many aspects of block.

General Books on Writing

The Artist's Way by Julia Cameron:

Sparks creativity through morning pages.

Fire Up Your Writing Brain by Susan

Reynolds: Neuroscience for creativity!

Wired for Story by Lisa Cron

Neuroscience for better stories.

The Psychology of Writing by Ronald

Kellog: As it says on the tin.

The Art of Non-Fiction by Ayn Rand:

Discusses writing avoidance.

The Art of Fiction by Ayn Rand:

Explains why not to edit while you write.

Cognitive Blocks

The most common block, arising from a vicious cycle of **bad strategies** for writing creating **bad experiences** with writing causing **writing avoidance** which prevents **skill development**.

Early Editing

Editing while writing can paralyze you.
Write your draft first, edit it later!

Rigid Rules

“Rules” about composition are guidelines.
Break the rules in your draft!

Awful Assumptions

We often assume writing must be perfect.
Feel free to write your way!

Strategic Shortcomings

Complex projects can overwhelm us.
Stretch your planning muscles!

Excessive Evaluation

Don't grade our own writing too harshly.
Finish your draft, then improve it!

Discordant Directives

Rules sometimes contradict each other.
Be willing to make tradeoffs!

Fighting cognitive block

Try all of these together – not just one.

Start Free Writing

Take on free writing like **morning pages**.

Develop a Writing Habit

Pick a regular day and time to write.

Stop Beating Yourself Up!

Stop negative self-talk about writing!

Get Social Support

Find a writing group or writing buddy.

Emotional Blocks

You are not alone! Many famous (and not so famous) writers have had emotional experiences that interfere with writing, sometimes for years. This isn't block per se, but a sign that you've got challenges to deal with. It's OK to get your life in order before taking on a big writing project.

Take care of yourself first!
The writing will follow.

Creative Blocks

Often “creative” blocks are just cognitive blocks in disguise. One assumption people have is that they must **wait for the muse**. Don't wait for her: put your **butt in chair** and **pen to paper** or (**hands on the keyboard**) and just write.

Sometimes creative blocks are **bad writing choices** masquerading as writer's block. Mark Twain got blocked for years on Huckleberry Finn because he tried to take his characters up-river; once he gave up that forced choice and let the plot go, he finished the book in a burst of creativity.

Functional Blocks

Some blocks have nothing to do with our thoughts or feelings or our creative muse: they have to do with brain structure or chemistry. **Postpartum depression** can cause writer's block; so can **seasonal affective disorder** or **depression**. If your struggles with block seem out of balance or affect more of your life, consider recruiting help.