

*9 tips to overcome
writer's block*

All writing problems are psychological problems. Blocks usually stem from the fear of being judged. If you imagine the world listening, you'll never write a line. That's why privacy is so important. You should write first drafts as if they will never be shown to anyone. Erica Jong

Actually, you know exactly what you want to write, but you just cannot start. Perhaps you try a first sentence, but you delete it immediately... And you try another one. Again you delete it... and so on. The screen remains blank. The page, bare. The situation seems insurmountable. Nearly everybody has struggled with writer's block at one time or another. Nearly every writer has experienced how dreadful it is. Even the most experienced authors. This article aims to give you simple tips to overcome writer's block.

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF WRITER'S BLOCK?

The most common causes for writer's block among PhD candidates are:

- Fear: e.g. fear of critique, of one's own ideas, of the reader, of failing, of success.
- Perfectionism: the text is never good enough; it needs to be rewritten and improved again – and never gets finished.
- Delusions of grandeur: *My PHD will save the world!*
- The environment: e.g. financial problems, conflicts, uncomfortable working space.
- The targeted reader: e.g. a professor who intimidates you, the anonymous mass of readers.
- The topic: e.g. it is boring, makes you angry, or you feel so passionate about it that you cannot think calmly.
- The inner critic: an inner voice which denigrates what you do.
- Isolation: being alone in front of your blank screen, facing your fears and constantly hearing your inner critic only worsens the problem. It does not help.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IN CASE OF WRITER'S BLOCK ?

- Start with the easiest part of your text. You will progress quickly and get motivated to continue.
- Brainstorm your topic before writing your first draft: It is easier to structure your thoughts when you can see them in black and white.
- Change the tool: If you cannot write with the computer, try with a pencil or talk on a Dictaphone.
- Change the location: If you cannot work in the office, try in the kitchen, in a pub, or in a park.
- Address your text to a friend: by targeting this reader you will be able to forget the readers who are blocking you.
- Tell a friend what you want to write about: Sometimes talking is easier than writing.
- Be aware that a good text is the result of many revisions: Do not try to write it perfectly the first time.
- Seek help: Don't spend too much time staring at your empty Talking with other people often helps you recover self-confidence and overcome a block.
- Join a writing group: This is a group of PhD candidates sharing the same aim (to finish their thesis), same problems and solutions. In such a group you can ask for help, ask for feedback while helping others and giving feedback as well, which will surely empower you!

In any case, remember that writer's block is normal. It belongs to the writing process. It is nothing to worry about, and no reason to question your intelligence !

I wish you a successful work !

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Dr Martha Boeglin and the website www.scriptoria.org.

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