



# Overcoming writer's block

You may have writer's block because you are trying to be both creative and critical. These two thought processes are very different. To prevent these impulses from competing with one another, it is best to separate them out by function. Follow the steps below to break down the writing process into discrete elements. The idea is to alternate between thought processes: first, do something creative, then complement that creativity with something critical.

## Formulate a plan

Work backwards from your paper's due date and create a customized calendar or time line for your project. Follow the steps listed below in the

sequence given, and set a target date for each step.

Target date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Creatively choose a topic

Pick something that interests you, or to which you have a personal connection. To generate ideas, review the indexes and bibliographies from class readings, talk to your instructor, and brainstorm with classmates.

If your instructor chooses the topic for you, make sure you understand it thoroughly, then see how you can personalize it. Figure out what about the topic interests you.

Target date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Critically refine your topic

Choosing a topic that has a narrow scope can make the writing process far more manageable. Think about moving from the general to the specific. For example: history of French art > history of 19th century French art > history of French art from

1895 to 1900 > comparison of impressionism and symbolism in French art from 1895 to 1900.

Target date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Creatively collect your ideas

Scan a wide variety of sources about your topic, including Wikipedia and Google Scholar, to develop an overview. Based on that overview, start reading and taking notes from the sources most relevant to your topic.

Take advantage of Noodlebib (<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/noodlebib>) or other bibliographic citation software to keep track of your sources and simplify documentation issues.

Target date: \_\_\_\_\_



### **Critically organize your ideas**

Make an outline. There's no better way to put your thoughts in order. Look for patterns in the ideas, notes, and sources you've collected. If you can't find any patterns, try to at least block your ideas into a sequence that would make sense to a

reader. Use a thesis statement as a magnet. Once you create a thesis, you can direct everything else towards it.

Target date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Creatively put your ideas on paper**

Start writing anywhere in the paper you feel you have something to say. It doesn't need to be the beginning. Work diligently to get something down and set a goal for each writing session.

Work quickly. Don't fret over selecting the perfect word or phrasing the most elegant sentence; allow yourself to edit and revise later. This is only a draft. Use the outline you've already established

but be prepared to modify it if necessary.

If you get stuck, talk about your ideas—with a friend, with an instructor, or just out loud. The act of selecting words to voice your ideas can translate to selecting words to write. Imagine a real reader for the paper; think of yourself as telling a story to an interested audience.

Target date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Critically revise your rough draft**

Give yourself time to edit. Make sure you finish your paper at least 24 hours before it's due. Check your paper to see if it is:

Organized? Does one paragraph follow another logically? Look for good transitions between sentences and between paragraphs.

Unified? Do all the paragraphs support and develop your thesis? (Don't forget to make sure you've stated your thesis very clearly at the beginning of the paper). Is each paragraph unified around a topic sentence?

Grammatically correct? Are sentences varied in length and structure, and designed to emphasize key ideas? Do they indicate relationships clearly? Are they punctuated correctly?

Well-worded? Are your words concrete?

Appropriate? Use a thesaurus for new ideas, but make sure the words are contextually appropriate.

Flowing? Read the paper aloud. Does it sound awkward? Do you stumble in certain places or have to reread particular passages? Ask a friend—ideally someone who knows nothing about the topic—to read your paper, and see if it makes sense.

Target date: \_\_\_\_\_

