



Getting Started & Overcoming Writer's Block

Figuring out how to start an argument or where to begin with a large research paper can be paralyzing. The following tips are meant to help you organize your ideas so that you can start writing, but many are also helpful for overcoming writer's block at any step along the way.

1. Talk about your assignment!

Explaining the assignment to a friend or family member, chatting about your ideas, and answering their questions will help you realize what you know and what you still have questions about. Keep a notepad handy and/or record your conversation so to keep track of your ideas. Engaging with your topic through discussion can help you work through writing roadblocks.

2. Freewrite

Freewriting encourages you to put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard). Start by writing for 3-5 minutes without stopping, even if what you write isn't always relevant. Giving yourself the freedom to write without paying attention to mechanics can initiate your thought process. Once you break through the ice, you may find writing comes more easily!

3. Brainstorming: Mapping and Listing

Brainstorming can help you generate ideas if you are stuck, or help you organize your ideas.

- **Making lists:** Start by looking at the main ideas in your thesis and make lists of examples that support and counter each idea. By doing this, you can see how much support you have for your thesis, and what you need to argue against in your paper.
- **Mapping:** There are many ways to make brainstorm "maps" that outline the relationships between different ideas in your essay. For example:
 - Begin with the main idea of your essay, draw lines out from that idea, and write down the "smaller" pieces or specific examples that make up that idea.
 - Fill a paper with any ideas and color-code ideas that go together.

4. Outlining

Outlining organizes your ideas and focuses your writing, making the actual "writing" much easier to work through. The more thorough your outline is, the more it will help you when you start writing.

- To outline your introduction, include your thesis along with a list of important ideas.
- For the body paragraphs, include the main topic of the paragraph, your support that connects it to your thesis, and as many specific examples/evidence (quotes, anecdotes, primary sources, etc.) as possible.

5. Start in the Middle!

When you start writing, don't feel compelled to start at the beginning! Coming up with the "first line" or an introductory paragraph can stall writers. Instead, pull the paragraph from your outline that you have the most information about and start your writing there, leaving transitions for last. Finally, write an introductory paragraph that helps orient the reader.