

# Centre for English Teaching Specialization

## MOOC 4: Communication Skills for University Success

### 4.2f Overcoming writer's block

or

#### How to *Just Start*.

- Remember it is a draft.

Drafts are not meant to be good. Drafts are not meant to be well written. Drafts are a chance for you to get your ideas out and structured. You do not have to worry about language, it can be edited in and perfected once you have something to work with.

- Give yourself permission to write rubbish

Ignore grammar, spelling, punctuation, references and everything else and just write. It is important to write full sentences, though, so avoid just writing in dot points!

- Free-write

Freewriting is fairly simple. Set yourself a 5minute, 10minute or 15minute time limit. Once the clock starts, start writing and don't stop until the timer goes off. This might mean that you ramble or end up writing about how much you love chocolate ice cream, but at least you're writing. If this is too easy, try and focus on just your overall topic, or narrow it down to one of your arguments.

- Record yourself speaking your answer and then transcribe it.

We often find it much easier to talk about something. When it comes to writing things down, we get too focused on the grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling or just simply what it looks like and can't seem to get past that. So record yourself talking about the question or your argument and then transcribe it.

- Change the font colour

Changing the font colour (even just making it a lighter grey) can help remind you that it is just a draft!

- Change your medium

Close your laptop and pick up some paper and a pen or pencil, change to a tablet or even just your phone, or vice-versa.

- Listen to music

This is a common studying technique because it can help you to focus your thoughts. A tip? Listen to instrumental music like classical, jazz or ambient music so that you don't get distracted by the lyrics!

- Answer "w" questions about your topic

Remember those questions from when you were trying to understand the assignment prompt? Who, what, where, when, why, how etc.? Try and answer them in full sentences.

- Summarize your arguments

If you find yourself getting too caught up in the details of your arguments and don't know where to begin, go back to the bigger picture and write a short summary of your argument.

- Write your favourite part first

You will usually have one argument, or one piece of evidence that you like more than the others. Instead of trying to start with the introduction or your first argument, start with your favourite part.

- Talk to someone else about it

Talking to other people (or even your dog!) can help you to sort out your thoughts and reasoning for your assignment.

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#### Sentence starters

Sentence starters can be useful in order to just get something on the paper. You'll notice these are informal and non-academic, so should not be used in your final assignment submission.

*The first thing I'm going to talk about is....*

*The issue is that...*

*What I mean by that is...*

*I don't like...*

*So-and-so makes a good argument about...*