

Beating Writer's Block

Trust me, we've all been there at one point or another – staring hopelessly at an essay and noticing that your monitor needs dusting, your water bottle needs filling up, your shelf needs rearranging – where the mundane things in your day-to-day life become the most interesting things ever. You have writers block!

Helpful as it may be for cleanliness, game progression, or pet attention, doing those mundane chores isn't going to get that essay written. So, here are the '5 R's' of beating writers block (I'll also add that writing this blog was, in itself, procrastination from my own work, but hopefully by the end you will understand why it has helped me beat writers block myself).

Relax: Writing requires creativity (it really does!) and creativity doesn't come from the overwhelming sense of pressure you get when your essay needs to be done right now – pressured writing leads to, at best rubbish, at worst nothing. Start early to give yourself time and then believe it or not, but the feeling of uselessness is an important part of the process!

US Author Damien Newman created the Newman Design squiggle to explain:

Noise / Uncertainty / Patterns / Insights

Clarity / Focus



Research & Synthesis

Concept / Prototype

Design¹

Out of the sense of chaos and uncertainty, out of the sense of back and forth with different ideas, comes innovation - writers block is a natural part of this noise and is *key* to the process of writing something. And don't underestimate the value of those mundane tasks here – a brain at maximum capacity all of the time will burn out, so run your brain at minimum capacity by doing those mundane chores to start straightening out that line!

Write (yes, I know it's technically a 'W,' but it sounds like an R): Just write something. There's nothing worse than looking at a blank page for three hours and realising it's still blank – so cheat the system and *just write ANYTHING!* A random story about a chicken, a description of your bedside lamp, a speech pretending you're the President responding to allegations of corruption, literally anything! That way, the page isn't blank. Your brain is warmed up to the process of writing and you can accidentally begin without realising. Just remember to delete the random stuff you wrote beforehand to avoid arousing suspicion about your corruption in office. Even bullet points are better than nothing!

¹ The Design Squiggle. (2020). Retrieved 8 June 2020, from <https://thedesignsquiggle.com/>

Rouse: In other words, move! If you remain in the same physical space, you remain in the same mental state. I've had discussions with senior professors (the people who set our assignments at University) who get their ideas by going outside for a walk, or even by jogging. If someone whose job it is to write can simply go outside and exercise to get ideas - we should too! Just standing up helps – it's really easy to forget to move when the only thing writing requires is a desk and a computer. Being stuck at a desk looking at a screen for hours leads to failure, so any movement within your capacity is a bonus!

Reward: Now this is probably the tricky one. If time is no object, then you should only write when your brain is in the mood to write – these are your *Golden Hours!* I'm great 8am-11am and 4pm-7pm, but 12pm – 3pm is basically dead time for my writing. As long as you've used your Golden Hours wisely, you can reward yourself outside of them with anything you like (that could be by napping, if you're into that kind of thing).

However, many of us don't live in a world of unlimited time, we have deadlines, so *you cannot waste time waiting for Golden Hours*. You need to establish 'writing time' and 'relaxing time' and stick to it. To stop yourself getting distracted, make sure your rewards aren't things that could lead onto procrastination, like trying to complete a video game level or watching 10 minutes of a 4-hour movie. Doing this will guarantee failure!

Instead, turn some of those mundane procrastination things we talked about earlier, into your rewards. This could be going to make a cup of tea, having a snack, cleaning the work surface, or even alphabetising the spice rack. Mini, short-term, relatively mundane tasks like this give your mind the switch off time it needs to craft some excellent writing ideas, but they're not interesting enough to risk long-term procrastination.

Remember: Nobody writes for fun – if they say they do, they're lying! We write to practice, to improve something, to communicate an idea, to begin a book, to make a statement. Writing is a tool of communication, not a craft or an art – it's the ideas the words create that is the art.

You're always writing *towards* something – think about what that *something* is, as it's very easy to forget how your essay on 'the economics of agricultural labourers in the 17th century' is actually going to help you get somewhere. Times like this, when writing is needed but it's boring, still lead somewhere. Think about how it could lead you from an A-Level to a degree, or to a job as Prime Minister, or CEO. This writer's block is just one small dent in the road towards something greater. So don't let it hold you back!

It's also important to remember that my advice is just a guide – there isn't one definitive way of beating writers block. Just know that with time, persistence and caffeine you can assemble your words into majestic literary print! In the end...

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