

## Accessing More Information

- Raimes, Ann. *Keys for Writers*. 5th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008.
- The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>
- Institute for Writing and Rhetoric at Dartmouth College: [www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/)

## Acknowledgments

Information for this brochure was adapted from: "Invention." Institute for Writing and Rhetoric at Dartmouth College. 27 Jan. 2009 <[www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/tutor/problems/invention.shtml](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/tutor/problems/invention.shtml)>.

## Where to Find Help on Campus

Consultants at the **Hamline University Writing Center**, located in the basement of Bush Library, are eager to help you with all stages of your writing. We will work with you whether you have just received an assignment and have no idea how to begin or you have a finished draft and want help with revisions.

You can make appointments online at WC Online. Simply follow the instructions at:

<http://rich37.com/hamline>

We look forward to seeing you!



**The Writing Center**  
Hamline University  
Bush Library, Lower Level  
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# Overcoming Writer's Block



There are a number of factors that motivate people to write, as well as a number of reasons that might explain why people find it difficult to write. Here are some possible reasons you might be experiencing writer's block.

### **The topic you have chosen doesn't interest you.**

Sometimes you might find yourself picking a topic from a list. Or you might not have given your topic much thought before choosing it. If you have another idea, ask your professor if he or she will agree to a change. A writing tutor can help you explore aspects of your topic you might not have thought of and which might interest you more.

### **Your topic seems too big, and you can't figure out where to begin.**

Reread your assignment and then do some additional reading on your topic. If you're still having trouble narrowing it down, talk to someone else about it—perhaps your professor or a writing tutor. That person can help you decide on something appropriate for the assigned page length.

### **You've read up on your assigned topic but are having trouble generating compelling, workable writing ideas.**

When you read, take notes. Pause while you are reading, ask questions, and assess your reactions to what you are reading. When you finish, look over your notes. Do any ideas emerge?

Think about what is at stake. Why does your thesis matter to anyone besides you? Write down an answer to this question, taking into account questions that involve who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Here are some strategies for generating ideas:

**Brainstorming:** Take ten minutes and write down every word about your topic that comes into your mind. Don't censor yourself; write everything down. You may be surprised at your ideas.

**Nutshelling:** In just a few sentences, explain what you are trying to argue or express. You may write these sentences on paper or say them aloud to someone else. Ask questions of your sentences: Are they clear? Do they make sense? Are they defensible?

**Discovery drafting:** Take one of your ideas and freewrite about it until you can't write any more. Don't edit yourself as you write; follow every thought that pops into your mind, even those that seem silly or irrelevant. Pretend you're addressing a friend or a teacher. When you finish, you might have the basis for your paper.

### **You can't figure out how to begin your paper.**

You have your topic, but starting out is a problem. Try starting in the middle or simply with whatever material compels you the most. Leave writing an introduction until last. The reader won't know, and a good introduction might come to you later in the process.

Another way to get started is to make a list of questions your reader might have about your topic. Then try to answer these questions in a logical sequence.

### **You feel self-conscious about your material or your abilities.**

Sometimes students are self-conscious about their writing, or about themselves as writers. They feel they don't know as much as other writers on their topic.

Here are some strategies to overcome lack of confidence:

**"Talk" your paper:** Find a friend or roommate, or make an appointment with a writing tutor. Tell the person about your paper and ask him or her to take notes. Your listener's responses can help you understand that in reality you have a lot to say.

**Imagine a different audience for your paper, other than your professor: your peers, young children, or a relative or family member.** Imagine that these people know nothing about the topic. Think of them as you write. Chances are, your sentences will be clearer and more compelling than they would be otherwise.

**Take on a different role as a writer:** Imagine yourself as a columnist for a newspaper, a politician, or a historical figure, someone who *has* to influence his or her audience to avoid catastrophe. Such role-playing may help you write an interesting paper.

### **You are distracted and having trouble focusing on your paper.**

We all have good days and bad days when it comes to writing. Allow enough time to write your paper so that a bad day doesn't cause you to miss your deadline.

Don't, however, keep putting off writing your paper because you feel you can't concentrate. Choose a time of the day when your mind is clearest and provide a space for yourself that is as free of distractions as possible. Turn off your cell phone and other electronic devices. Make sure you are well fed and well rested. Set a time limit for yourself—perhaps forty-five minutes—and write for that length of time no matter what. Then take a break.

Writer's block is a real phenomenon. With a little determination and some help from others, you can overcome it.