



# Stumped? How to Branch Out and Continue with the Writing Process

Updated for the Writers Lab by Sherri Wahrer

Writer's block affects everyone from time to time, even the most seasoned academic and professional writers. However, there are ways to keep from being 'shut down' by this frustrating nuisance (which often likes to strike at critical moments in the writing or time-management process...!). Beating writer's block can be tricky, but the key is to become actively involved with your draft by freewriting, outlining, looking for areas for expansion/further detail, thinking about your topic, etc. The following guidelines offer suggestions on how to do these (and other things).

1. Ignore the editor/censor in your head
  - Keep writing...even if you think what you're writing is horrible (at least you'll have something down on paper to either revise or work from).
  - Don't try to edit, proofread, censor, or perfect things as you write (at this point you want to concentrate only on getting ideas down on paper...you can edit the text later).
  - Start anywhere you want...you don't have to begin with the introduction (and some writers even save the intro for last, after they've written the rest of the paper, so they can formulate an appropriate one).
  - Stay focused on your topic (if you're having trouble concentrating, try taking a break before continuing writing).
  
2. Return to the prewriting stage
  - Writing is a recursive process, so what feels like regression is actually just part of the natural composition process.
  - Do some freewriting, mapping, webbing, clustering; these strategies will work for individual sections of your essay as well as for the whole thing.
  - Construct an outline (if you're comfortable with a more demanding, rigid approach), or highlight important passages to help you better organize and develop ideas.
  - Think about your topic. This is not a waste of time; you can't write about an idea you haven't first thought about (and keep in mind that the writing process is actually 90% thought and only 10% actual writing).
  
3. Build on your own ideas, a sentence at a time, using transitional words and phrases (see transition handout for categories and examples). Transitions are useful, and necessary, because they are used to continue thoughts, begin new sentences, and connect ideas.

4. Go through your essay with a fine-toothed comb, so to speak, and look for opportunities to do the following: add details, provide examples (or more examples), describe something, and/or explain something. Doing these will give your paper added 'life' by increasing length and your readers' understanding of what you're writing about.