

4 TIPS TO OVERCOMING WRITER'S BLOCK

Though you've probably written dozens of essays in high school already, if not more, writing your personal essays for college applications can be a slightly different process. As the common app and college admissions offices limit essay lengths to 500 words or less, you may be having trouble with choosing what you should include and what must be eliminated. The questions can often feel too open ended, or too specific to inspire a worthwhile response. Furthermore, the pressure of putting your best foot forward may bring you to a point where you can no longer get your ideas down on paper, or as writer's call it, writer's block. Whatever the case, if you're suffering from the inability to finish or even start your essays, don't worry, as most people experience the same difficulty at some point or another. Take a look at these tips for getting over writer's block, and hopefully you can jog your memory or find some inspiration along the way.

Let yourself go - in writing or out loud.

If you have an opening line or a grand idea for your essay, but can't quite get it started, one of the first steps to getting all of your thoughts down is to allow yourself to "freeflow" for a while without any inhibitions or limitations. For some, this means writing non-stop for at least an hour, making bullet points, messy charts, or simply random phrases with information you'd like to communicate in your writing. Another method is talking out loud to a friend or family member, who can help you recall what you've said but can also serve as a sounding board as you hash out your own thoughts and opinions. With the freeflow method, you will likely end up with more material than you need, but at least you'll have a solid foundation of ideas upon which you can build your essay.

Set Incremental Deadlines.

If you're finding it difficult to write an essay or even a full paragraph all at once, setting some realistic deadlines for yourself will help you manage your time and make steady progress. You don't have to write an amazing, inspirational essay the first time you sit down to work on it. Instead, take on the task little by little, and work incrementally. In the first session, maybe you'll work through your "main idea" or personal-essay version of a thesis statement. Next time, you'll get halfway through the essay's body. By the end of however many sessions you need, you will hopefully have a rough first draft that you can begin to edit and hone until you've written the best version yet.

Take Breaks.

While personal goals and deadlines are important steps to completing a good essay, so is taking breaks and allowing yourself to decompress along the way. If you have hit another roadblock in your writing, allow yourself an hour or a few days to take a walk, spend time with friends, listen to music, or do whatever it is that relaxes you most. After clearing your mind, you'll be able to approach your essay once again with a fresh mentality. If you overwork yourself and find that you aren't making headway, it will only be detrimental if you continue trying to overcome the hurdle without resting in between. Sometimes, good ideas come to you when you least expect them, and by relaxing your mind and body, you're opening yourself up for even more unexpected inspiration.

Ask for a critique.

If you've done all you can do on your essay and still feel that it's coming up short, ask a friend, parent, or teacher to read it over and give some suggestions. You don't have to take

every piece of advice that they offer, but having a new set of eyes look over your work may provide you with some ideas or angles that you hadn't considered before. Do not allow them to rewrite the entire essay, but it's always useful to have someone read your essay who has not seen it before. It's also helpful when your editor knows you well, so they can tell you whether or not you've portrayed yourself to the extent or in the manner you had intended.

Regardless of the reasons for your writer's block, you can always move past it with a few strategic methods. Just remember not to be too hard on yourself as you write, and give yourself time to realize your essay's full potential as you work.