#3) Breaking Writer’s Block

You may have learned that writing is an orderly, step-by-step process, but writers use a variety of strategies for getting to a finished product. If you are stuck on an assignment, try not to focus on producing perfect sentences. Instead, consider some of the following techniques to break your writer’s block.

**Brainstorm.** When brainstorming, the goal is to move your ideas to paper—to list the ideas you know and to discover new ideas in the process. See Chapter 3 of *The St. Martin’s Handbook* for examples of these strategies.

- Freewriting: Set a timer for 15-20 minutes. Without stopping, freely write all thoughts and ideas that come to mind on the topic. Don’t try to write polished sentences.
- Looping: Freewrite for five minutes about a topic. Look back at what you have written and choose the central or most intriguing thought; freewrite for five minutes about that topic. Repeat this process until you find a topic you think can be used for the assignment.
- Clustering: After circling your topic in the center of the page, draw a ring around each of your main ideas, and draw a line connecting each idea to the topic. Think of as many facts, examples, details, explanations for each main idea, and cluster those around that idea. Repeat until you cannot think of any more details.
- Questioning: Write down all of the questions you have and all the questions you think your audience will have about the topic.

**Talk it out.** In the early stages of the process, some writers find it easier to talk about a topic than to write about it. Have a friend take notes, or talk into a recording device. If you can, have your listener ask questions.

**Start anywhere.** Skip the introductory paragraph and write on one of your main points. If you can’t think of the main point, evaluate your evidence, choose a quotation to analyze, or respond to an idea from a source.

**Read a model or sample paper.** Ask your instructor for a reputable source that is similar to the type of document you want to write. Outline the major sections to discover how the writer organized her ideas. Use the organizational strategy (not the words, ideas, or arguments without proper citation) as a framework to begin outlining your ideas for your paper.

**Set early deadlines for small goals.** Some writers work best under pressure, but many longer assignments cannot be written the night before the due date. Choose a section of the assignment you want to complete, and ask a friend to set a deadline for you before the assignment is due. Alternatively, work on your paper in 15-30 minute sessions, or challenge yourself to finish one paragraph each day in the weeks before the due date.

**Exercise.** Clear your mind by going for a walk, a jog, doing yoga, stretching, etc.

**Remove distractions.** Turn off music, television, and other distractions, and then find a quiet place to work.

**Talk with an instructor or a tutor.** Visit your instructor during office hours or schedule a tutoring appointment at the Quality Writing Center.