

Overcoming Writing Anxiety

Writing is a challenging and rewarding craft, but many people—including professional writers like your professors—experience occasional trepidation about writing. During your college career, you might experience writing anxiety or “writer’s block.” Using the following strategies can help you prevent such anxiety from crippling your academic performance and, I hope, help you learn to appreciate the writing process.

1. Get support.

Isolation can contribute to writing anxiety. On a supportive campus like Lake Forest’s, you can seek support in a variety of places. Your professors and the Writing Center are great resources. Visit your professors with specific questions about writing assignments and course content. Many professors encourage students to bring outlines or drafts to discuss.

The Writing Center can help you throughout all stages of the writing process. Peer tutors are trained to work with clients in the very beginning (brainstorming, outlining, assessing evidence) and the very end (editing, checking citations) of the writing process.

2. After each class, write down the most interesting piece of content discussed.

Try to identify something integral to the course’s content. If you keep a log about what interests you about the class (even if you find the class itself lackluster), you will be more excited to write about its course content.

3. Get words on the page.

Use strategies like assessing the assignment, freewriting, and making flow charts to get words on the page. Do not censor yourself. Do not self-edit. The physical act of writing can jumpstart ideas and connections between ideas.

3. Modify your writing calendar to allow for more revision and editing time.

Convince yourself that your writing assignment is due two days earlier than the actual due date. Spend the extra two days revising your argument and editing your paper for sentence-level errors. Creating an artificial time crunch can both motivate you to begin working and assure you that you will have ample time to revise.

5. Identify your strengths.

If you are an anxious writer, be sure to identify positive feedback from your professors or classmates. Perhaps your professor praised your ideas or one of your classmates complimented your use of evidence. Keep a “success journal,” to track your positive feedback. Do not ignore the constructive criticism but, rather, think of those comments as opportunities for growth. Think of yourself as an apprentice, building upon past successes and improving your skills with each new paper you write.

What causes writing anxiety?

Expectations for yourself

Sometimes it feels as though your writing is a reflection of yourself, of who you are as a person. Writing anxiety often stems from perfectionism, from a desire to get a good grade or impress your professor.

Expectations of your professors/peers

You may feel as though your professor will not think you are intelligent enough for the class. You may feel that your professor or your peers will judge you as a person based on your writing abilities.

Sound familiar? Follow the tactics above to facilitate a more relaxed writing process.