**COMMON BARRIERS TO WRITING:**
- Too Busy
- Prefer Pressure of a Deadline
- Afraid to Write Something Bad
- Don’t Know What to Write
- Don’t Know How to Start

**TIPS TO OVERCOME WRITING BLOCKS:**
- **Start Small:** Set aside short but focused blocks of time for small steps/goals.
- **Invent Your Own Motivation:** Create an earlier deadline for yourself and prioritize.
- **Collaborate to Motivate:** Schedule a meeting with a friend, advisor, or writing tutor.
- **Write Anyway:** An ugly, rough first draft is still a useful start, and no one needs to see it yet!
- **Start with what you know:** Start writing the easiest part with the content you know the best.
- **Determine what you don’t know:** Figure out what you need to brainstorm or research further.

**TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES TO GET STARTED:**
- **Guiding Questions:** Write out your core goals by addressing Who your audience is and Why and What you are writing.
- **Using Models & Guides:** Find examples or templates of your document to use early in the process, and fit content into that format.
- **Brainstorming & Idea Mapping:** Jot down topics, ideas, examples, or details (can be in no particular order). Cluster into themes, prioritize, and turn into an outline.
- **Outlining:** List and organize main topics and ideas. If you have a template, start with section headings, and map out your flow of ideas.
- **Start with the easiest part:** Start writing the easiest part with the content you know best (no need to write in the order it is read).
- **Start with Figures:** List, sketch, or storyboard possible images or figures first, and then structure the written ideas alongside or around them.
- **Free Writing or Free Speaking:** Just write, type, or speak (and record) without hesitation about wording or details that interrupt your flow of ideas.

**FLIP OVER PAGE FOR MORE DETAILS & EXAMPLES FOR THESE TECHNIQUES...**

1 See also handout: “Procrastination and How to Avoid It: Making the Most of Your Writing Time,” [http://www.writing.caltech.edu/resources](http://www.writing.caltech.edu/resources)
2 Make an appointment with a tutor in the HWC who can help you learn more about these techniques: [http://writing.caltech.edu/tutoring](http://writing.caltech.edu/tutoring)
TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES TO GET STARTED WRITING:

**Answer Guiding Questions**

**Who** is my audience?
- Your target audience determines format, style, and language choices.
- Consider who they are, what they want to read, and what info they need.

**Why** am I writing?
- What is your core reason to communicate? (e.g., filling gaps in research knowledge, surprising new findings, new methods)

**What** am I writing?
- What templates, examples, author’s instructions can you find/use?
- What are your core messages?
- What content do you have vs. need?

**Using Models & Guides**

Find examples or templates for your model choice of document. For articles, journal websites often provide links to guidelines and templates (look for resource pages for authors).

Consider extracting and using section headings from your model (then see Outlining). Typical sections in an article:
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Methods/Approach
- Results
- Discussion/Conclusions
- References

**Brainstorming & Idea Mapping**

(1) With no concern for order, begin jotting down ideas, topics, or content that you want to include.

(2) Group similar or linked concepts (e.g., connect bubbles or reorder lists), perhaps arrange ideas from general to specific (from top to bottom of list, or central vs. periphery bubbles).

(3) Organize according to the format for your document (or see Outlining).

**Freewriting**
Write whatever comes to mind on the topic, ignoring grammar and organization.

**Free-speaking**
If you more easily or clearly communicate verbally, record/transcribe what you say aloud, whether alone or to someone.

**Start with the easiest part**

For example, you don’t have to write the Abstract or Intro first. Methods may be easiest to start if not yet finished Results. Or writing Results may reveal what to include in the Discussion or Conclusions.

**Outlining**

(1) Start a random or organized list of main topics and ideas.

(2) Fit ideas into document structure or preferred organization, e.g.:

   A. Abstract
   B. Introduction
      1. Motivation
      a. Idea 1
      b. Idea 2 [perhaps figure idea…]
      2. Prior research gaps
      3. This research will…
     ...
     ...and fill in until ideas become sentences!

**Start with Figures**

You can “storyboard” your figures as sketches in the sequence they would appear in the text, which can tell the story visually to someone skimming.

Decide which visuals best fit your data or content (tables, plots, schematics, photos, etc.). Consider whether some visuals can be combined into one figure.

You can initially note figure ideas within your outline as placeholders and later treat them as your to-do items once ready to sketch or generate the figures.