

Addressing Writing Anxiety

What is Writing Anxiety?

"Students may ignore the existence of the [writing] center until required to come in, they may come with all the wrong expectations, and their attitudes toward writing may vary from *anger to anxiety* about grades to eagerness to produce the best paper they are capable of, but the vast majority emerge feeling that the experience was positive." -Muriel Harris, further developer of the [Purdue OWL](#)

Writing anxiety is a lot like writers' block, and may lead to many of the same symptoms: an inability to write, a fear that one's writing isn't good enough, procrastination during the writing process, and a struggle with perfection even on a rough draft. It can leave writers with little time to complete their work, causing mounting feelings of frustration, anger, and anxiety. The bad news is at some point or another, writing anxiety affects *everyone*, even the most prolific of writers. The good news is we have ideas about how you can thrive even when coping with writing anxiety and stress!

Our advice:

1. **Avoid procrastination by starting early:** Even if you're writing ideas down that first day in response to the prompt your professor has given you, you're thinking about your paper in a productive way, decreasing your stress and anxiety about the assignment.
 - a. So jot some notes on the prompt or get a scratch piece of paper and start thinking about ideas; this work will give you a frame or lens through which to view your project and help you move on to the next steps.
2. **Gather your sources and keep track of them:** if your paper is asking you to use additional resources, begin using our [librarians](#) to help you find them! If it's asking only that you use sources from class, begin looking over your texts and notes to determine what sources you'll want to use for paraphrasing, quoting, or summarizing.
 - a. Take note of page numbers and author names so your in-text and end-of-text citations are easy to make at the end!
3. **Pace yourself by creating a plan of action:** Plot out when you're going to work on your paper. Even if you only have a half hour to spare between classes or events, that time can be spent re-reading a source, thinking about your thesis, or editing a paragraph.
 - a. Use small chunks of time wisely to make decisions about what to work on and when. The [writing center tutors](#) can help you here to create a plan of action.
4. **Take breaks:** You cannot write all the time. As much as we might like to, you need to practice self-care and have some fun, too. So take breaks away from your paper and try not to think about it.
 - a. Overthinking your topic can lead to writing anxiety just like under thinking it can!
5. **Write, then edit:** Jot down all ~~your~~ your ideas, don't worry about spelling errors or if it's perfect that first time. Embrace what Anne Lamott calls the genre of the [shitty first draft](#).
 - a. You use a different part of your brain to write than you do to edit. By trying to do both simultaneously, you can stress yourself out and increase your writing anxiety. Write and *then* edit after a break to decrease your stress levels and increase your chances of a stronger paper.
6. **Use your [campus writing center](#):** our tutors are here to help you at ANY stage of the writing process.
 - a. When we say that, we really mean it. We can help you brainstorm, draft ideas, edit, outline, polish your prose, and more. And we help with any type of writing or presentations, too!

7. **Get support and use your resources:**
 - a. If your anxiety is affecting your school work, it is a good idea to meet with one of our [counselors](#) to talk through strategies to manage the new challenges college brings your way.
 - b. Additionally, [Student Accessibility and Support Services](#) can help here, too, if you are concerned about your learning accommodations needing to be adjusted or if you need guidance on being more proactive about your academics.
 - c. Lastly, all professors offer office hours so they can meet you and learn more about your needs for their course. Use them to ask questions, get additional instructional support, and learn more about your professor, too!
8. **Consider and incorporate the feedback you receive:** no doubt you'll have some combination of tutors, professors, and peers reading your paper and offering advice. Consider what they have to say and how to best incorporate the advice they've given you.
 - a. If you're stuck on what to do, or confused about what they've suggested, visit again with your tutor or stop by your professor's office hours for additional guidance.
9. **Run spell check and grammar check!** It may seem silly, but when we're stressed or anxious, we can sometimes forget the most important necessities. So remember to check your paper before you submit it.
10. **Hit Submit!** Once you've done all of the above, you're likely ready to submit your work. Read it over one last time (out loud if you can) and then submit it.
 - a. Writing is an ongoing *process* which means you need to keep doing it to improve. Don't expect immediate results, settle in and enjoy the experience and what it can teach you about yourself!

Resources for Writing Anxiety Support:

- [The Counseling Center](#): If you notice that anxiety is affecting your school work, it is a good idea to meet with one of our counselors to talk through strategies to manage the challenges college brings your way. There are many ways to get support through the counseling center and now is a great time to explore what they have to offer when it's free and readily-available!
- [The Writing Center Tutors](#): Our trained, peer student success tutors are great at offering strategies to avoid procrastination, to plan out an academic paper, and stay on track with a writing assignment. You can find them in Chalmers library on Floor 2 or by visiting owl.kenyon.edu to make an in-person or online appointment.
- [SASS](#): Student Accessibility and Support Services offers all sorts of guidance for students needing accommodations who find college as a time of new challenges and new opportunities. If you find yourself struggling, consider meeting with SASS to determine your next steps.
- [Chalmers Library](#): Our library has many great resources on writing successfully including *Writing in College: from Competence to Excellence*: a great book that addresses how to take your writing to the next level. Chapters address everything from transitioning from high school to college-level writing, constructing a thesis, and understanding professor expectations. It's available [online](#) as an ebook!

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