Overcoming Writing Anxiety

Pick a Topic Which Interests You

Often instructors will give you a choice of topics for your paper. If you pick a topic that interests you, you will be more motivated to learn and to write about this topic.

"... writing is not just an act of transmitting information. It should also be an act of learning."
(Heffernan & Lincoln)

Use Instructor’s Guidelines

Instructors will usually give you details about the assignment and may provide you with evaluation criteria. When preparing your paper, work closely from this assignment; identify, and focus on, key words and clarify any terms you don’t understand with your instructor.

Understand the Purpose of Writing the Paper

Understanding the reasons why your instructor assigned the essay may help you overcome that feeling of "Why am I doing this anyway?" Writing papers develops your organizational, research, critical thinking and writing skills; all of these skills will serve you well in further education and in the working world. If you are feeling discouraged or unmotivated, try to think of how this assignment accomplishes some goals of the course or your program.

Resist Procrastination

When you are assigned a term paper in September and it isn’t due until December, you are likely to procrastinate. "If I have all term, I don’t need to think about this paper yet…". However, this procrastination can cause you anxiety when you finally do start to write your paper and may cause writer’s block. Since most instructors notify you of papers ahead of time, prepare a schedule to complete your paper. You can avoid procrastination and the accompanying...
anxiety if you break down the thinking and writing process into manageable chunks throughout the term.

"Students are much more likely to procrastinate after saying, 'I'm going to write my paper today' than they are if their goal is a smaller, more specific component of the paper: 'I'm going to develop my outline today.'"

(Randall Hansen)

Writing Process

Being aware of various steps in the writing process may help you to schedule the writing of your paper into workable chunks. Here are some steps in writing an essay:

Prewriting

Prewriting is the writing that you do before you start the first draft of your paper. In this stage you should concentrate on simply getting ideas down on paper; do not worry about spelling, grammar, or organization. This gives you something to work from and eliminates the stress of looking at a blank page. Some prewriting strategies include:

**Questioning**
write down questions and answers about your topic

**Brainstorming**
list as many ideas and details as possible that apply to your topic

Research

If your paper requires some research, do this after you have narrowed down your topic with prewriting. This is the time to explore the library and all the research resources it offers.

Outlining

At this stage, you have probably gathered many ideas and details about your topic. Now you are ready to organize these ideas into an outline. An outline is a brief sketch/plan for your paper. It breaks down the paper into your main points and the support and details for those points.
Writing the Rough Draft

Write to say what you mean in your own terms. Don’t get frustrated because you can’t think of a fancy word with which to express your thoughts. Say what you mean out loud and write it down. This is often the best and clearest way to communicate your meaning. Put the ideas in your outline into complete sentences.

You may have additional thoughts that you hadn’t thought of in the prewriting and outlining stages. Don’t worry about this. Simply add these details where you think they belong and keep writing. You can evaluate the strength and relevance of these additional ideas to your outline once you get the thought down on paper.

Revising and Proofreading

Now that you have some complete sentences that resemble a paper, it is time to revise. Revising means checking what you have written for ideas, organization and details. Revising may require you to write a few more rough drafts. Once you are satisfied with the content and organization of your paper, you must proofread it for grammar and spelling errors. If you are tired of your paper at this point, set it aside for a day or few days, but do not ignore this important step. Proper spelling and grammar in a paper helps you communicate your meaning as clearly as possible.

Following these tips should help you cope with writing anxiety. If you need additional help with any of your college writing, come to Counselling and Learning Support Services in Room 1402. We are here to help you!

References

