ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:12, Issue:2, June 2023

Is Writing Block a Myth?
What Possible Strategies Required to Beat it?

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Abstract

Previous studies and research findings show that there are a number of diverse factors that contribute to Writer's Block that may occur any time. This study aims to investigate the real and main causes of such a problem and find the possible and effective solutions for it. The question to be highlighted here is whether writers really suffer from a block while writing, and to what extent this could be named phenomenon? The researchers have found that this block could be due to lack of motivation, psychological reasons, anxiety, fear of criticism, or cognitive issues. Explanations, discussions, and recommendations will be discussed deeply and in detail throughout this study.

Keywords: block, cognitive, data, factors, participants, phenomenon, research

(Received: 02 March 2023; Revised: 17 April 2023; Accepted: 09 May 2023; Published: 30 June 2023)

Introduction

Many writers experience "Writer's Block". They often quit and stare at the screen or the piece of paper not knowing what to do next: continue or give up. This could be due to many things such as having no ideas, not finding the proper vocabulary, or having no motivation.
Writer's block could be reduced if the writer has confidence and good background about the topic at hand, but this needs him/her to be more focused. This paper highlights the possible definition(s) of writer's block-- its causes, and cure.

Research question

The ultimate aim of this study is: to what extent does writer's block affect the writing process and students' outcome when writing their term papers? What are the main causes of this problem, and what are the possible solutions, or cure?

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Literature Review

According to Glatch (2020, Para. 1)"Writer's block—wanting to write and not writing—is a persistent problem that every writer (yes, *every* writer, even Stephen King) deals with. At its simplest, it manifests as a lack of ideas". "Writer's block is a phenomenon experienced by writers that is best described as an overwhelming feeling of being stuck in the writing process without the ability to move forward and write anything new (Master Class, 2021, Para. 2). So, writer's block is something mysterious that affects writers and stops them from accomplishing the writing mission. The sort of life which is full of responsibilities plays an important role that forces writers to quit for a short, or long time. Writers are like other people in society: they have families, jobs, social relations, water and electricity bills, telephone bills, etc. They suffer because they have the fear of losing their jobs or being taken to court for some issues. All of that contributes to writers' mood and causes downfalls in their writing.

> Let's face it: this world was not built for writers. Very few of us have the luxury of dedicating our entire lives to literature: we have jobs to work, bills to pay, kids to raise, and thousands of decisions to make. When we find time to sit at the writing desk, we don't always have the energy to write (Glatch, 2020, Para. 30).

Lack of ideas plays a considerable cause of this problem- writer's block. Why not have a trick to stimulate ideas? Writers may get a sheet of paper and start writing anything that pops up, with a non-stop process, preferably with setting a timer, and stop when time is up. This way, though simple, kindles some ideas to utilize to continue writing at a high speed.

> Decide on what you would like to write. This can be a scene, a chapter of your novel, or simply a page of free writing that will help stimulate an idea. Set a timer for 25 minutes and don't stop writing until the timer rings. Finally, take a five-minute break and repeat these three steps, sticking carefully to the clock (Master Class, 2021, Para. 6).

However, some writers are lucky not to suffer from blocks; they have peace of mind, and enjoy writing with no problems—they have no worries at all regarding paying bills. "I rarely have writer's block because my bills arrive too regularly" (Bachofen, 2014, Para. 11). But some writers- experienced or fresh- do admit that the reason behind getting stuck is due to the hectic life—pressure and anxiety.

> Writing is never a smooth process, and most successful writing proceeds in fits and starts. Writer's block refers to those greater-than-ordinary blockages. It occurs when a writer feels truly stuck and unable to write. There are many possible causes, including anxiety, stress, or a simple lack of understanding of the material (LeBel, (n.d), Para. 1).

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Bachofen, (2014, Para. 3) concludes that he follows certain ways to overcome blocks: doing many things to solicit ideas and restore his positive mood to continue writing. He may browse the Internet, read a story or an article in a magazine or newspaper, etc.

> For me, solving writer's block involves working on an unrelated writing project. In addition to writing books, I also do some magazine freelancing and write for my websites. Diverting my attention from a temporary block to something else seems to restart the creative process for me, even if I'm just doing research or editing someone else's writing. When I return to the original project, the block is gone.

Moreover, by narrowing his audience, normally, to one person, Bachofen can avoid blocks in writing. He admits that this procedure is so effective.

> First I imagine one person—a friend. Then I simply describe to my friend what it is I am writing and how I got stuck. By narrowing my audience to one person, I become more decisive. And imagining the explanation keeps me in the right point of view to unsnarl my work. It sounds too simple, but it's been very effective (Bachofen, 2014, Para. 5).

It is disappointing to stop the flow of writing for diverse reasons that affect the writer's mood. What shall a writer do if gets stuck? Stop it and give up? "It happens to every writer. It's inevitable. Your prose has turned to mush, you don't have a creative bone left in your body, and you want to throw in the towel" (Goins, (n.d.), Para. 1).

> Moreover, **"FEAR"** plays a major role in causing writer's block. It has different kinds: fear of the audience, fear of bad style, and fear of not satisfying a specific group of readers- critics. "Many writers struggle with being afraid, with putting their ideas (and themselves) out there for everyone to see and critique. **Fear** is a major reason some writers never become writers"(Goins, (n.d.), Para.3).

Writers normally need quiet places and proper times to write. This includes students who are asked to write their term papers or any task that needs much concentration. Some universities provide rooms to reserve, either on campus or in the library. This is a way to let writers do their missions with no external effects- noise, interruption, intrusion, etc. "Many libraries have rooms that can be reserved for this very purpose. Academic institutions often have rooms across campus that you can use for writing" (Charlesworth Author Services, 2021, Para. 5).

> Overall, one of the best ways to overcome writer's block is to write. Even if you use bullet points to list information, write down thoughts, respond to questions, or pose questions for yourself, getting words on paper is the most important step. You can come

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> back later and connect ideas to form paragraphs, structure and organize your writing, and polish your paper. (Charlesworth Author Services, 2021, Para. 11).

One of the most important things to overcome writer's block is to start writing. Just start, and things will work smoothly. This is a good way for writers to follow. Unintentionally, they forget that they were suffering from that problem. "Once you start heading in a direction, it's easier to pick up speed. And before you know it, your block will be a distant memory and you'll be doing what you once thought impossible. You'll be *writing*." (Goins, (n.d.), Para.9).

Normally, the beginning is so demanding; some writers start smoothly-- have the proper ideas, good mood, and peace of mind. Suddenly, they get stuck and their minds go blank; nothing exists.

> All academics hit blocks when they are writing. Sometimes beginning can be challenging. Sometimes the writing is flowing, and you have plenty of ideas, and then suddenly your mind goes blank. Having a toolkit of strategies for overcoming writer's block is essential (Charlesworth Author Services, 2021, Para. 1).

Purdue University Global, (2019, Para. 1) offers a way to overcome writer's block: sit down and write. Waiting for inspiration does not work. The secret to overcoming writer's block might take this way: "Sit down at your computer and write. If you wait until you're inspired, you'll never do it. Fortunately, methods are available to make it a little easier on you".

On the other hand, Valero, (2021, Para. 13) praises inspiration and blocked writers should search for it somewhere. Writers would read some articles from certain journals, organize their offices, etc. This refreshes them and makes them more positive. "If you get stuck, then start searching for inspiration somewhere else. I usually read articles from the journal or conference that I plan to submit. This gives me an idea about the expectations of its reviewers and editors".

> If you're an avid reader, you can glean inspiration from your favorite writers. Even if you're not always reading, try cracking a book before you sit down to write. Read poetry for 10 minutes, a chapter of a book, or a short essay. This will put you in the right mindset to write your own words—or at least imitate those of your favorite writers (Purdue University Global, 2019, Para. 10).

Writer's block is general and not related to writing, in particular. It covers many fields such as music, poetry, sports, etc. It is so old and goes back to old eras.

> Writer's block, or creative block, is possibly as old as the art of writing itself. And it doesn't just happen to writers. Creatives from all walks of life—artists, musicians, poets,

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> entrepreneurs—can suffer from it. Sometimes inspiration just doesn't strike. (Lachs, 2018, Para. 2)

Should "Writer's Block" be respected? How would it be treated in a way that writers, especially students, should consider respectful? Well, this is true, to some extent. When writers are under pressure and have no ideas, or the will to write, it is wise not to write, lest they mix things up and produce bad content. So, it is preferable not to take the risk- just relax. "Ms. Morrison would tell her students that writer's block should be respected and to *not* try to "write through it." (Reid, 2022, Para. 13). Does perfectionism have a role to play in writer's block?

When writers seek perfectionism from the start, they normally do not succeed. Everybody wants to produce the best products for different reasons. Avoiding severe criticism and bad feedback from the readers- critics, in particular- are among the people hindering writing. Nobody is perfect. Having "Perfectionism" as a priority from the beginning is risky. "Whether you call it resistance, perfectionism, or procrastination, the fear of bad writing is probably the most common type of writer's block" (Henneke, (n.d), Para. 5).

> One of the most common blocks for writers and creatives of all walks is perfectionism. It's normal to want to do our very best, to get everything just right before we even start our first sentence. Most people use perfectionism as a protection mechanism, to protect themselves from harsh critique or failure. Unfortunately, trying to write the perfect sentence, paragraph, or novel will lead most writers to never write a single word. (Lachs, 2018, Para. 11).

Konnikova, (2016, Para. 7) highlights a good piece of information by saying that the term writer's block was first introduced by a psychiatrist. Psychology may play a major role in this block. "Writer's block has probably existed since the invention of writing, but the term itself was first introduced into the academic literature in the nineteen-forties, by a psychiatrist named Edmund Bergler" (Konnikova, 2016, Para. 3).

Almost all blocked writers share certain experiences: lack of motivation, less ambition, fatigue, and decline in strength. "There are some experiences that almost all blocked writers have in common. Almost all of them experience flagging motivation; they feel less ambitious and find less joy in writing. They're also less creative" (Konnikova, 2016, Para. 7)

Writer's block- the invisible monster- freezes the writer's feelings. The page seems blank and there is no way to start writing. It really is a serious block.

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> Every time I start writing a new research paper, the same freezing feeling seems to emerge when I look at the blank page. This problem is known as writer's block, and most academics suffer from it in one way or the other. I've dealt with this invisible monster on many occasions, and each victory has taught me how to overcome it better (Valero, 2021, Para. 1).

Progress in overcoming writer's block could be tackled by drawing some pictures, graphs, figures, etc., then starting to describe them. It is a possible way that leads to getting refreshed with new ideas, as well.

> Furthermore, with time you will notice that describing tables and figures is almost a mechanical process. After adding this type of content, you will have a good chunk of white space filled, which gives a very gratifying sensation of making progress (Valero, 2021, Para. 6).

Blocked writers should not switch to editing their work early if stuck. They should move to another section of their writing- let it be a term paper- and once they finish up, they can edit. "Don't switch to editing if you hit a block. Instead, switch to writing a different part of the paper and edit only when you have a complete draft for a section" (Valero, 2021, Para. 15).

There are so many ways and procedures to overcome writer's block-- find the proper time of the day that makes you more creative. Some writers enjoy writing after midnight, while others prefer writing in the early morning when the weather is cool.

> To avoid or overcome writer's block, think about what time of day you find it easiest to be creative. For many people, creative tasks are easiest in the morning when it's quiet and emails aren't piling up. Others prefer writing late at night. Plan to write when you're naturally most creative, whether it's at 6 AM or 10 PM. (Engle, (n.d), Para. 6).

Physical exercises play an important role in overcoming writer's block. Walk, swim, jog, dance, and do anything that makes you happy and excited. "If you're feeling sleepy and disconnected or disinterested in your work, try kick-starting your energy with aerobic exercise. It can be running, walking, or dancing: anything that makes you feel happy and gets your heart rate up" (Engle, (n.d), Para. 16).

Methodology

To collect accurate data regarding writer's block, the researchers distributed a questionnaire among (22) male and female Fourth- year students at Ibri College – in the Sultanate of Oman.

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Moreover, colleague teachers were referred to as direct observers to let the researchers have a complete idea about their student's behavior when writing in class throughout the semester.

Participants

The participants are Omani students studying at Ibri College of Applied Sciences, sharing the same background and aged between (22-23). The questionnaire aims to investigate their awareness regarding writer's block, its causes, and its cure. It consists of twenty questions: (10) Yes/ No, (5) Agree/ Disagree.

Questionnaire Analysis

Yes/No

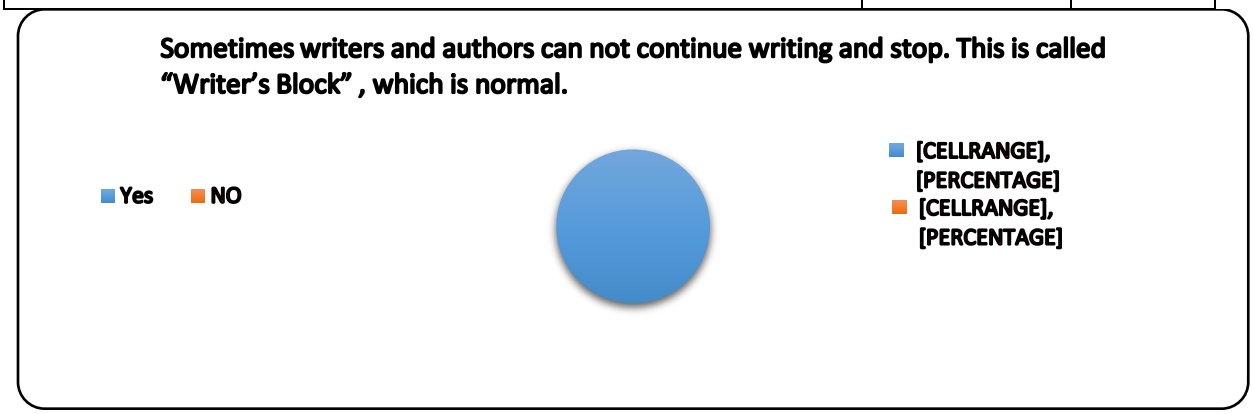
Figure 1:

1. Sometimes writers and authors cannot continue and stop. This is called "Writer's Block", which is normal.

(A) Yes (B) No

Table 1

Sometimes writers and authors cannot continue writing and stop. This is called "Writer's Block" , which is normal.	**Yes**	**No**
	22	**0**
	100%	**0%**



(100%) of the survey agree that at certain times, writers and authors alike stop writing which is called (Writer's Block). According to students' answers, this is normal and could happen any time during the writing process. No worries at all if it happens.

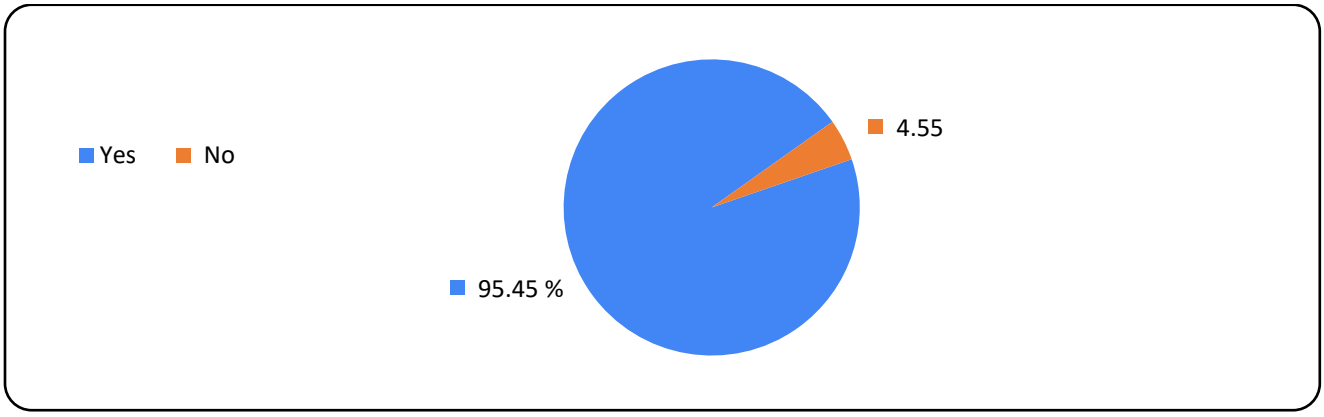
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Figure 2:

2. Choosing the proper time and place to writer is a good way to overcome, or at least reduce "Writer's Block".

(A) Yes (B) No

Choosing the proper time and place to writer is a good way to overcome, or at least reduce "Writer's Block".	**Yes**	**No**
	21	**1**
	95.45%	**4.55%**



One of the possible ways and procedures to avoid Writer's Block is choosing the proper place and time. Some writers write in offices, others in quiet cafes. Choosing the right time is so important; in the early morning, during the night. (95.45%) say that the right place and time are essential factors that may reduce the Writer's Block.

Agree/ Disagree

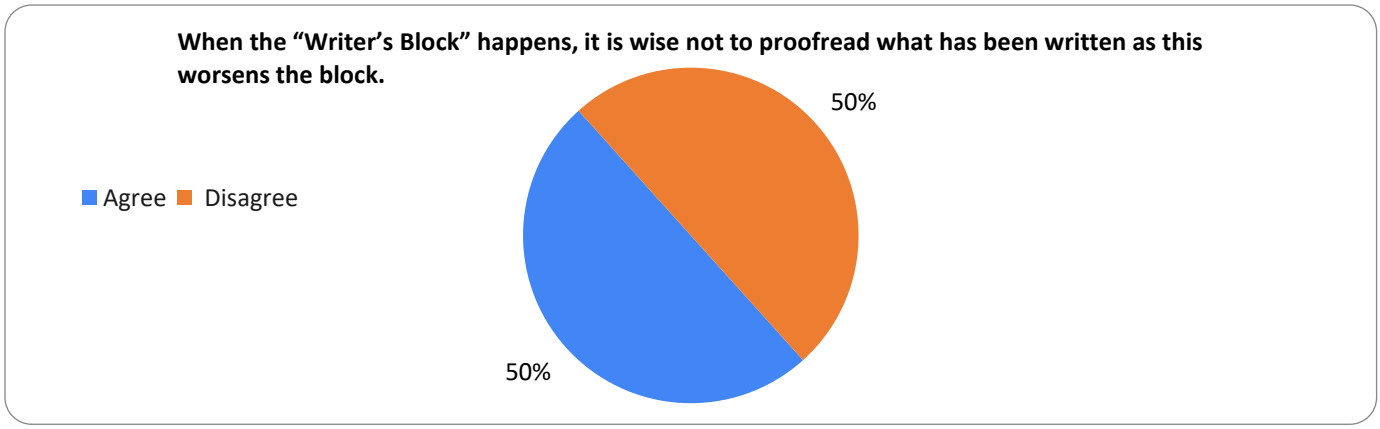
Figure 3:

3. When the "Writer's Block" happens, it is wise not to proofread what has been written as this worsens the block.

(A) Agree (B) Disagree

Sometimes writers and authors cannot continue writing and stop. This is called "Writer's Block", which is normal.	**Agree**	**Disagree**
	11	**11**
	50%	**50%**

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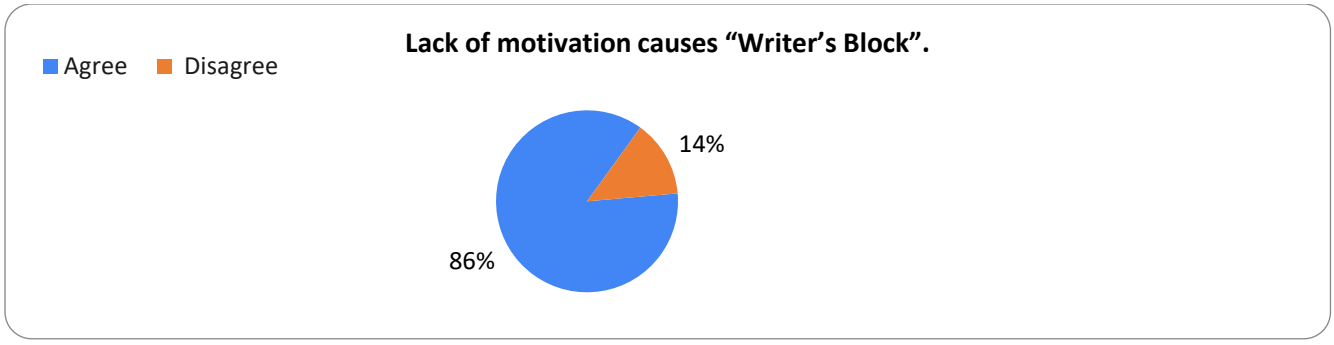
(50 %) agree that when Writer's Block happens, writers should quit and not revise or proofread what they have written. This may distract writers' attention and become unfocussed, which will spoil the piece of writing already done. It seems there is a balance (50/50 %).

Figure 4:

4. Lack of motivation causes "Writer's Block".

(A) Agree (B) Disagree

Lack of motivation causes "Writer's Block".	**Agree**	**Disagree**
	19	**3**
	86%	**14%**



To excel in any task, there must be a sort of motivation. If writers just start writing when they are in a bad mood or without the least percentage of motivation, they will stop writing or might produce a bad outcome.

Recommendations

-when blocked, writers need not edit their writing.

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-find the proper time of the day to start writing- in the early morning, midnight, etc.
-almost all writers experience "Writer's Block". To overcome this problem one may do some activities such as swimming, jogging, walking, etc.
-having "perfectionism" as a priority from the start is risky and may cause writer's block. Nothing is perfect, so be yourself and do your best.
-once a writer faces writer's block, it is wise not to continue. Just relax.
-fear is also one of the major causes of writer's block; fear of the audience's comments, especially from **CRITICS**. Writers need not worry before they start writing, otherwise, they will not proceed.
-writers should not work under pressure, or think of hectic events such as paying water and electricity bills, rent, etc.

Conclusion

Writing becomes difficult and much more demanding when there is little guidance, or when one is under direct control by others—teachers, for example. The many rules imposed on writers make them work under extreme pressure, with not much freedom to go ahead to explore or create. This makes students lost, confused, or left stray. Regarding the questionnaire sample of students, it is obvious that most students suffer from Writer's Block if left alone with not much guidance from their teachers. However, they excel and write well with no pressure or fear when writing about things they like, especially personal things.

Acknowledgment

The researchers would like to express their deepest thanks and gratitude to all students who participated in this questionnaire without whom this would not have been done this way. Special thanks go to colleague teachers for their assistance.

About the Researchers

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