

Dr. Mickle  
Mark Curcio  
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### Outline: A Cure for the Common Writer's Block

Writer's block is a problem found anywhere there is a pencil, paper and a mind. It happens when a person has to write in any type of medium and he or she does not know where to begin, how to write it, and when to end. In schools, "writing teachers these days help students discover ideas worth writing about through provocative conversation, heuristic exercises, close reading and daily journal writing" (Rothman, par.10). But still, with all that a teacher can do for a student to help beat writer's block; it still exists more frequently than desired. A study was conducted from 1999 to 2003 on students of many grade levels to try to cure this horrible disability in all writers (Graham, par.1). The outcome was that the majority of "fourth, eighth and twelfth grade students who partook in the study demonstrated only partial mastery of the writing skills and knowledge needed at their respective grade levels" (Graham, par.1). This is something that has to be stopped in education because writing is a key in everything. In English, writing is a majority of the whole course. In math, one must be able to write answers to word problems and know how to write the correct answer. Writer's block is a harmful disability in education, but making outlines is the best solution to the problem because they start the writer off and lead him or her along the way by providing step- by-step instructions to follow to finish a paper.

Outlining is the best way to beat writer's block and get started because everything a writer needs is right there in front of them. Research showed in 2003 that "planning-strategy instruction is effective with poor writers in fourth through twelfth grades (Graham, par. 46). Even teachers in a 2003 survey "emphasized both planning and transcription" (Graham, par. 21) before actual writing occurs. These statistics make perfect sense. When building something, instructions help a contractor to see and put together the final product. When paying bills online, instructions help finish the bills correctly and safely. But when writing a paper, there is no exact way to do it. There really is no right or wrong way. The information can be wrong, or the citations can be wrong, but when it comes to substance and how a writer wants to format his or her paper, there is no wrong answer. This is how writer's block comes into the picture. But, making an outline can help a writer know what to write, how to start writing, and what to finish the paper with. The only question that remains in a writer's head is how to make an outline in the correct way, and more importantly, in an efficient way.

By setting up an outline in its original form (I., A., 1., a.), a writer can look at each Roman numeral as the part of the paper (introduction, body, conclusion), and each capital letter as a paragraph. The numbers underneath the capital letter can be viewed as points that will be explained in that particular paragraph. By doing this, each part of the paper is shown step-by-step. All that is needed now is to write down each part of the paper with information that is researched from cited sources. A writer can either do this with phrases or whole sentences that explain each part of the paper. It really all depends on what kind of writer the person is. If the person likes to be quick and write quick notes, simple

phases after each number or letter can work effectively. But if the person is a straight out sentence writer; a sentence after each number or letter can effectively work as well. As long as the writer can read what he or she writes down to guide them, the outline will do its job as to helping them continue their writing and hopefully be happy with their finished piece of work. An outline can be looked at as a map to follow from point A (beginning the paper) to point B (finishing the paper). But in contrast to an outline to beat writer's block, there are many other inefficient ways that have been published to beat writer's block.

There was an article written entitled, "Eight Ways to Help Students Beat Writer's Block" by Rebecca Elliott, which did not include the outline idea, but had free writing as a solution to writer's block. Number two on the eight ways mentioned, "You realize you don't have some of the facts you need and you keep running back and forth to the library, the internet, or your reference books" (Elliott). The answer she gives in a nutshell is to "keep writing even if you don't know all the facts" (Elliott), and to "write notes for yourself that you can make sure of later" (Elliott). Elliott puts it best when she states: "Just Write" (Elliott). In "Preparing to Teach Writing", James D. Williams suggests the same idea that free writing or the "Just Write" motto, is the best way to help students "explore ideas without the burden of having to be correct or clear" (Rothman, par.17). Free writing is a very effective way to get your pencil moving in the right direction because in a writer's mind, some words are better than no words. A form of free writing is keeping a journal. As a writer writes more and more each day, he or she will feel more

comfortable to write papers or anything else that comes the writer's way because it will all sound right to the writer, which is what ultimately matters.

Free writing may indeed help beat writer's block, but in the overall picture of writing itself, Williams believes that: "it is not a particularly effective technique for improving writing performance" (Rothman, par. 17). He also states that: "The ritualizing of free writing, independent of the demands of a particular writing event" (Rothman, par. 17). When using an outline the correct way, he or she can write correctly and in a structured format, allowing their writing performance to improve as well. Graham even states that: "children will incorporate new planning tools into their existing routines" and "teaching planning strategies have a high likelihood of producing a positive effect on students' writing" (Graham, par. 49). Overall, this is why making an outline is the best way to go when it comes to beating and defeating writer's block. Not only will an outline help a writer during each paper by providing a step-by-step guide as stated earlier, but it helps a writer in the long run to help him or her write any type of paper correctly and completely. An outline can also help a writer not only start, which is the hardest part, but get the point across to its full extent, which ultimately is the goal of every writer out there with a pencil in one hand and a notepad in the other.

#### Works Cited

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