Communicate Virtually Anything
Communications solutions for virtually any organizational challenge

8 Tips for Blasting through Writer's Block

Whether it's a technical project with an extensive set of deliverables or a marketing project aimed at your unique niche, a blank screen can be scarier than that envelop from the IRS; these 8 tips can help you tame that blank screen and put your best words forward.

1. **Think about who you want to talk to**

   There are times when it helps to picture exactly who you want to talk to. I used to do implementation guides and think, "Amy really needs to know about this stuff" – and then make sure I would include that information. By getting a good picture of your audience – and what you want to deliver – can help you start to focus on what it is you want to or need to tell them.

2. **List important concepts**

   Begin listing important concepts. Don't push yourself with any real format. Start by listing out words. If they come out as sentences, even better. Work at this for a while. Again, picture what it is you want to tell that audience of yours.

3. **Look for idea sparkers**

   Now that you have some sort of direction, take a look around to see if you can find some idea sparkers – some other thoughts you can layer or build around your initial concepts. You already have a shell of the kind of thing you want to talk about so see what else might be around. You are not looking for source material you can cut and paste into your work. But, you do want to see if other people have approached what you are looking to do to see if this can help you create some more ideas. This is even easier if this is an internal assignment. Working on a technical piece? Go get the specs. A marketing piece? What else has the office done in this area? An HR piece? What industry work is out there already?

4. **Take notes under each lead sentence**

   Start to expand what you have in each area -- building out under each point. It's sort of like building a house. You built the frame now add a few floors and walls. One of the nice things when you are writing -- it's really easy to expand or build out one area. Go at it for a while. Really work at it to list out whatever you can. Get stumped in one area – just skip over the another. Don't worry about where this is taking you yet -- unless you have a good direction then go for it.

5. **Put it away**

   Now that you have stuff – get a bit of distance. Go get some coffee. Or go home (if it's the end of the day -- I am not giving you permission to leave). Let what you have already done percolate in your brain for a while. Let the ideas sort of rub against each other to see what other ideas they can generate. This is sort of like work on it without really working on it. I do get some great copy ideas in the shower once I have given myself a place to start. Now, one word of caution. Not working on writing when you have to deliver something is great – but you still have to be mindful of your deadline. So, how long you can really put it away depends on when it all is due.

6. **Reorganize what you have**

   Shuffle the pieces you do have until it really begins to fill out your picture. This can be some major reworking or just cutting and pasting a couple of snippets. Words are really malleable so don't be afraid to mix and match the sections and phrases. On larger pieces, it can help to add sub-heads and work on the text in ever smaller sections. If you get to a place that looks pretty good, save a copy. The one thing you don't want to do is to lose ideas.

7. **Keep building on each section**

   When you're happy with your framework, keep building out each area. You don't have to work linearly -- you can "eat dessert first" if that's the way your brain wants to work on the project. Write the end and then let that part lead you back. In fact, if you are working on a technical piece, you can jam the details into the sections where they belong and then work up through each area. Remember that picture you had in your head when you started? Are you getting closer with what you have already written? One of the things that happens when you build out the sections is that your picture can change. You have to make that decision. And it might mean changing that picture now that you know (and wrote) more stuff.

8. **Know when you are done**

   With the writing tools available you can work on a project forever. A small tweak here, another change there. Enough already. You need to know when it's time to stop. Need some help? Put your most recent final draft into the hands of a reviewer for their feedback. Then, go celebrate. An author I worked with celebrated with a new pair of shoes after she delivered a tough project. Another writing team would have pizza day after they published. How will you reward yourself once you're done?