

Keeping the Ball in Play

Moving Past Writer's Block

Let's face it. Everyone who writes will hit writer's block at some point in the writing process and will wonder how to move beyond it. The answer does not lie in bumping up against the same old block again and again, but in applying strategies for working past the block. Suggestions in this lesson move students from panic and frustration into action and show them steps to start writing again.

Focus Students learn strategies to move beyond writer's block.

Writing links All writing.

Lesson activity, pages 62–64 While writing a rough draft of a personal essay, students learn three strategies to move beyond writer's block: reading the writing, asking questions, and freewriting.

Introducing the lesson Illustrate the principle of resistance by having students conduct an experiment. Ask students to line up with their left foot, left side, and left cheek to the wall. Then ask them to try to lift their right foot. Surprise! The rigid posture and balance will not allow them to do it. Only when they change their strategy by shifting their balance—moving away from the wall—are they able to lift the other foot. Tell students that writer's block requires the same kind of flexibility. They must be willing to change their strategy and shift their balance, so to speak.

Literature resource We've developed a strategy checklist called **SAFE** to help students push their writing beyond writer's block and begin writing again.

S Stop and reread what you have written.

When a writer gets lost, it's helpful to go back and find a familiar spot. Rereading the writing helps students get back on track.

A Ask questions.

An important tool for moving beyond the block is asking questions, such as the following:

What am I really writing about?

What do I really need to say about my topic?

What seems most interesting and important to me that I've already written?

Does my writing connect to my topic or the assignment?

Do I have enough material to write about the topic I've chosen?

F Freewrite on your answers to the questions.

It's not enough simply to answer the questions. The student needs to freewrite and expand on these answers to discover new thoughts on the topic.

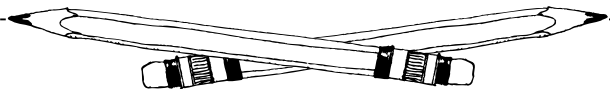
E Energize your draft with these new ideas and direction.

Now it's time to take these fresh ideas back to the draft to infuse it with this new energy and direction.



TIP

Writer's block is about resistance to the white page. But it does not always mean the writer has nothing to say. It can mean that the writer is wrestling with powerful emotions or thoughts. Your encouragement can demystify the problem and help to move the student through the block and back to the writing again. Begin by explaining that writer's block is a common experience among writers and by assuring your students that there are surefire ways to tackle this problem.



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Listen Up: What do you do when you hit writer's block?

In spite of your best efforts, you may experience writer's block. It's like an opponent stepping right in front of you. You may feel frustrated and stuck.



We soccer players have a strategy for overcoming blocks. The call goes out to change our strategy, keep the ball in play, and get the game back on track. You can use the same idea in writing. When you hit a writer's block, don't sit there struggling and stalling. Play it SAFE and try a new move to keep your writing going.

When you face a writer's block, what's one thing you do?



Practice

I began writing on the topic "My Number-One TV Show." But as I wrote, I didn't have a main idea and I hit a block. I stopped writing in frustration.

Sal's example

As I flip on the TV, I surf the channels for the sports games, my favorite. I can always watch sports anytime—any day, any night. Last night, though, I stopped on the weather channel, and guess what? A storm was heading this way.

Oops! No wonder my writing stalled. I couldn't decide what I wanted to write about—the sports program or the weather channel. So I checked out my easy, effective strategy for moving my writing past a block—I call it SAFE!

First, I stopped and read my writing from the beginning. Next, I asked myself, *What am I really writing about?* That helped me know I was really trying to write

