

Improving Your Confidence as a Writer

Sometimes, you may feel anxious about writing. Although this is normal (and can even be healthy!), it can also sometimes interfere with your ability to write effectively and do your best on assignments.

You may experience writing anxiety, feelings of apprehension and pessimism about writing, in some situations and not others. For instance, you might really enjoy analyzing novels, but find it very difficult to write the journal article-style paper for your Experimental Psychology course.

Common Stressful Experiences

You might be more likely to experience writing anxiety if you:

- are adjusting to a new form/style of writing
- feel that the person reading your paper has been overly critical before
- have had difficult writing experiences in the past
- have limited time, or a lack of structure
- are working on an assignment that does not feel meaningful
- are experiencing troubling events or concerns outside of school

How to Deal with Your Anxious Feelings About Writing

There are various ways to deal with your feelings and improve your confidence. Here are just a few:

- *Get support* from your professor, one or more of your classmates, or one of our tutors here at the Student Center for Academic Achievement (SCAA). The importance of seeking support cannot be understated!
- *Keep your strengths in mind*. You might be tempted to feel like you're a "bad writer" or that you "can't do anything right". However, think of what you know you can do. For example, are you good at "drawing in" the reader at the beginning of a paper? Are you an organized writer?
- *Reflect on, and be able to express, areas for improvement*. Just as it's good to know your strengths, reflecting on your challenges can be helpful, too. This can help you reach out for help most effectively. Just remember to be patient with yourself as you learn!



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- *Utilize a growth mindset.* This means recognizing that your current writing abilities are not necessarily the same abilities you will have in a few days, a few months, or a few years. We all grow and change in skills and abilities, and no one is destined to be a “bad writer.”
- *Remember that writing can be complex and difficult.* Even accomplished and skilled writers sometimes get stuck and seek opinions and support from others. Needing help is neither unusual nor a weakness!
- *Treat new forms of writing like apprenticeships.* Try to learn as much as you can about forms of writing you are unfamiliar with. Ask a lot of questions, seek help, and see if there are skills you learn that are more generally applicable to your writing.
- *Try new strategies and techniques when you struggle.* Sometimes previous habits are not helpful with your current writing assignments. You might find that you tend to get stuck at particular parts of your writing process. So, you might consider things like:
 - trying a new style of brainstorming or outlining
 - free-writing for a set amount of time, trying to get as much information on the page as possible, and worrying about editing later
 - putting every idea on a sticky note or index card, and arranging them in different ways to see what works well
- *Recognize and celebrate your accomplishments (even the small ones).* Did you spend 15 minutes working on that paper you've dreaded all week? Great! Did you work hard and get a good grade (however you define that)? Nice job! Did you see a tutor at the SCAA even though it was difficult? Good for you! Remind yourself of when you've done well; if you've done it before, you can do it again.
- *Use other resources.* The SCAA has lots of handouts for you. Cal State East Bay also has various other support services for students, like personal counseling and recreation opportunities. All of these things can also help you relieve stress and feel more confident!

References - This handout is adapted from “Writing Anxiety” by The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



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