



serious. Sometimes seeing your name and title neatly printed out can make the whole concept of writing seem real and exciting. That can be an incentive.

**Allow yourself to write several beginning sentences:** Putting pressure on yourself to get it right from the start can keep you from feeling comfortable about starting. Write several openings and decide later on the one you like best.

**Start in the middle or at the end:** Just write any part of the work that seems easiest to get down. Go back later and write the beginning.

**Set timer:** If you're really stuck, try setting a timer for one minute. Write without stopping. As you gain confidence, try longer periods...five minutes, ten minutes.

**Talk out loud:** Say a sentence out loud. Edit your sentence out loud, if needed. In other words, make any changes to the sentence out loud until you get the sentence the way you want it to sound. Then repeat the whole sentence again slowly as you write it down. Easier to do in the privacy of your home than in public. Definitely worth it.

**Talk it through with someone else:** Explain the basic plot or premise or outline of whatever it is you are working on to someone else. When someone else is listening, it can help you to make decisions about or clarify your own work.

**Let go of whatever isn't working:** You are writing a poem and you're stuck because you've ended the line with orange and you've been trying for three days to find a rhyme with orange. Let go. Completely change the line that ends with orange. Or perhaps let go of your initial desire to rhyme.

**Walk with a journal and specific problem:** Let's say you're supposed to write a story and you have a setting (a swamp) but you haven't really defined who your main character is. Grab a little pad of paper and a pencil and walk around the block while focusing on solving the main character issue. Who would live in a swamp? What kind of personality traits would that person have? Stop and jot things down so you don't forget. When you come back, start writing.

**Lie down:** No kidding. Sometimes, I lie down with a pencil and pad next to me and close my eyes. After a few minutes of silence and stillness, a solution may come to me. I usually set a timer for ten minutes, so I don't fall asleep for the rest of the day!

**Add a soundtrack:** Some people can't concentrate when music is playing. Music actually helps me to focus, as long as it is instrumental music (no vocals). When I'm working on a novel, I choose a composer or a CD of music that helps me to get in the mood. For example, when I was working on *The Naked Mole-Rat Letters*, which is set in rural Indiana and features a character who plays the dulcimer, I played CDs of dulcimer music.

**Shift your point of view:** If you're stuck while writing a creative work, try changing the point of view to become your main character. That may help you to more clearly see/hear/feel the setting and conflict of the story.

**What is the want:** Often, stories, poems, and songs are constructed around a main character who wants something. Take a look at whatever you're working on. Ask yourself what do my characters want?

**Set a deadline:** You may have been given a deadline. If not, it may help you to set one for yourself.

**Contract with someone to read it on certain day or certain time:** Knowing that someone else is waiting to read what you've written can push you to keep going. I often ask a child to read one of my children's book manuscripts. Not only do kids give great feedback, but also they're excited about receiving it, which makes me want to deliver.

**Make it a challenge:** if your problem is that your teacher has given you a writing assignment that you don't care about or don't like, then tell yourself (firmly, but nicely) that completing the assignment is part of your training to become a great novelist or song writer or lawyer or whatever. If you want to become an athlete you have to do things like push-ups or stretches. Writing can be a form of exercise for your brain. Think of yourself building muscle power in your brain as you complete the assignment. Oh, and don't forget to give yourself a pat on the back when you're done.

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