



Rowan University

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Writing Anxiety & Procrastination

Procrastination: You Aren't Lazy, and You Aren't Alone

Every student who transitions from the undergraduate level to the graduate level experiences writing anxiety, procrastination, and writing blocks.

There are plenty of reasons why it makes sense that you would be feeling overwhelmed or apprehensive:

- You are adjusting to a new form of writing.
- You may be writing for a reader or readers who have been overly critical or demanding in the past, or readers who make you feel intimidated.
- You may be remembering negative criticism received in the past—even if the reader who criticized your work won't be reading your writing this time.
- You are working with limited time or with a lot of unstructured time.
- You may feel like you are responding to an assignment that seems unrelated to academic or life goals.

Any one of these issues is a reason to want to avoid writing, and it's possible that you are facing two or more.

The Brick Wall of a New Genre

Writing and other dimensions of academic work become most difficult and disorienting at turning points—periods of transition—when we write in unfamiliar contexts or forms, to meet new sets of expectations. - Keith Hjortshoj

Genre doesn't just refer to things like horror or science fiction; it refers to any type of writing for which you can point out specific expectations.

Genre Expectations of Horror Movies: jump scares, Big Bad Evil Thing, sinister music, etc.

Genre Expectations for Theses & Dissertations: long-form, academic style, chapters, IMRaD, etc.

Thesis and dissertation writing is a brand new genre. You've been used to working in the "school writing" genre, and now you're moving into "professional writing."

Genre Expectations of School Writing: purpose is just to complete assignments, done in short time frames, in order to demonstrate knowledge or skills to an audience of just your teachers, in exchange for grades or other forms of evaluation

Genre Expectations of Professional Writing: purpose is to communicate research findings or arguments in a field of inquiry, done in a much longer time frame, to an audience of other researchers in your field, in exchange for professional satisfaction, recognition, and credentials

A new genre is always an uncomfortable place to be. You are learning how to write while you are writing, which isn't easy for anyone. Every one of your professors, mentors, and cohort have experienced or are experiencing the same thing, and will every time they move into a new genre.

Tips to Overcome Writing Anxiety and Procrastination

1. Foster Self-Efficacy (your level of confidence in performing a given behavior [in this case, writing])
 - Acknowledge what you are already good at, while understanding that there are areas in which you can improve.
 - Reach out for support from other people in a similar situation.
2. Understand the Genre
 - Learn the expectations of your given genre.
 - Reach out to people who are already proficient in the genre for input.
3. Understand the Rhetorical Situation (Audience, Purpose, and Context)
 - Know who your audience is and what they expect from your work.
 - Know what the purpose of your work is, beyond “getting my degree.”
 - Know how your work fits into the work that has been previously done in your field, or is currently being done.
4. Evaluate Your Writing Process
 - Consider what works and what doesn’t work about how you go about writing.
5. Work Writing into Your Life
 - Make a writing schedule that works for you and will let you reach your deadline goals.