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WRIT 1301: University Writing

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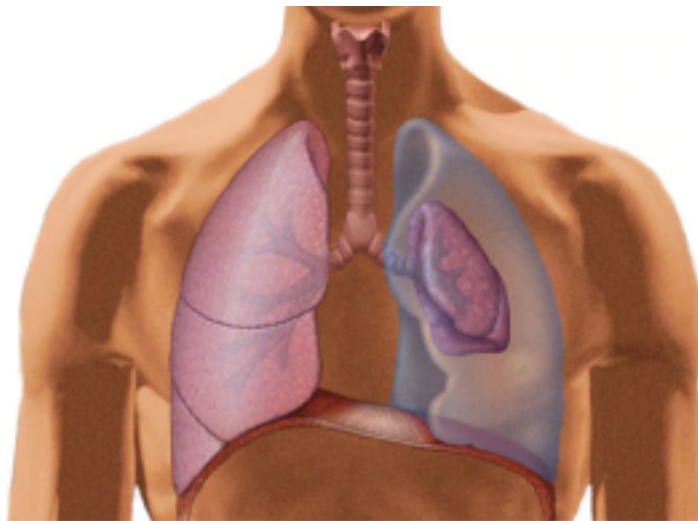
### Writing About Writing or The Way of the Coward

When I first read about this assignment, I was absolutely terrified: to write about writing? How am I even supposed to start? Those who know me know I love writing but I have a serious creativity problem: given a specific prompt, I will write the best piece I've got in me, but throw me a wide statement and I'm lost. Luckily, I had help from an unexpected "friend": the hospital. In the end, that didn't help me at all, though, so I had to resort to the ancient "Way of the Coward". What does this mean, you may ask? Well, follow me for a trip into the mind of a university writer to find out....

This experience starts around a month ago, when we (students of WRIT 1301) found out we had to write about one particular time where we had to write about something. Still with me? Good. Basically, we had to write about writing, and that's not particularly easy. You see, when you are told to write about something, it's generally a closed prompt, such as "argue why or why not is it necessary to illegalise drugs", or semi-closed, like "recount a time when you overcame adversity", not a statement as open as "reflect on your own literacy experiences —a memory you have of yourself reading or writing, or learning to write in English or another language". However, this is university, and an assignment is an assignment, so I set myself to the task. To no avail. No matter how hard I tried, I just could not think of anything to write about, not even a small paragraph (let alone 1500 words).

And then disaster struck. Or fortune. Or Fortuna. Yeah, as in "the Roman goddess

of luck”. Long story short, I ended up in the hospital with a small pneumothorax (“... a collapsed lung... [it] occurs when air leaks into the space between your lung and chest wall... and makes it collapse” according to Mayo Clinic). You’d assume I used that time to reflect more on what I could write about, how to approach the essay... But let’s be honest: any student can tell you a trip to the hospital (when your life is not in danger, of course) is nothing short of a freebie. A few days without having to worry about anything university-related? Sign me in. So three days later, I was at the same point: I had no idea of what I was going to write. Actually, I wasn’t at the same point; I was a few days behind. No pressure.



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For me, writing is like riding a bike: starting is super complicated, but once you get going, there's no way of stopping. Finding a good opening is the part of writing I find the most difficult, as I want everything I do to be as close to perfection as possible; however, once I find that perfect first sentence (often after long times), everything just flows through without pause. Let me explain what this means. I’m a perfectionist when it comes to writing; you could call me an “ultra-perfectionist”. But only for beginnings. For some reason, I struggle massively to find a good opening to my texts, but everything

flows smoothly after I find it. Most teachers I've had would probably say it's because I don't do brainstorming before actually starting to write. To that, I say that I do brainstorming along the way. Which is true: I come up with ideas as soon as I read the prompt (except for this one essay) and then develop those ideas and think of new ones as I write. I know of people that also go through similar things; someone once told me that they could think of entire texts but not write them because they didn't know how to start, which I think is a problem many people face. You could say I also experience this kind of block in some way, not being able to start a text before properly addressing the beginning.

**Teacher: you need to brainstorm and  
write down your ideas before starting your essay**  
**Me:**



The “blank-page syndrome”, as it is often called, is probably the worst type of writer’s block: it basically nullifies your whole text by not allowing you to even start writing. To overcome this difficulty, I often just write things and delete them until one of them feels right to continue with what I have in mind. Another alternative (very common when writing academic papers) is to write the body and conclusion of the text and then come back to the introduction/abstract and just sum up what you’ve talked about below.

As time went by and I started doing the “midway” activities for this project (draft, aims and methods, etc.), I realised this was completely new for me: I was doing pre-work for the first time in my “writing life”; never had I ever drafted an essay before or thought of the structure of the text in advance. Truth be told, I had never had to write about something this complex. However, I encountered an old friend along the way: writer’s block in the middle of the text. You see, I sort of lied earlier: when I said “everything just flows through without pause” I meant “everything just flows through without pause EXCEPT when it doesn’t”. I’ve also had people tell me this happens to them, and it’s completely normal; you’re writing your text with enough inertia to break through a brick wall and then writer’s block hits you like a truck. You’re writing the most beautiful essay you’ve ever written and then... yeah, you know, then... listen: it just happens. To me, it’s not that big of an issue, since all that happened was I lost my words and I struggled to find them again, but other people completely lose their train of thought (as if it were a conversation) and forget what they were going to write. This can be a serious problem, but it can be remedied: reading the text above usually helps to regain that lost train of thought (unlike in a conversation, in which there is no transcript... unless you’re in court. And I don’t think it would be your biggest problem in that situation), but continuing to write whatever followed (similar to writing the body before the introduction) can also help to see what is missing in the middle of the disconnection. Should everything else fail, I think the best option is to completely stop writing, take a break and then come back to it.

At this point, this essay looks like the maniacal ravings of a student who’s had a few too many and isn’t getting enough sleep (i.e. a regular university student), but stay

with me for a little longer. In the end, there is no “magic formula” for writing a good essay, it’s all about sitting down and finding your mojo (although listening to music helps. At least me. Get those beats on). For me, that means finding a perfect opening and writing like there’s no tomorrow.

And at the end of the day, I just wrote an essay about something completely different from what was asked, chucked a couple of home-made memes in, gave advice to university students (even though I’m still one myself) and... got away with it? The Way of the Coward.



Please, Sarah, don't give me a 0. I just tried to make it enjoyable. :)

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