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An Analysis of Writer's Block: Causes, Characteristics, and Solutions

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AN ANALYSIS OF WRITER'S BLOCK: CAUSES, CHARACTERISTICS, AND SOLUTIONS

by

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Abstract

Previous research suggests that writer's block can have multiple causes and occur at any part of the writing process (Boice, 1985; Flaherty, 2015; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2013). A survey was distributed to a sample of 146 writers with experience in a variety of fiction and nonfiction genres. Research objectives concerning the causes and characteristics of writer's block were investigated using mixed-method, qualitative and quantitative analyses. Effective solutions provided by writers were presented and described. Blocks with physiological and motivational components were the most frequently reported in general and were found to interfere with the composition process more than the creative process. Writers who wrote daily reported shorter periods of writer's block than those with less consistent writing habits. These findings suggest that there may be an association between components of blocking and cognitive processes associated with specific parts of the writing process.

Keywords: writer's block, writing process, writer's block solutions, creative thinking, decision-making, stress, intrinsic motivation

An Analysis of Writer's Block: Causes, Characteristics and Solutions

The net revenue accrued by the U.S. publishing industry was $26.23 billion dollars in 2017 (Statistica, 2018). The sale of books, audiobooks, and eBooks form a major consumer market around the world. Over 40,000 people are employed as writers in industries such as advertising, journalism, and communications (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). For those who write for a salary, writer's block can be devastating. Such blocks pose a risk to their ability to earn a living. For the many others who submit manuscripts for novels, short stories, and other works for publication each year, blocking can still cause a great deal of psychological distress (Michael, 2016). Because of its adverse impact on so many people, writer's block is an important topic of research.

Much of what is currently known about writer's block has been gained through interviews, case studies, and other non-experimental or quasi-experimental designs (Boice, 1985; Flaherty, 2015; Goldiamond, 1977; Harris, 1974; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Passman, 1976; Rose & Rose, 1984; Upper, 1974). Components to blocking have been identified (Boice, 1985; Flaherty, 2015; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Nelson, 1993; Rose, 1985), interventions for blocking have been developed (Dearing, 2007; Goldiamond, 1977; Harris, 1974; Houston, 1998; Passman, 1976; Rosenberg & Lah, 1982; Smeets, 2008; Upper, 1974), and individual differences thought to be relevant to blocking such as writing efficacy, self-monitoring, and attitudes about writing have been examined (Peterson, 1987). However, the majority of sample sizes reported in the existing writer's block literature are very small and many studies have been conducted on college students with little writing experience (Passman, 1976; Rose, 1980; Rosenberg & Lah, 1982; Upper, 1974). Sample sizes of ten or fewer participants are not uncommon to find in the writer's block literature (Harris, 1974; Murray, 1985; Rose, 1980; Rose & Rose, 1984; Rosenberg & Lah, 1982; Upper, 1974).

The goal of this study was to collect information about writer's block from a fairly large sample of experienced writers with careers in a writing field or a publication record. The sample also included those pursuing a career in writing or who were preparing to publish or share their work with an audience. In other words, the sample was composed of respondents with a strong interest and background in writing. The study was intended to yield information about different causes and characteristics of blocking and present solutions that writers have found effective in overcoming writer's block. Individual differences in planning, schedules, daily writing habits, and years of experience were also examined. The survey was expected to provide some additional support for existing findings and answer new questions about blocking, such as whether different types of blocks tend to happen during different parts of the writing process and whether individual differences such as years of experience or planning type predict some kinds of blocks more than others.

Definition of Writer's Block

Writer's block has been defined as the inability for a writer to produce new material (Boice, 1985; Flaherty, 2015; Nelson, 1993; Rose, 1985; Rose & Rose, 1984). Although there is a consensus among researchers concerning the general definition of writer's block, there is some dispute over what should be included within the parameters of this term. For instance, evaluation apprehension is considered an important factor contributing to writer's block by some researchers (Boice, 1985; Rose, 1983) and as an entirely separate construct by others (Peterson, 1987). Similarly, procrastination has been described as a separate phenomenon from blocking (Rose, 1983; 1985; Peterson, 1987), a factor contributing to blocking (Boice, 1985), and as the most important cause of blocking (Dearing, 2007). Because the goal of the current study is to present a comprehensive picture of writer's block containing information that is of practical use for as many writers as possible, every situation that was explicitly stated by a writer in an interview, case study, or think-aloud study was considered as a possible factor contributing to writer's block.

The primary reason for assessing multiple causes of writer's block is that previous research has found multiple sources (Boice, 1985; Flaherty, 2015; Rose, 1980; Rose & Rose, 1984). The majority of writer's block researchers agree that most causes of writer's block have an affective/physiological, motivational, and cognitive component (Boice, 1985; Flaherty, 2015; Nelson, 1993; Rose & Rose, 1984; Smeets, 2008). Such components are thought to operate independently of each other by interfering with different cognitive processes and their associated neurological systems (Boice, 1985; Flaherty, 2015; Smeets, 2008) but may sometimes have a dynamic, mutually influential impact on each other, causing more complicated blocks (Flaherty, 2015; Smeets, 2008). Additional causes have sometimes been attributed to writer's block, including social, environmental (Nelson, 1993), and behavioral factors (Boice, 1985; Dearing, 2007; Rosenberg & Lah, 1982; Smeets, 2008). Out of the three additional categories, the most prominent perspective in the literature is that blocking is often the result of the writer's own behavior (Boice, 1985; Dearing, 2007; Rosenberg & Lah, 1982; Smeets, 2008). According to this perspective, a writer's choices and habits such as the consistency of their writing schedule and tendency to procrastinate are the most telling predictors of productivity (Dearing, 2007; Rosenberg & Lah, 1982). Because the other two causes mentioned above, social and environmental factors such as the loss of a close relationship or a change of schedule could be categorized as behavioral, motivational, or affective depending on the context of the social or environmental change, they were excluded as variables in the current study and included within the four main categories previously mentioned.

The following sections will present an overview of the existing literature on writer's block and describe the cognitive processes that are involved in each part of the writing process. Then, the causes and characteristics of blocking, solutions to blocking, and individual differences associated with blocking will be described in greater depth. Finally, the hypotheses of the current study will be presented.

History of Research on Writer's Block

The earliest research on writer's block was conducted by psychoanalysts in the early 20th Century (Bergler, 1955; Leader, *Writer's Block*, 1991). Most of these theorists were students of Freud, who has

been credited with having recorded one of the earliest case studies on writer's block (Castillo, 2014; Leader, 1991). One of his followers was a psychoanalyst named Bergler, who ran several case studies on writer's block throughout the 1950s and published the first review of research on the topic (Bergler, 1955). In the psychoanalytic tradition, writer's block was usually viewed as an unconscious defense mechanism or as the consequence of trying to exert too much conscious control over the writing process (Bergler, 1950; Leader, 1991). Although the earliest explanations of blocking relied heavily on Freudian theory and tended to focus on aspects that, by modern standards, may seem outdated, psychoanalysts were the first to describe some general ideas that remain central to the study of writer's block today (Bergler, 1955; Castillo, 2014). The first is that writer's block is a psychological phenomenon that often lies outside of conscious control (Bergler, 1950, 1955; Boice, 1995; Flaherty, 2015; Leader, 1991; Rose & Rose, 1984). The second is that blocks may occur when a writer becomes overly concerned with controlling certain aspects of the writing process. The "anal" and "phallic" interpretations offered by psychoanalysts in the 1930s used different terminology but described how perfectionism could be detrimental to writing in a similar way that cognitive scientists would later propose that fixating on rules and structure could contribute to writer's block by resulting in inflexible thinking (Bergler, 1950; Boice, 1995; Castillo, 2014; Rose & Rose, 1984). Finally, both psychoanalysts and modern psychologists have described motivation and emotion as important components to blocking (Bergler, 1950; Boice, 1995; Flaherty, 2015).

In the 1970s, psychologists used case studies of individuals, often college students struggling with writer's block (Goldiamond 1977; Harris, 1974; Passman, 1976; Upper, 1974), and interviews with successful novelists to study blocking (Wallace & Pear, 1977). Unlike the psychoanalysts of the 1950s who thought that writer's block was chiefly an unconscious phenomenon with mostly affective and motivational components, these psychologists thought that writer's block was predominantly the result of a writer's behavior (Goldiamond, 1977; Harris, 1974; Passman, 1976; Upper, 1974). Procrastination,

irregular writing habits, and poor self-control were identified as the main components of blocking (Goldiamond, 1977; Harris, 1974; Passman, 1976; Upper, 1974). In the 1980s, Rosenberg and Lah (1982) tested the hypothesis that writer's block could be improved with an intervention that included the implementation of a schedule and use of reinforcers. They found that this intervention did yield a consistent increase in the amount of time their participant spent writing, the number of words he produced, and the quality of his writing (Rosenberg & Lah, 1982). This study, however, like many that came before it, was conducted using a single participant. That participant was a graduate student in psychology, not an experienced writer who would have likely had more training and experience. Their results were also partly based on the student's subjective judgment of how much he thought his writing had improved over the course of the intervention.

Not all writer's block researchers at this time thought that writer's block was simply due to procrastination or poor writing habits. Rose (1985, p. 18) defined writer's block as "the inability to begin or continue writing for reasons other than a lack of basic skills or commitment" and said it could be caused by affective, motivational, or cognitive factors. His book on writer's block included a collection of essays contributed by several authors interested in applying findings of writer's block research to high school and college essay writing instruction (Rose, 1985). Each chapter described how different variables could influence the composition process, including writing apprehension, anxiety, attitudes about writing, and cognitive errors while writing. Most of these essays summarized research on undergraduates, who were a good representation of the population under study considering it was meant to be applied to high school and college students (Rose, 1985). However, one chapter did address writer's block in literary writers. Murray (1985) interviewed two professional writers about writer's block with the goal of using their experiences as examples teachers could use to encourage apprehensive young writers not to worry too much during the drafting process. Those writers described their experience with writer's block as becoming too paralyzed with anxiety to start work on a new project because they were afraid that they

would not be able to describe their ideas as well as they imagined them (Murray, 1985). They said that it often helped to just write a rough draft keeping in mind it would take many revisions to shape the piece into the final product (Murray, 1985).

Rose (1981) also developed a questionnaire to assess the cognitive dimensions of writer's block, called the *Questionnaire for Identifying Writer's Block (QIWB)*. This questionnaire measured attitudes about writing and respondents' general tendency to become blocked. He used this survey in several studies, including an experiment on the cognitive behaviors and processes that contributed to writer's block in 10 college students (Rose, 1983). He wanted to determine what behaviors distinguished students who were prone to blocking in general from those who scored low on the blocking questionnaire. Six of the students who participated scored as high-blockers on the QIWB and four scored as low-blockers (Rose, 1983). These students were video recorded while composing essays on an assigned topic and their time spent editing, planning and pausing was recorded along with the number of words they erased or crossed out (Rose, 1983). The essays were evaluated by two raters. Rose found that high blockers spent a longer amount of the time allotted to them prewriting and planning, paused more frequently while writing, deleted more words, and produced shorter drafts. He concluded that perfectionistic attitudes and behaviors, such as editing prematurely and spending too much time planning, were more likely to be present in high blockers than low blockers. However, his sample was very small ($N = 10$) and its directionality could not be established. It could be that perfectionism, spending too much time planning, and hesitating frequently could interfere with the normal flow of cognitive processes involved in the composition process, thereby causing a block. On the other hand, those who scored as high blockers on the survey may have simply had more difficulty with the technical aspects of writing in general and their actions could have reflected that rather than true blocking.

Despite these issues, his study lends support to claims made by authors who have been interviewed on the topic of writer's block (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Michael, 2016). Such writers have described becoming blocked from becoming too critical and perfectionistic about their work and have said at such times they found themselves rewriting entire chapters or throwing away work they did not consider good enough to meet their personal standards (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Michael, 2016). Other writers have claimed that sometimes having too detailed of a plan for a story before beginning to write closed them off to considering other possible directions a story could develop in, eventually resulting in writer's block (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009).

While it had long been recognized that there could be more than one cause of writer's block (Rose, 1985; Bergler, 1955), Boice (1985) wanted to identify what these distinct components of blocking were. Using a think-aloud protocol with 60 writers (40 were identified as high blockers on the QIWB), Boice (1985) gathered over 5,000 samples of the writers' self-talk during writing sessions. Two raters coded these samples of self-talk and produced seven distinct themes: work apprehension, procrastination, dysphoria, impatience, perfectionism, evaluation anxiety, and rules (Boice, 1985).

After Boice's think-aloud study, few new studies were conducted on writer's block in the following decades. Several books and review articles were published in the 90s and 2000s (Castillo, 2014; Flaherty, 2015; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Leader, 1991; Nelson, 1993). These books and chapters summarized past findings from earlier decades and built upon existing theories by presenting evidence from related areas of Psychology, such as work on the stress response, neuroimaging studies on parts of the brain associated with writing, and studies of brain injuries that resulted in problems similar to writer's block (Flaherty, 2015; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Leader, 1991; Nelson, 1993). Perhaps the most popular perspective taken by this group of researchers is that writer's block has a biological basis and that any factor, particularly those involving high levels of arousal, could impair the normal functioning of the

parts of the brain involved in important cognitive processes necessary for writing, such as the prefrontal

cortex, parts of the hippocampus, and the limbic system (Flaherty, 2015; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009,

Nelson, 1993). Kaufman and Kaufman's research heavily drew on interviews and case studies of writers

to identify reasons authors thought developed writer's block (2009). Common explanations included fear

of evaluation, writing apprehensions, life stress, and oscillations in mood (in particular, extreme levels of

happiness and sadness; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009). The authors suggested that looking at physiological

components to blocking could be promising in establishing connections between components of blocking

and specific parts of the writing process.

Flaherty (2015) was also interested in investigating the physiological aspects of blocking. Her

recent book on writer's block explains how affective and motivational factors may cause writer's block

from a neurological perspective (Flaherty, 2015). Most of the book describes what brain regions and

neurological systems are most likely to be involved in blocking. In particular, the author focused on

linking motivational explanations for blocking with the limbic system and reasons associated more

closely with changes in arousal with the stress response. Flaherty (2015) thought that many factors could

result in writer's block independently of each other by impairing systems associated with a part of the

writing process. Sometimes one component to blocking could lead to another one. For example, a block

caused from lack of drive, which is associated with the limbic system and rewards and punishment, could

make someone anxious and trigger the fight or flight response.

In the following section, cognitive processes associated with the writing process will be

described. Then, the causes outlined in the literature review will be described in greater depth and their

influence on cognitive processes involved in the writing process will be discussed.

The Writing Process

The writing process consists of planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Seow, 2002). Planning

involves coming up with new ideas, choosing which ideas to pursue, and arranging the presentation of

ideas in an order that makes logical sense. Ideas are generated by making associations between two or more different ideas and combining them into something entirely new. Writers may do this consciously, such as deciding to retell an old story in a modern setting, but often come up with new ideas by daydreaming and using their imagination (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Michael, 2016). In that case, the associations made between ideas often occur without conscious awareness via unconscious cognitive processing (Simonton, Pervin, & John, 1999). The process of thinking in different directions, such as coming up with multiple possible uses for the same object, is known as divergent thinking (Simonton, Pervin, & John, 1999). Divergent thinking is flexible, imaginative, and more often associated with associative or nonlinear thinking more than linear, step-by-step thinking (Simonton, Pervin, & John, 1999). This process has been described as creative thinking (Guilford, 1958). On the other hand, the cognitive processes associated more with deciding which of several ideas to pursue, how to structure the order of arguments for an essay or scenes in a chapter, and executing all of the rule-based tasks associated with composing a paragraph are considered convergent thinking processes (Simonton, Pervin, & John, 1999).

According to the dual-process theory of writing, a writer must alternate back and forth between using these processes (Lubart, 2009). Both kinds of cognitive processes are probably engaged for part of the time in every part of the writing process. However, each part of the writing process is thought to utilize one form of thinking more than the other (Lubart, 2009). For example, when a writer is generating new ideas, he or she may stop and make a decision about what idea to pursue and then convert the idea into an outline, but most of his or her time is spent imagining how different scenarios might play out: a form of creative thinking. When a writer is deciding what words to choose in order to express a scene, he or she must refer back to the scene that he or she is imagining, but most of his or her effort is spent on

retrieving the right words from memory and deciding how to structure the composition of a piece (Lubart, 2009).

Because both divergent and convergent thought processes are present to some degree in each part of the writing process, the variable used in the current study regarding the part of the writing process at which a writer became blocked was based on both the steps of the writing process and the cognitive process that was the most impacted. For example, rather than simply asking "Did you have more difficulty during the planning, drafting, revision, or evaluation stage of the writing process?", options were provided that would address different aspects of those processes. For example, someone who reported becoming blocked in the planning stage could have had trouble coming up with new ideas, choosing which idea to develop, or both. These options were based on interviews with writers, who have described becoming blocked while performing specific actions associated with the writing process, like deciding on an idea, coming up with new ideas, writing their ideas in words, and both coming up with new ideas and expressing them in words (Boice, 1985; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Michael, 2016; Rose, 1985). Writers have also described becoming too paralyzed to start working on different parts of the project: most commonly, the beginning or at transition points, such as the beginning to the middle or the middle to the end (Murray, 1985).

Causes and Characteristics of Writer's Block

Characteristics of blocking. Just as writer's block can be caused by different factors, writer's block can impact different parts of the writing process (Boice, 1985; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Michael, 2016; Rose, 1985). Blocks have sometimes been described as a failure to come up with new ideas despite the author retaining a normal level of technical fluency (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Smeets, 2008). Other blocks have been described as primarily affecting the writer's ability to carry out the more technical aspects of composing a work, such as retrieving the right words to express an idea or structure one's work in a logical manner (Rose, 1985; Smeets, 2008). Sometimes writers have described

having trouble with both coming up with ideas and expressing them (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Michael, 2016). Other times, blocked writers have described freezing up midway through a work, paralyzed by the fear it would not live up to expectations (Murray, 1985; Rose, 1985), and some have found it difficult to choose which idea of many to pursue (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Michael, 2016; Rose, 1984). Blocks can be very short, lasting from minutes to a few days, or can be chronic, lasting decades (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009). In the following sections, the four major factors or causes thought to contribute to writer's block covered in the current study will be explained in depth.

Causes of blocking. Common factors associated with writer's block generally fall into four categories: physiological or affective causes, which are thought to lead to writer's block by impairing the functioning of cognitive process used for writing (Flaherty, 2015; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009); motivational causes, which range from ceasing to find writing enjoyable to fear of criticism (Amabile, 1985; Boice, 1985); cognitive causes, such as perfectionism or fixating on rules and structure to the point it disrupts one's flow of ideas (Boice, 1985; Rose, 1983; Smeets, 2008); and behavioral causes, such as procrastinating or having an irregular schedule (Dearing, 2007; Rosenberg & Lah, 1983). In the following paragraphs, different causes of blocks and common situations included within each category will be described.

Physiological/affective causes of writer's block. One variable in the current study is physiological causes of writer's block. Physiological causes of writer's block include stress, anxiety, intense affective states (such as depression or grief) and burnout/fatigue. These factors are all associated with unusually high or low levels of arousal (Flaherty, 2015; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Nelson, 1993). Heightened levels of arousal have been found to enhance performance on cognitive tasks by improving memory, information processing, and executive functioning (Arnstein, 2009; Baer & Odham, 2006; Lamborne & Tomporoski, 2010, Nazarian, Byron, & Khazanchi, 2010; Oei et al., 2006; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908). However, once arousal levels reach beyond a certain threshold, the performance of these processes has been found to drastically decrease (Baer & Odham, 2006; Cowen, 1952; Nazarian et al.,

2010). Because the writing process requires the use of memory to retrieve the right words to describe a scene or convey an argument and executive functioning for making decisions about what to write or which idea to pursue, it would make sense that any major increase or decrease in arousal level deviating from the optimal point could potentially trigger an episode of writer's block by pushing a writer over that threshold or back past the minimal threshold required to begin writing. According to Flaherty (2015), the impairment of brain structures or networks involved in the writing process could be sufficient to cause blocking, such as an episode of clinical depression (associated with very low levels of arousal), a stress response to a major life change (associated with very high levels of arousal), or a brain injury to a particular structure required for the writing process to occur. In the following paragraphs, physiological causes of blocking will be described in greater depth and evidence will be presented that could explain why each factor could result in blocking.

     Stress. Stress stimulates the release of hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline, which have been found to increase sensory arousal, alertness, and goal-directed behavior (Baer & Odham, 2006; Nazarian, Byron, & Khazanchi, 2010; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908). However, at high levels, stress hormones have been found to impair normal functioning of the prefrontal cortex and areas of the hippocampus, structures involved with memory, planning, and executive functioning (Arnstein, 2009; Oei et al., 2006). This may explain why high levels of stress have been found to decrease performance on complex problem-solving tasks (Andrews & Farris, 1972; Bunce & West, 1994; Nazarian, Byron, & Khazanchi, 2010; Rank & Frese, 2008).

     Writing requires two sets of cognitive processes: one more routine, linear process associated with decision-making, and the other a more creative process which involves combining seemingly unrelated ideas in new ways (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Lubart, 2009). The first set of processes are like those used when completing any complex task, such as solving a math problem (Lubart, 2009). The research findings presented in the paragraph above suggest how stress may impair the process of composing a draft: choosing which idea to pursue, how to express it in words, recall writing-specific rules from long

term memory, and making countless decisions on word choice, plot direction, and organization. Other research findings suggest that stress may also impair the more creative cognitive processes associated with writing such as coming up with new and original ideas.

Nazarian, Byron, and Khazanchi (2010) performed a meta-analysis of 76 experimental studies to determine the relationship between stressors and creative performance (as opposed to simply routine performance). They found that the relationship between stress and creativity depended on the type of stressor and strength of the stressor. A curvilinear relationship was found between evaluative stressors and creativity and a linear negative relationship between uncontrollable stressors and creativity. Because evaluative stress is situation-specific, it is based on fears of how others will judge one's work, and exhibits a different relationship pattern with creativity than other types of stress such as uncontrollable stress, it was coded as a motivational factor of blocking in the current study and will be discussed in greater detail in that section. Uncontrollable stress and stress associated with major life events was coded as a physiological factor in this study because such stress is not specifically related to writing or fear of evaluation but could indirectly result in blocking by triggering the stress response.

According to distraction arousal theory, the stress response decreases creativity by diverting limited cognitive resources to the stressor (Baron, 1986; Drwal, 1973; Eysenck, 1995, Teichner, Arees, & Reilly, 1963). Complex, resource-costly ways of thinking are replaced with simple, error-prone strategies that result in the generation of fewer ideas, lower quality ideas, or the failure to produce any new ideas at all (Baron, 1986; Drwal, 1973). Physiologically, this process may operate in the same way that the stress response impairs more routine decision-making processes but impairs the operation of structures or networks associated with making associative connections rather than those associated with more ordinary decision-making processes.

Affective intensity. A curvilinear relationship has also been found between affective intensity and creative performance (Davis, 2009). Davis (2009) performed a meta-analysis on the relationship between

mood and creativity using 62 experimental and 10 nonexperimental studies. Positive affect was found to increase creative performance, supporting previous findings that positive affect may facilitate creative performance to some degree (Estrada, Isen, & Young, 1994; Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987). However, this effect was only found to occur when negative affect was low (or in other words, when the mood was primarily positive and not ambiguous) and when positive affect did not exceed a certain threshold. When moods were very extreme, however, creative performance decreased. This suggests that at high levels, the changes in the brain that may enhance creative thinking may start to impair it. The expansive frame of mind that may cause someone to make brilliant connections between ideas could, when taken to the extreme, lead to scattered, unfocused thinking (Estrada, Isen, & Young; Flaherty, 2015 Lubart, 2009). Negative affect was found to generally have a negative relationship with creativity (Nazarian et al., 2010), but has been found to sometimes enhance critical thinking and problem-solving ability in non-creative task by making the problem solver more attentive to potential errors (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Nazarian et al., 2010). Like positive affective intensity, negative affective intensity is only helpful up to a point. Once it reaches a certain threshold, the problem solver becomes too emotionally distressed to think effectively (Nazarian et al., 2010). This relationship between affective intensity and creative performance has also been described by researchers who have studied the incidence of mood disorders in creative writers (Andreasen, 1997; Flaherty, 2015; Kaufman, 2001; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009).

According to one study, in a sample of 60 participants (30 writers and 30 controls), 80% of writers were reported to have experienced an affective disorder during their lifetime. This prevalence rate was higher than the rate for the control group's: only 30% of the control group experienced an affective disorder during their lifetime (Andreasen, 1997). The most common were bipolar disorder and major depressive disorder (Andreasen, 1997). In 2001, Kaufman conducted two studies using a sample of 986 20th Century writers and 889 American writers from the 17th Century to the present to investigate whether this higher presence for affective disorder occurred in different types of prize-winning authors compared

to nonwinners. He found that highly successful, Pulitzer Prize writers were more likely to suffer from mental illness than nonwinners.

Some researchers have used these findings to support the claim that affective intensity is responsible for both the heightened productivity of successful writers and the blocks that writers experience when moods become too high or too low (Flaherty, 2015; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009). Highly successful writers who were known to have had bipolar disorder such as Earnest Hemingway, Sylvia Plath, and Virginia Woolf could have utilized the oscillations between intense emotional states to produce prolific amounts of work during heightened positive mental states preceding levels of full blown mania (at which they would cease to be productive) and to edit and evaluate their work during the earliest stages of depression (Flaherty, 2015; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009). Once such writers became very depressed, writing would stop (Flaherty, 2015; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009). Depression is associated with extreme negative affect, lack of drive, and lack of arousal and mania with increased energy, extremely positive affect, extremely high levels of arousal, and racing thoughts (Flaherty, 2015). Oscillating between such extremes would put a writer in the optimal zone to produce creative work suggested by the curvilinear model of affect and creativity more often than the average person.

Of course, these researchers did not intend to say that every writer does or will suffer from an affective disorder (Flaherty, 2015; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009). They merely used the examples to show how affective intensity may accelerate (to a certain extent) and eventually then block the writing process (Flaherty 2015; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009). They suggested that the existence of these disorders does suggest people could vary in range of the affective states they experience and that writers who may not have any history of affective disorders may simply be more likely than nonwriters to experience a greater range and intensity of moods that could facilitate and, at the highest levels, sometimes block the cognitive processes involved in the writing process.

Motivational causes of writer's block.

Evaluation anxiety. Evaluation anxiety (or fear of criticism or rejection) and loss of enjoyment have been identified as motivational components to blocking (Boice, 1985; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Flaherty, 2015; Michael, 2016; Smeets, 2008). Evaluation anxiety is different from general anxiety because it is context-specific and exhibits a different relationship pattern with creativity (Nazarian, Byron, & Khazanchi, 2010) and routine problem-solving tasks (Beilock & Carr, 2005) than other kinds of stress, such as life-event or time-pressure stress (Nazarian, Byron, & Khazanchi, 2010). A writer fears that others will judge his or her work poorly and freezes up (Murray, 1985). Sometimes, this "freezing" has been described as being accompanied by a lack of ideas or knowledge of how to express ideas fluently, and other times writers have indicated that besides being paralyzed with fear over how they would be evaluated on a particular project, they did not feel blocked in any other way (Boice, 1985; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Murray, 1985; Smeets, 2008).

Evaluative stress has been found to be detrimental to writing when a writer has low levels of writing efficacy and has been found to enhance writing when a writer has high levels of writing efficacy (Nazarian, Byron, & Khazanchi, 2010). This is likely because someone with high levels of writing efficacy, or competence, would have higher levels of writing confidence (Peterson, 1987), and therefore hold the belief that they will be successful. This is similar to findings on a study conducted on the relationship between psychosocial stress and performance on a problem-solving test (Beilock & Carr, 2005). The more students interpreted the task as threatening, the more the feelings of stress escalated (as evidenced by increased cortisol levels) and the worse they performed on the task. According to the authors, those who perceived the situation as less threatening were better able to regulate their emotions and did not build up enough stress hormones to impair working memory (Beilock & Carr, 2005).

These findings suggest that whether or not a writer is driven to succeed or becomes blocked may be related to their interpretation of the event. One writer's block intervention program has been developed to help writers reframe their interpretations of writer's block as a challenge rather than a threat in order to

help them overcome their difficulty writing (Smeets, 2008). Because a relationship has been found between evaluation anxiety and creativity and evaluation anxiety and ordinary problem solving, it is equally likely that blocks with mostly motivational components would occur during both the creative process and the more evaluative, decision-making parts of the writing process.

    Amotivation. Sometimes, a writer may simply stop enjoying the writing process (Boice, 1985). For some reason, the work a writer once considered rewarding now feels like an obligation (Boice, 1985). The writer could be said to have lost his or her intrinsic motivation to write, or the motivation to engage in an activity for its own sake (Lepper, Green, & Nisbett, 1974). Success in creative domains, including writing, has been linked to high levels of intrinsic motivation. (Amabile, 1985; Amabile, Barsade, & Mueller, 2005; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1974). Writers with high intrinsic motivation have been found to produce more creative poems than writers with low intrinsic motivation (Amabile, 1985) and produce higher quality products in general (Amabile, Barsade, & Mueller, 2005; Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1974).

    Why would a writer suddenly lose interest in writing? Past research has shown that the mere act of introducing a reward for an intrinsically enjoyable activity can make that activity less rewarding for the participant, decrease the quality of the create product they produce, and can decrease the amount of time he or she is willing to spend engaging in that activity during his or her free time (Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1974; Amabile, 1985). Writers who get a job writing or get a lot of positive feedback about it may start to write for reward rather than for their own enjoyment. When this happens, they may stop enjoying the writing process. This could lead to writer's block in different ways. A writer might stop writing because they simply lack the drive to write. Or, a writer might get bored during the writing process. Boredom describes a lack of arousal, and because high levels of arousal have been associated with improved performance on creative thinking and problem-solving tasks, it is likely that boredom would result in the opposite effect.

It is expected that while all parts of the writing process may be adversely impacted by blocks with a strong motivational component, most writers with motivational blocks will describe freezing up at the beginning or middle of a piece, either because they are afraid of ruining their work or because they no longer feel driven to write.

Cognitive causes of writer's block. Cognitive components to blocking are based on factors occurring during the composition process (Boice, 1985; Rose, 1980, 1985; Rose & Rose, 1984; Smeets, 2008). They could be thought of being more related to the technical aspects of the work itself rather than motivational, affective or behavioral factors, which are more closely related to the feelings or habits of a writer (Boice, 1985; Rose, 1980, 1985; Rose & Rose, 1984; Smeets, 2008). Some cognitive causes of blocking include perfectionism, writing with a fixed perspective in mind, and using time or effort inefficiently (such as spending a disproportionate of time planning compared to writing or not planning sufficiently for a complicated text; Boice, 1985; Rose, 1980, 1985; Rose & Rose, 1984; Smeets, 2008). For example, Rose (1981, 1983) found that students who scored as high blockers exhibited a group of similar behaviors and attitudes such as perfectionism, a fixation on rules about grammar and essay construction, a tendency to edit their work heavily early in the writing process by crossing out and rewriting sentences, and spend more time planning and structuring their work than freewriting.

This could be partially explained by perfectionistic attitudes about writing, which many of these high blockers shared (1981). Perfectionism is the result of setting standards that are unrealistically high. Perfectionistic attitudes can lead to behaviors that do not facilitate writing, such as being overly critical of one's work and dismissing it prematurely (Rose, 1980; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009). Creating excessively detailed outlines in advance may also result in rigid thinking, which describes an author's tendency to try to force the story in a particular direction to fit preconceived ideas about what he or she thinks should happen (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009). This could make a writer less open to perceiving how his or her story could develop in different directions which may be more appropriate for the work at hand (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009).

Behavioral causes of writer's block. Procrastinating, becoming too busy to write, changing one's routine, or not following a structured schedule have been associated with writer's block (Boice, 1985; Dearing, 2007; Goldiamond, 1977; Harris, 1974; Passman, 1976; Nelson, 1993; Rosenberg & Lah, 1982; Upper, 1974). Unlike physiological/affective, motivational, or cognitive factors described earlier, which are thought to lead to blocking indirectly, behavioral factors are thought to lead to blocking more directly (Dearing, 2007). Behavioral factors are not thought to impact the writer's ability to recognize connections between ideas, come up with ideas, or communicate them in an articulate manner. A writer may be capable of writing, but choose to put off writing until a later time (Boice, 1985; Dearing, 2007; Smeets, 2008), stop following their regular routine due to changes in their schedule, environment, or social circle, resulting in a substantial decrease in writing output (Dearing, 2007; Nelson, 1991), or simply write too infrequently or erratically to finish a project (Dearing, 2007; Smeets, 2008; Wallace & Pear, 1977). Therefore, blocks with strong behavioral components are not expected to be associated with any specific cognitive process or stage of the writing process.

Solutions to Blocking

Since the 1950s, many interventions to writer's block have been developed (Dearing, 2007; Goldiamond, 1977; Harris, 1974; Passman, 1976; Nelson, 1991; Rosenberg & Lah, 1982; Smeets, 2008 Upper, 1974). Most of these solutions have been taken from intervention studies and interviews with successful novelists about their routines and writing habits (Dearing, 2007; Goldiamond, 1977; Rose, 1980, 1984; Rosenberg & Lah, 1982; Upper, 1974; Wallace & Pear, 1977). According to Smeets, the cause of the block should determine the solution (Smeets, 2008). The more precisely the cause of a block can be defined, the more accurately a writer can select and implement an appropriate strategy to solve the problem. For example, Smeets (2008) suggested that a writer with evaluation anxiety should reframe their perception of writer's block as a challenge rather than a threat. Some other solutions recommended to overcome writer's block include training writers to use more efficient writing strategies during the composition process, to implement more effective goal-setting strategies, and to brainstorm ideas in

groups (Dearing, 2007; Smeets, 2008). These suggestions are helpful because they directly address the issues above. Sometimes, these techniques may address more than one issue at a time. This is good because causes of blocking can often become interrelated, even if the block began in response to an isolated issue. For example, a writer who must reduce his or her usual writing time because they have accepted a new job requiring a farther commute, he or she could feel more stressed than usual during their writing session and be less productive as a result. For the current study, experienced writers listed the solutions they have used to overcome writer's block. The most frequently mentioned solutions will be presented and reasons why they might be helpful will be discussed.

Individual Differences and Blocking

Individual differences that could affect how someone responds to factors that may or may not result in a block have been investigated (Peterson, 1987). Writing confidence has been found to predict whether or not a writer escalates the initial stages of a block (Peterson, 1987). In the current study, it is hypothesized that experience and writing habits may play a role in who may be more prone to developing writer's block. Someone who has written for many years is more likely to write at a higher skill level, produce consistently superior work, and to have received more positive feedback for their writing in the past compared to a beginner (Ericsson, 2003; Kellogg, 2008; McNamara, Hambrick, & Oswald, 2014). Therefore, a writer with many years of writing experience may be less likely to develop blocks with motivational causes such as evaluation anxiety. However, writers with more experience may be more perfectionistic about their work and tend to draw on their own internal source of ideas rather than look outside themselves for inspiration than a writer with less experience (Kellogg, 2008). Although more technical aspects of writing such as rules about composition and how to structure an argument for an essay or character arc for a novel may be automatized in highly experienced writers (Ericsson, 2003; Kellogg, 2008; McNamara, Hambrick, & Oswald, 2014), too much reliance on skills developed from past work might make it more difficult for an experienced writer to come up with new ideas. An experienced

writer may be more likely to draw from old ideas rather than consider new sources of inspiration (Kellogg, 2008).

Because some causes of writer's block have been found to be related to inefficient planning strategies such as spending too much time on planning or not planning sufficiently before starting a project, it is expected that planning style may influence the kind of block a writer experiences (Boice, 1985; Rose, 1983; Rose & Rose, 1984; Smeets, 2008). Authors who plan work thoroughly before starting a project may be more likely to become perfectionistic about their work or rigid in thinking due to becoming attached to a certain outcome early during the writing process. Such authors may be predicted to have blocks with a more cognitive basis. On the other hand, writers who tend not to plan their work ahead of time may be more likely to abandon a writing project prematurely if no ideas come to them quickly. It is also possible a writer's preference for not planning work ahead of time may reflect a general tendency to prefer a less structured approach to writing, which could make such writers more prone to procrastination or other behavioral causes of blocking (Boice, 1985; Dearing, 2007; Smeets, 2008). In the writing community, writers with a preferences for planning thoroughly before starting to write are often referred to as "planners" or "plotters", and writers who tend to figure out the details of a story as one writes have been described as "pantsers" (writing from the seat of their pants). The names of these planning styles were suggested by a writer and book coach who assisted with the development of the survey and are commonly used in the writing community, appearing in craft books and articles in popular journals such as Writer's Digest (Hayes, *How to Write Faster: Strategies for Planners and Pantsers*, 2015; Sambuchino, 2013).

Similar to planning style, general writing habits such as schedule are expected to influence the length and cause of writer's block. According to those who postulate that writer's block is mostly due to poor writing habits, those with more irregular writing schedules and those who do not plan their work before writing would be more likely to experience longer blocks and to experience blocks with more

behavioral components (Dearing, 2007; Harris, 1974; Huston, 1998; Passman, 1976; Rosenberg & Lah, 1982; Upper, 1974).

Hypotheses

The current study had a two-fold purpose. The first aim was qualitative, to gather and present general information about writer's block from a large sample of writers: what writers thought caused their most recent block, when during the writing process the block occurred, how long it lasted, and what solutions writers have found effective for overcoming writer's block in the past. Posing these questions was important because previous research on the causes and course of writer's block has relied heavily on college students, who may not be representative of the population for which the findings are the most relevant, and on case studies of authors with small sample sizes (Boice 1993, 1995; Flaherty, 2015; Rose, 1980, 1985; Rose & Rose,1984). The second objective was quantitative: to test a set of hypotheses about the frequency of different causes of blocks, for a relationship between the cause of a block and when during the writing process it occurred, and for relationships between the characteristics of a writer (such as experience level) and characteristics of the block they experienced.

The current study had the following five research objectives: to present common causes of writer's block and identify which cause was reported the most often; to report common characteristics of blocking, including the average length of a block and when during the writing process blocks were most likely to happen; to test for relationships between the causes and characteristics of blocks; to present a list of solutions writers used to try and overcome writer's block and report how effective each strategy was found to be; and to test for a relationship between individual differences between writers and the type of block they experienced.

It was predicted that the most commonly reported cause of writer's block would be behavioral factors (Dearing, 2007; Smeets, 2008; Wallace & Pear, 1977). Blocks were hypothesized to last several weeks on average and to influence different parts of the writing process about equally (Flaherty, 2015;

Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009). Motivational blocks were expected to last the longest because factors contributing to such blocks should, theoretically, result in the formation of an aversive association specific to writing (Boice, 1985; Flaherty, 2015). Physiological blocks were expected to last the shortest amount of time because such blocks should be swayed by fluctuations in mood or energy level (Flaherty, 2015; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009) and are not always specifically related to the act of writing itself. It is possible writing may even be a form of improving mood for writers reporting certain physiological causes of blocking. Blocks with physiological causes were predicted to occur most frequently while a writer attempted to articulate ideas (Beilock & Carr, 2005; Nazarian et al., 2010); blocks with motivational causes were expected to occur most often either before starting a piece or transitioning to the end (Murray, 1985); blocks with cognitive causes were hypothesized to happen during idea generation (Lubart, 2009); and blocks with behavioral causes were thought to happen at any part in the writing process, occurring no more frequently at one part than another.

It was expected that the most common solutions reported by writers will match up with solutions suggested in the existing literature, namely those that address multiple causes of writer's block at a time, such as discussing ideas in a group or reframing one's perspective about a writing project (Dearing, 2007; Smeets, 2008). It was hypothesized that solutions that addressed more than one potential cause at a time would be rated as the most effective. An example would be discussing ideas with others, because this could improve mood, increase motivation, and lead to a writer considering another person's perspective.

Finally, it was predicted that some writers would be significantly more likely to be blocked by some components more than others. More specifically, writers with highly structured schedules and who plan their work carefully were expected to be more prone to having blocks with cognitive causes and writers with sporadic schedules and no planning structure would be more likely to experience blocks with a behavioral cause. Writers with high levels of writing experience were predicted to be more perfectionistic about their work and more likely to get stuck in inflexible writing patterns, making them

more prone to blocks with cognitive causes than writers with lower levels of experience. Writers with low levels of experience were predicted to be the most likely to develop blocks for motivational or behavioral reasons.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from professional organizations such as Technical Writers of America, Travel Writers of America, national and regional writing organizations such as Romance Writers of America, Horror Writers of America, and the Historical Writers Association, and one online workshopping forum, Scribophile. These platforms were chosen because they provided information about publishing opportunities, competitions, and/or served as an online workshopping group through which writers could post work, receive feedback, and critique others' work. Membership to these organizations required an application and review process. Originally, the sample was intended to consist exclusively of working writers, meaning published authors or those with jobs in a writing industry such as technical writing, publishing, or journalism. Because many respondents reported that they held other jobs and did not make the majority of their income from writing alone, the sample was expanded to include active and aspiring writers who have, through membership to such writing organizations, demonstrated a serious interest in and commitment to writing. This sample is still different from samples used in many previous studies consisting only of college students, hobbyists, or case studies of writers with limited sample sizes because it is fairly large for a special population and includes productive and serious writers. The answers provided in response to several free response questions indicate that many respondents have publication records and actively participate in writing workshops even if writing is not their dominant source of income.

Seventy-seven respondents in this sample were women, 21 were men, and 3 answered that they did not wish to disclose their gender ($N = 101$). Of the 146 who agreed to informed consent and began the

survey, 101 completed the survey to the end. Because the demographic questions were placed at the end of the survey, 45 writers did not respond to the question about gender or any other demographic questions.

Ages ranged between 22 and 78 years old ($N = 101$). Most participants were in their late forties ($M = 47.63$, $SD = 13.47$). The average years of writing experience reported were approximately 11 years ($N = 95$, $M = 11.51$, $SD = 9.77$). The shortest amount of writing experience reported by respondents was less than a year and the longest amount of time was 37 years. Because the specific wording on the survey for the question concerning writing experience was "How long have you been writing professionally?" there is some variation in what participants meant when they reported their answers. The writers in this sample who were full-time fiction writers or who had a career in a writing field, such as journalism, listed how many years they wrote at their job, while those with other careers sometimes wrote in the answer box that they interpreted the question as meaning how long they had been publishing their work. A few writers indicated they were not yet published but began writing seriously with an intent to publish a certain number of years ago. Therefore, this question was interpreted as "how long have you been writing seriously?" and as measuring general writing experience rather than professional writing experience. As mentioned earlier, originally the survey was intended for professional writers, defined as those employed in a writing field or who earn most of their income from publishing their work. The sample was expanded to include writers with a publication record or who were working towards sharing their work with the public in some way as evidenced by involvement in writing organizations developed to assist writers with that purpose. The question on years of professional writing experience was the only one that was specific to professional writers, so no additional adjustments needed to be made to the interpretation of the remaining answers to allow for a more inclusive population.

Most of the writers in this sample wrote fiction or both fiction and nonfiction with a minority writing exclusively nonfiction ($N = 145$, fiction = 64, nonfiction = 23, both fiction and nonfiction = 58). A more detailed breakdown of the specific genres writers in this sample reported working in can be found

on Table 1. Most writers in the sample reported working in multiple genres of fiction or a combination of

fiction and nonfiction genres. Many writers indicated that they specialized in a genre, with the most

common being science fiction/fantasy, followed by horror/thriller, women's fiction, historical fiction, and

romance. Most nonfiction writers reported writing in multiple nonfiction genres. However, several

specified they mostly wrote in news and journalism, business writing, creative nonfiction, and

autobiography. Writers had a variety of career backgrounds. See Tables 2 and 3.

Instrument and Procedure

The survey "writer's block in working writers" was developed by the primary investigator with

the assistance of two professional writers: one was a published romance novelist, and the other was a

book coach, writer, and survey developer. These writers offered feedback on the design and suggested

items to include in the survey that they thought would be relevant and interesting for the writing

community. Then the PI contacted the executive directors of over a dozen regional and national writing

organizations to request permission to post a link to the lab webpage and survey on the organization's

website and/or social media platform. Membership to the organizations that were chosen required an

application and review process in which prospective members stated their purpose for joining and

described their writing history. The content on the websites chosen provided publication guidelines,

information about writing competitions, and opportunities to critique another members' work. Some

organizations, such as Technical Writers of America and Travel Writers of America were professional

organizations requiring employment in the writing field. The sample was originally intended to consist of

working writers, or productive writers who share their work with a reading public and/or receive payment

for their work. Though some participants in the sample were hobbyists, their answers on the survey and

their membership to such organizations indicated they were productive and serious about their work.

Therefore, the pool of participants in this study was expanded to include productive and aspiring writers.

A link to the Qualtrics survey was posted on a lab webpage which included a short description of the study. Writers who were interested in completing the survey followed the link on the writing organization's webpage to the lab website and the writer's block survey. In return for participating the survey, writers could sign up to be entered into a lottery. Six respondents were randomly selected to win a $50 gift card to Amazon.

The survey contained 40 questions and took approximately 45 minutes to complete. Sixteen questions were multiple choice, twenty were free response, and four questions were mixed, meaning that they included some multiple-choice answers and a text-entry option for the answer, "other" (a copy of the survey is included in the appendix). The order of questions was not randomized, and the survey was not set to the "force answer" option except for on the informed consent page, meaning that participants could move on without answering items. Therefore, most items contain some missing data. To account for this, sample sizes were reported separately for each item. The reason participants were not required to answer all items before moving on is because doing so might have made respondents more likely to quit the survey before completing it. This would have caused the research team to lose valuable data, particularly for the qualitative portion of the study requiring the analysis of the free response questions. Furthermore, some questions were only relevant for a small number of respondents. For example, one would only answer the follow-up question, "If you think your last block was caused by multiple factors, which do you think had the biggest impact on your ability to write?" if he or she indicated on the previous question that they thought multiple factors caused their block.

Results

Free response answers were coded by two independent raters. Kappas ranged from acceptable to very good, from .77 to .90. See Table 1. Data was only excluded from analysis if it did not answer the question. For example, if a respondent filled in a text entry box to the question "how have you dealt with writer's block in the past?" with the answer "N/A" or "I have never had writer's block, this question is not

relevant for me," the answer would not be included as a method writers use in an attempt to overcome writer's block. Other answers were deleted if the respondent had made a mistake entering it into the wrong textbox. If so, the primary investigator looked at the questions before and after it to see if it answered any nearby questions. If the answer was clearly meant to be in response to another question which they left blank, it was moved to the appropriate section. If the answer did not match any nearby questions and did not make sense in the context of the question, it was deleted.

If answers did not provide enough detail for the coders to fit it into one of the categories or themes they came up with, answers to follow-up questions were examined for more information. For example, one multiple choice question was, "during your last period of writer's block, did any of the following situations apply?" and some of the answers were, "I received harsh criticism for my work," "I was trying harder than usual to make a good impression on a reader," "I experienced a stressful life event," and "more than one of these" (see survey in the appendix to see all answer responses). Next, there was a question that asked them to elaborate on what aspect of the situation they thought blocked them the most. The majority of participants who selected "stressful life event" described their experience in the follow up question as emotionally distressing for them but a few said the stress did not stop them as much as simply becoming too busy to write (for example, having to work longer hours or have a longer commute after getting a new job). For those who answered the stressful life event was emotionally distressing or emphasized that they felt too stressed or exhausted to write, their answer was coded as a "physiological" cause of writer's block. For respondents who reported they simply had no time to write, the stressful life event was coded as "behavioral". Those who selected that more than one situation occurred at the time they had writer's block were asked to describe which situation they thought impacted their ability to write the most. Follow up questions were assessed by one rater, the PI; however, assessment was based on the criteria the two raters came up with for analyzing the main free response questions.

Table 1

Cohen's kappas

Variable coded	Cohen's kappa
	(*k*)
Cause of block	.84
Part of writing process blocked	.77
Writing schedule	.84
Planning method	.90
Solutions to writer's block	.84

Note: Kappa values of 0 or less are interpreted as less than chance agreement, 0.01-.20 as slight agreement, 0.21-0.40 as fair agreement, 0.41-0.60 as moderate agreement, 0.61-0.80 as substantial agreement, and 0.81-0.99 as almost perfect agreement (Viera & Garret, 2005). Examples of coding will be provided throughout the text. See appendix for a full list answers to free response questions.

Chi squared tests and a discriminant analysis were performed to test the hypotheses. Simple descriptive statistics were used to answer more general research objectives. Examples of coding are included throughout the results section and the respondents' original answers can be found in the appendices along with a copy of the survey.

Most Commonly Reported Cause of Writer's Block

The first objective of the study was to identify which factor was reported as the cause of writer's block the most often. On the survey, writer's block was defined as "a period in which a writer is unable to produce new material." Answers to the question, "What was the main reason you think you experienced your last period of writer's block?" were coded as physiological, motivational, cognitive, behavioral, and a combination of factors. The first four categories were based on the most common explanations for writer's block that appear in the literature. The last one, "a combination of factors" is an additional item to

show that some writers described becoming overwhelmed by a combination of components and each one contributed to the block about equally. This category is omitted from later analyses because the focus of the particular tests that were run was on characteristics of blocks with different root causes.

The questionnaire item included multiple choice answers and an optional write-in response for the option, "other." The multiple-choice answers were "change in writing routine," "stressful life event," "health related issue," being under more pressure than usual to perform well," "change in social network," and "other." The answer "change in social network" was omitted because very few respondents selected it and it was unclear which category it belonged to. This choice was originally included in the survey to measure an "environmental" component of writer's block that was later excluded from the study and replaced with the "cognitive" cause variable.

Many participants selected the option "other" and recorded specific factors they believed caused their block. Most were answers that were not included as answer options on the multiple-choice question, but some were elaborations on a particular situation they thought triggered their block.

Physiological causes contributing to writer's block included stress, anxiety, intense emotional states, mental or physical health issues, and exhaustion. Fear of criticism, performance anxiety, lack of enjoyment, and perfectionism were coded as motivational causes. Cognitive causes included perfectionism, problems associated with structure and planning such as not planning well enough or planning too much at the expense of flexibility, and rigid thinking, such as trying to force a story to move in a particular direction. Procrastination, interruptions to writing, and being too busy to write were coded as behavioral causes of writer's block. An answer was coded as a combination of factors when the respondent reported that more than one factor led to the block and no single cause was identified as more influential than the others. Table 2 shows the frequency and definition each of type of cause. Table 3 includes examples of original answers to demonstrate how each variable was coded. All original responses can be found in the appendix. See Table 6 for example of how original answers were coded.

Table 2

Cause of Most Recent Block

Cause of Block	Definition	Frequency
Physiological	Stress, anxiety, extreme emotional states, mental and physical illness	44
Motivational	Fear of criticism or rejection, performance anxiety, and loss of enjoyment	30
Cognitive	Perfectionism, problems due to errors in planning (not planning sufficiently or too fixated on an outcome), rigid thinking	14
Behavioral	Procrastination, being too busy to write	11
Combination of factors	More than one factor is causing writer's block and it is impossible to say which factor is the most influential	5

Note: N = 104.

Table 3

Examples of Coding

Cause of Block	Examples
Physiological	Depression, I have a harder time writing when there is high stress in my life, health issues, stressful life event leading to physical and emotional exhaustion
Motivational	Pressure to perform well, receiving critical feedback, stifled by unnerving experience with a writing group
Cognitive	Perfectionism, not having planned well enough in advance, the block is related to the work itself rather than outside influences
Behavioral	Busy promoting books #1 and #2, no time to write #3, demanding professional work schedule diverting attention from creative work, change in writing routine Stressful life event- just being busy and having lots of other obligations build up.
A combination of factors	All of the above, any of these can disrupt the process, none more than the other, all of these, a combination of factors

Note. The answer "stressful life event" was usually interpreted as stress and categorized as a physiological cause of blocking. However, a few respondents wrote in the follow up question, "if you experienced more than one of the above reasons for your block, which did you think had the biggest impact on your writing?" that the life event they were referring to did not stop them from writing because it was stressful, but rather because it caused some change to their routine that resulted them having less time to write. In those cases, "stressful life event" was coded as a behavioral cause.

The most commonly reported cause of writer's block was physiological. Forty-four writers thought that physiological factors such as stress, illness, or intense emotional states like anxiety or depression preceded and may have led them to develop their most recent block. The second most

commonly reported cause was motivational factors, such as fear of criticism or rejection, pressure to perform well, and lack of excitement about a topic. However, answers that were coded as motivational and physiological were included in the multiple-choice question more than other types of causes. It is possible this could have influenced the responses of some participants who may have preferred selecting one of the choices on the list than type out a new response in the box.

Common Characteristics of Blocks

The second research objective was to report common characteristics of blocks. First, the average length of a block was assessed. Because this variable was categorical, it was measured by observing which time frame was most frequently selected in response to the question, "How long did your most recent period of writer's block last?" Forty participants reported that their block lasted several weeks and 37 indicated that their block lasted a few days or less. Longer blocks lasting months or over a year were less common. Blocks lasting months were reported by 22 participants and blocks lasting over a year were reported by 20 participants. Only 20 respondents indicated that they had never experienced writer's block.

Next, the part of the writing process most frequently impacted by writer's block was investigated. It was predicted that blocks would be spread throughout different parts of the writing process, with a roughly even amount occurring when a writer was coming up with new ideas and when they were expressing their ideas in words.

Variables representing each part of the writing process were taken from the mixed multiple choice/free response question, "Which of the following best describes the kind of block you experienced?" The response "It was hard coming up with ideas" was coded as occurring during idea generation. "It was easy coming up with new ideas but difficult to find the words to express them," was coded as occurring during articulation, the name used in this study to refer to the process of a writer expressing their ideas in words. A full list of parts of the writing process and the frequency of blocks occurring at each stage can be found in Table 4. Most answers that were written in the free response box

fit into one of these categories. However, one new category based on answers provided by the

respondents was added: planning/structuring scenes. Examples of coding including some original answers

can be found on Table 5. See Table 4 below to view the frequencies of blocks reported during each stage

of the writing process.

Table 4

Part of the Writing Process that was Blocked

Part of Writing Process	Definition	Frequency
Idea generation	It was hard coming up with new ideas	17
Articulation/expression	It was easy coming up with new ideas but hard to express them in words	41
Choosing which idea to pursue	It was easy coming up with new ideas but hard to decide which ones to pursue	20
Idea generation and articulation	It was hard coming up with ideas and finding the words to express them	18
Getting started/transitioning	It was hard to get started or to transition between different parts of the work/it was hard to complete a work due to freezing up midway for reasons other than lack of ideas or trouble expressing them	12
Planning/structuring scenes	It was hard organizing the structure of the work	4

Note: $N = 112$.

Table 5

Coding for Parts of the Writing Process

Part of Writing Process	Examples
Idea Generation	It was hard coming up with new ideas
Articulation/expression	Ideas are never an issue for me, but figuring out how to express them in words is the most difficult
Choosing which idea to pursue	With several directions the plot could take to reach the ultimate goal, I get stammied at which path to take.
Idea generation and articulation	Coming up with new ideas *and* expressing them in words
Getting started/transtioning	I found it hard to sit down and write as I was coming to the end of the novel and my mind kept telling me I wouldn't be able to live up to the expectation I had created with the rest of the book. So, my mind went blank.
Planning/structuring scenes	I usually experience what people might call writers block when I have failed to plan my stories sufficiently and know where I want to go in a story, but not how to get there

Relationships Between the Causes and Characteristics of Blocks

It was hypothesized that there would be a relationship between the cause of a block and the length of that block because if blocks can be caused by different root factors, some factors may be more quickly or easily overcome than others. It was hypothesized that blocks with a physiological cause would, on average, be the easiest to overcome because many of these causes describe fluctuations in mood, stress, and energy levels. These are factors that change throughout the day and are often temporary. The exception to this would be very high levels of intense affective states such as grief or mental health issues such as depression or anxiety. Still, it is expected that once the root issue is managed, knowingly or accidentally, a writer should be able to return to their usual levels of productivity. It was hypothesized the motivational blocks would be the longest lasting and most difficult to overcome because they are associated with loss of enjoyment and/or fear of criticism, which are both negative states specifically associated with writing. Therefore, a writer should not be able to overcome the block as easily because changing moods or circumstances would have little effect on their writing.

This hypothesis was tested using a chi square test. The fifth cause, "combination of factors" described under the first objective was omitted or recoded to reflect what the respondent placed the greatest emphasis on. No significant relationship was found between the cause of block and length of block, $\chi^2(12, N = 101) = 17.00$, $p = 0.15$. See Table 6.

Table 6

Relationship between cause and length of writer's block

<div align="center">Cause of Block</div>

Length of block	Physiological	Motivational	Cognitive	Behavioral
A few days or less	15	10	4	5
Weeks	12	9	6	5
Months	7	7	2	0
Over a year	11	4	0	1
I have never had writer's block	1	0	2	0

Because the chi squared test is sensitive to cells with a frequency smaller than 5, the test was repeated a second time. This time, the variables "months" and "over a year" were combined and the variable "I have never had writer's block" was excluded from the analysis. Once again, no significant relationship was found between cause of block and length of block, $\chi^2(6, N = 98) = 4.49, p = 0.61$.

Next, another chi-square test was used to test for a relationship between the cause of a block and the part of the writing process that block interfered with. To meet the assumptions of a chi squared test of independence, 2 of the 6 categories for the variable "part of writing process blocked" were recoded. Choosing which idea to pursue was recoded as articulation because decision making is a form of cognition that is more closely related to the skills used when writing down ideas such as deciding what

words to choose when describing a scene and retrieving rules about composition. Individual answers

categorized as planning/story structure were re-examined and were coded as idea generation if the writer

described having trouble imagining how the scenes unfolded because both describe a block to the

imaginative, creative thinking process. If responses emphasized that the writer had a difficult time making

decisions about how to sequence scenes or organize their work, they were coded as articulation for the

same reason mentioned above.

It was predicted that those who indicated that physiological and motivational factors contributed

to their most recent block would be more likely to report that block occurring during articulation because

some of the factors included within these variables such as stress and performance anxiety have been

shown to inhibit memory, decision making, and complex problem solving in other contexts (Andrews &

Farris, 1972; Arnstein, 2009; Baer & Oldham, 2006; Beilock & Carr, 2005; Drwal, 1973). Because

writers would be making use of similar cognitive processes during articulation, it would be expected for

the same kinds of factors that have been found to block problem solving and memory retrieval tasks

(stress, performance anxiety) to also block the expression of ideas. Cognitive causes were expected to be

associated with difficulty during idea generation due to reflecting rigidity or a fixation on a single idea on

the part of the author. Behavioral causes were thought to impact all parts of the writing process equally

because behavioral factors such as procrastinating or becoming too busy to write could happen at any

stage in the writing process. A significant relationship was found between the cause of a block and the

part of the writing process that became blocked, $\chi^2(9, N = 97) = 0.43$, $p = .043$. As predicted, most

physiological and motivational blocks occurred during articulation. Most cognitive blocks also occurred

during articulation. Most behavioral blocks occurred during idea generation. See Figure 1.
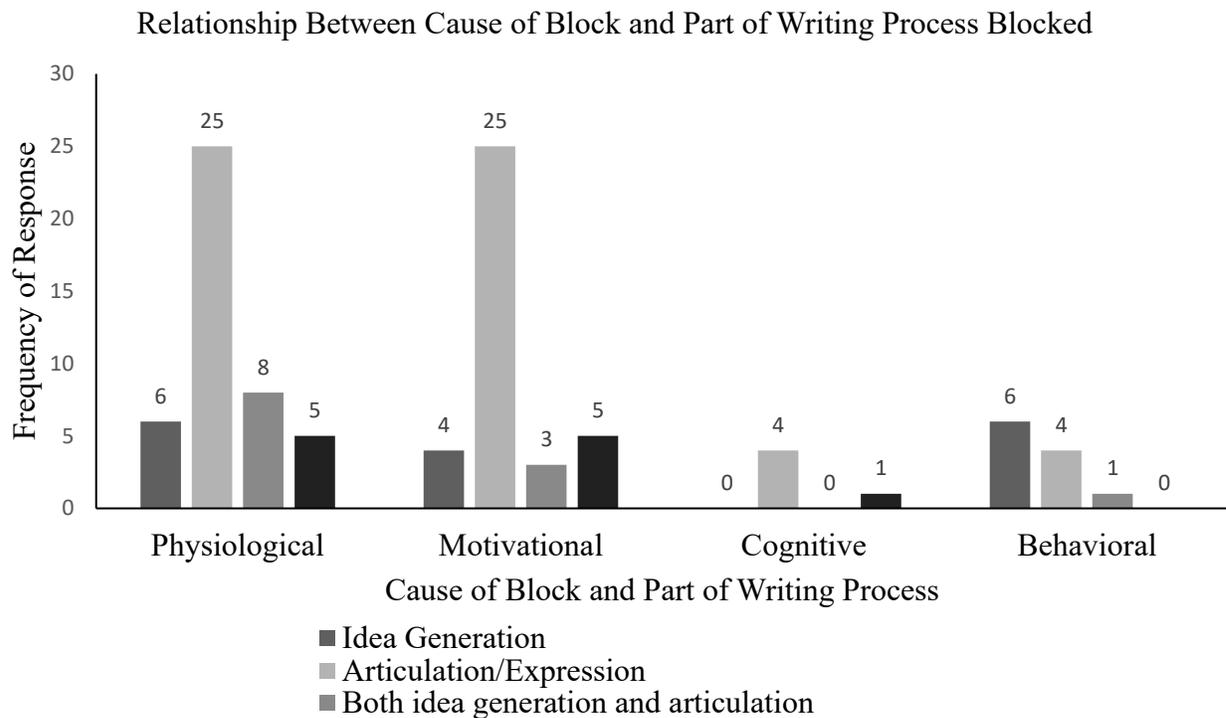
Relationship Between Cause of Block and Part of Writing Process Blocked

Figure 1.

Common Solutions to Writer's Block

One goal of this survey was to compile a list of strategies that writers use to overcome writer's block and identify the solutions that writers rated as the most effective. Each respondent was instructed to list three things they do when they get writer's block and to rate the effectiveness of each solution on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being extremely ineffective and 5 being extremely effective. This item generated a total number of 235 solutions. Two coders independently read these responses and came up with 12 common themes. Table 7 lists the twelve themes the raters used, the frequency of each response, and provides examples of the original answers that were included in each category. A comprehensive list of strategies can be found in the appendix in each writer's own words.

Table 7

Themes: Solutions to Overcome Writer's Block with Examples

Solutions	Examples of original answers	Frequency
Take a break from writing	Stop writing, decide tomorrow is another day, and walk away from the computer until the next day.	66
Take a walk	I go for a walk	11
Keep writing	Force myself to write to a certain page number	34
Meditate/do yoga	Meditate for five minutes	2
Revise or reread current work or skip ahead to work on a later section	Reread notes or drafts	28
Read a book or watch a movie	I read the work of authors I admire to become inspired.	28
Discuss ideas with others	Ask for advice. See what other people think. While you usually won't use what they suggest their ideas can kickstart you brain.	24
Eat or drink something	Drinking coffee or snacking	5

Change writing location or writing method	Switch up locations or methods of writing - write using a pen, a typewriter, etc.	16
Work on a different writing project	Jump from the work on which I'm currently engaged to another.	33
Exercise	Exercise/movement	7
Research	Researching relevant or related topics	9

Note. $N = 235$. Some themes may seem to overlap. For example, taking a walk, reading a book, or exercising could all be included within the larger category take a break from writing. The raters decided it would be more informative and useful to report more specific information when it was available. Several other themes were suggested like listen to music and take a shower but were included undertake a break because both coders did not include them on their list.

Effectiveness of solution strategies. To determine which solutions were the most frequently reported to be effective, a new variable called effective solution strategies was created. This variable included all solutions that received ratings of 4 or 5, indicating that they had been effective or extremely effective for the respondents. It did not include solutions rated 1, 2, or 3 (extremely ineffective, ineffective, and slightly effective). The most frequently reported solution strategies to be effective or extremely effective were take a break from writing, work on a different writing project, keep writing, and discuss ideas with others. Because some solutions were much more frequently reported than others in general, the percentage of writers who tried each solution found it effective in overcoming writer's block were taken for each solution so that they could be compared more accurately. One hundred percent of

writers who said they took a walk or exercised reported that this solution was effective or very effective for them. Approximately 67% of those who discussed their ideas with others reported that doing so was effective. Fifty six percent of those who researched material for their work reported they found it effective or very effective to do so, and 55% found it effective or very effective to switch to a different writing project. A full table of frequencies of solutions and percentages of respondents who rated these solutions as effective or very effective can be found on Table 8.

Table 8

Effectiveness of Solutions

Solution	Total Number of Times Solution was Reported	Total Number of Times Solution was Rated Very Effective/Extremely Effective
Take a break from writing	66	26 (39%)
Take a walk	11	11 (100%)
Keep writing	34	16 (47%)
Meditate/do yoga	2	1 (50%)
Reread or revise current work/skip ahead	28	10 (36%)
Read a book or watch a movie	28	11 (39%)
Discuss ideas with others	24	16 (67%)
Eat or drink something	5	2 (40%)
Change writing location or method	16	8 (50%)
Work on a different writing project	33	18 (55%)

Exercise	7	7 (100%)
Research	9	5 (56%)

Note. $N = 235$. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and are calculated based on the total number of times a solution was used and the total number of times it was rated a 4 to 5, or effective or very effective.

Tests for Relationships Between Individual Differences and Cause of Writer's Block

       Relationship between writing experience and cause of block. A discriminant analysis was used to test for a relationship between the continuous predictor variable, years of writing experience, and the categorical outcome variable, cause of writer's block. It was predicted that writers with more years of writing experience would be more likely to report cognitive components to blocking than any other type. Although the mean age of writers was the highest in the group that reported cognitive causes of blocking, this relationship was not statistically significant, $N = 90$, squared canonical correlation = .02, Eigen Value = .02, Wilke's Lambda = .98, and Wilke's Lambda significance = .66. Table 9 shows the means and standard deviations of years of writing experience for each type of writer's block cause and the values of functions at group centroids.

Table 9

Mean Years of Writing Experience and Functions at Group Centroids for Causes of Blocks

Cause of Block	Mean (years writing) and *SD*	Valid *N*	Functions at Group Centroids
Physiological	10.03 (*SD* = 8.37)	40	-.106
Motivational	11.67 (*SD* =10.42)	30	.060
Cognitive	14.86 (*SD* = 15.92)	7	.381
Behavioral	10.33 (*SD* = 6.80)	3	-.075

Relationship between writing schedule and block. Respondents' answers to the question "How would you describe your work schedule?" were coded as structured, flexible, and sporadic. Schedules were described as structured if the writer said they wrote at the same time every day and/or listed those times, flexible if the writer had a rotating schedule or one that changed daily, and sporadic if the writer had no regular pattern. Examples of coding can be found on Table 10.

Table 10

Coding for Schedule Type

Type of Schedule	Examples
Structured	MW 11:00-3:30 Tthr 12-3:30 Sat 8:00-12:30
	M-F noon to 2pm Wednesday nights 7-9pm Saturdays 11 to 2 or later if possible.
	Same hours every day, I usually start around 7am and go into the early afternoon. Once I hit my word count goal, I move on to business and volunteer work, spending regular amounts of time to move those forward.
Flexible	My work hours vary in response to other commitments, but I try to write in the mornings.
	Work hours vary significantly. Flexibility of an academic
	Different job schedules every day. Some days, teaching. Some days, meetings. Some days, lit journal editing. Summer is more stable day to day. It's a FT job--40-60 hours per week during the academic year, probably 20 hours per week summer.
Sporadic	Extremely sporadic. Usually many late-night hours in a row, followed by nothing for months.
	Irregular.
	It's all over the place. I like taking little workshops and things so I can buy some pressure to generate new "starts" once a year or so, then I'll work on completing those starts throughout the year. No real rhyme or reason t how I accomplish that, though.

It was hypothesized that those with structured schedules would report experiencing more cognitive blocks and that those with flexible and sporadic schedules would be more likely to experience blocks with a behavioral cause. The chi square analysis did not yield a significant relationship between writing schedule and cause of block, $\chi^2(6, N = 86) = 2.23$, $p = 0.90$.

Because the cell count was so low for the variables cognitive and behavioral causes, they were omitted from the analysis and the test was repeated. Again, no significant relationship was found between writing schedule and cause of block, $\chi^2(2, N = 74) = .28$, $p = 0.87$.

Relationship between planning style and cause of block. A chi-square test of independence was used to test for a relationship between a writer's planning style and the cause of his or her block. A writer's planning style was determined by answers to the question: "How do you plan out your work? Do you use outlines, flowcharts, or some other method? Or do you write and let the process carry you to the finish?" The writers' answers were then coded as demonstrating the planning style of a planner, pantser, or both, taking on the characteristics of a planner or pantser for some kinds of writing projects but not others. The terms "planner" and "pantser" were used because they were suggested by writers who helped with the development of the study, were often referred to by writers in the free response questions, and also appear in writing journals and reference/writing craft books (Hayes, 2015; Sambuchino, 2015). For example, one respondent said, "I am a pantser, I write once the flow comes," and another said, "I am firmly a pantser." This terms planner and pantser did not appear on the survey but were used as labels for different planning styles by the two coders who thought these terms were appropriate to describe opposite planning tendencies. It was also thought it would be appropriate to use terms popular with the population under study.

A planner is defined someone who plans out his or her work very carefully before beginning to write using outlines, flowcharts, character sketches, notes and other techniques. A pantser, in contrast, prefers not to plan their work ahead of time and jumps straight into writing, letting the process carry them

to the finish. Planners usually know how a story or chapter will play out in detail before writing it. Pantsers may have a general idea of the direction their story is going in but may not know the ending or what events will happen by the end of the section.

Many writers in our sample strongly identified with one style or the other. However, others indicated that their use of planning depended on the kind of writing project they were working on. For example, one writer described carefully planning out novels, but simply writing a full draft without taking any notes or preparing outlines for short stories. Fifty-three respondents identified as planners, 27 as pantsers, and 30 said their style varied depending on the kind of project they were working on ($N = 110$). See Table 11 for frequencies of planning styles..

It was predicted that planners and those with alternating planning styles would be more likely to report becoming blocked by cognitive factors and that pantsers would be more likely to report be blocked by behavioral factors. No significant relationship was found between planning style and cause of block, $\chi^2(6, N = 89) = 6.32, p = 0.39$. See Table 18.

Table 11

Relationship Between Planning Style and Cause of Block

	Physiological	Motivational	Cognitive	Behavioral
Planner	19	14	4	5
Pantser	8	12	0	2
Varies	14	9	1	1

Note. $N = 89$ because not everyone who answered the question about planning style also answered the question about the cause of their most recent block.

Because of the sensitivity of Chi square tests to low cell counts, the variables behavioral and cognitive causes were removed, and the test was repeated. Once again, no significant relationship was found between planning style and cause of block, $\chi^2(2, N = 76) = 6.10, p = 0.73$.

Relationship between daily writing habits and length of block. Next, a chi-square test was used to test for a relationship between daily writing and the length of a block. It was predicted that those who wrote every day would report shorter blocks than those who wrote more consistently. A significant relationship was found between daily writing and length of block, $\chi^2(4, N = 122) = 16.28, p = 0.003$, suggesting that those who write every day were less likely to have blocks lasting longer than several days than those who did not. This may be because those who write every day have more opportunities to start writing again compared to those with schedules that are more spread out. Because this survey was not randomized and the question regarding how long the writer's most recent period of writer's block lasted preceded the question "how long did your last period of writer's block last?" and the order of questions was not randomized, it is possible that the order of questions impacted how participants responded. For a summary of the results, see Figure 2.
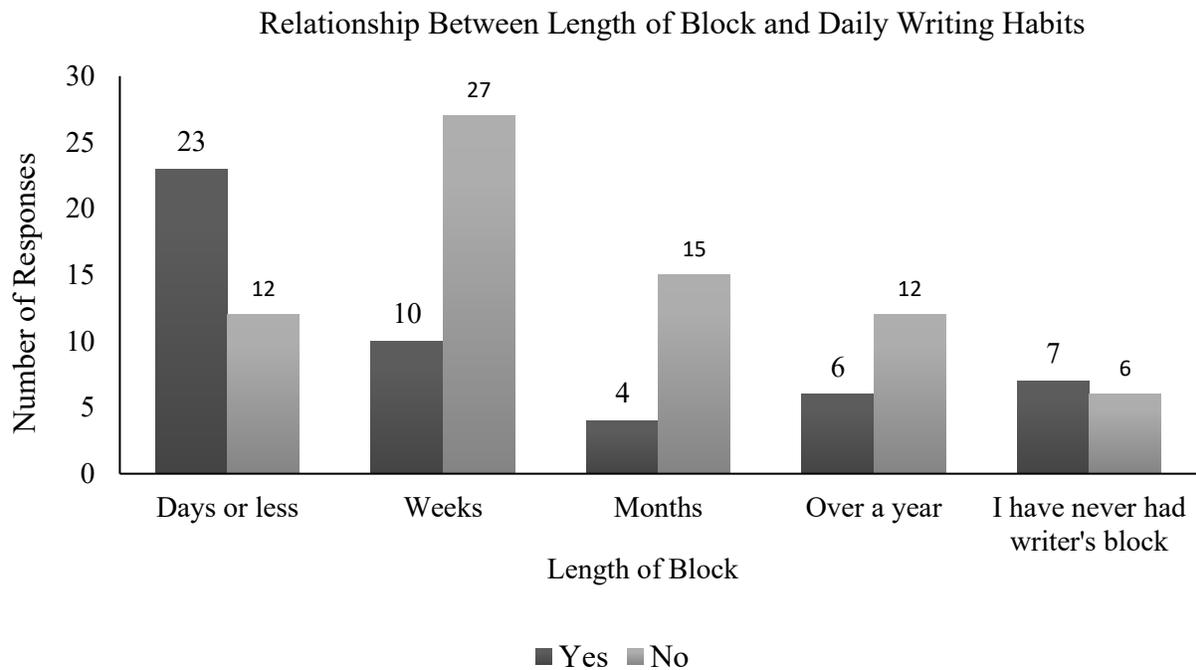
Relationship Between Length of Block and Daily Writing Habits

Figure 2.

Discussion

The primary goals of the study were to present common causes and characteristics of blocking, to identify the most helpful solutions in overcoming writer's block, and to test a set of hypotheses about the relationships between causes and characteristics of blocks. In addition, individual differences that might be important in predicting reasons why some writers may be more likely to develop writer's block were investigated.

Physiological factors such as life stress, general anxiety, depression, and burnout were reported to be the most common cause of blocking. The second most common reason consisted of motivational factors such as evaluation anxiety and decreased intrinsic motivation. Few writers reported that they thought cognitive factors such as perfectionism or behavioral factors like procrastination were the main cause of their block. These findings may suggest that experienced/productive writers may be less prone to

procrastinating, having their schedule disrupted due changes in routine, or having many technical issues during the composition process than previous samples used to study blocking from a cognitive or behavioral perspective (chiefly college students; Menks, 1979; Passman, 1979; Rose, 1980; Rose, 1984; Rosenberg & Lah, 1982; Upper, 1974). One reason may be that the students in those samples were assigned topics and most of them did not have a strong interest or background in writing.

The current sample consisted of participants with a great interest in and often an extensive background in writing. Such participants may be less likely to put off writing or to focus on the more technical aspects of the writing process in the same way that a student expecting to be assessed on an essay would. Another possibility may be that more answer choices were provided in the mixed multiple-choice/text entry question, "what do you think caused your last block?" for motivational and physiological blocks ("fear of criticism," "stressful life event," "physical/mental illness,") than for behavioral blocks ("routine disruption"). The variable cognitive causes were created based on common themes such as perfectionism and problems specific to the writing project that many writers mentioned in the text entry response. If some respondents preferred selecting a default option rather than writing in a new one, then it is possible those numbers are somewhat higher than they should be. However, such responding is unlikely the main cause of the high numbers of writers who said they thought their block had mainly a physiological or motivation cause because certain responses, such as "perfectionism," "being too busy," and "difficulties related the work itself," were mentioned more often than some of the multiple choice answers provided such as "disruption to writing routine."

As expected, blocks varied in length, lasting from less than a few days to over a year. Most blocks were reported to last a few weeks. Blocks occurred at different points throughout the writing process, which is consistent with the varied descriptions of writer's block found in previous research (Boice; 1985; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Murray, 1985; Nelson, 1993). Most blocks happened during the composition process, or articulation, the point at which a writer must choose how to express his or her ideas in words (Boice, 1985; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Lubart, 2009; Rose, 1985; Seow, 2002). The

second most common time for blocks to occur was the point at which a writer must decide which idea to

pursue after coming up with a number of different directions (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Lubart, 2009;

Murray, 1985; Seow, 2002). It was surprising to find that blocks occurred during the stages of the writing

process most associated with decision-making processes more often than during the process of making

associations and coming up with new ideas (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Lubart, 2009; Nelson, 1993).

A significant relationship was found between the cause of a writer's last block and the part of the

writing process at which they became blocked. Most blocks with physiological, motivational, and

cognitive components happened during articulation. This relationship between physiological and

motivational components and blocking at this period could be explained by the effects that stress, anxiety,

fluctuations in energy and high levels of arousal have on problem-solving processes (Andrews & Farris,

1972; Arnstein, 2009; Baer & Oldham, 2006; Beilock & Carr, 2005; Drwal, 1973). In the future,

experimental designs could be used to determine if specific motivational and physiological factors may

interfere with the normal functioning of cognitive processes, such as decision making, that are critical

during this part of the writing process.

The most common solutions writers used to try to get over blocks were taking breaks, forcing

themselves to keep writing, and working on a different writing project. The solutions that were found to

be the most effective overall were those that seemed to serve multiple functions. For example, talking

about a writing project with others could both improve one's mood and expose a writer to new

perspectives he or she may have never considered alone. Receiving encouragement from others could

boost motivation and other people could hold a writer accountable for producing work in a timely fashion.

The effects of discussing an idea with others could potentially solve any of the specific causes under

study or any combination of those causes a writer might be dealing with.

Similarly, those who chose to work on another writing project generally found doing so to be

very or extremely helpful. Like discussing ideas with others, working on a different writing project would

allow the writer to shift perspective, possibly helping him or her to think about the project from a different angle (for example, a journalist might find inspiration for a piece of fiction he or she is writing from a work project). Working on another project is a form of distraction and could also cause a writer to experience a shift in mood by allowing them to make progress on another task. This could make a writer feel more confident and relaxed, perhaps eventually helping to decrease a writer's anxiety about the other project.

Another finding that is interesting to mention is that, although these solutions were not mentioned as frequently as some of the others, 100% of respondents who reported exercising or taking a walk found that strategy to be very or extremely effective. The reason is unclear. The number of participants how many? who answered that way was so low compared to the others it may be due to chance. However, if some blocks can be caused by depressed mood or low energy levels, movement could theoretically help by increasing arousal and mood. Movement has also been found to increase oxygen levels to some parts of the brain (Bond et al., 2002), which could improve the functioning of those brain regions and aid in the cognitive processes needed for writing. Movement is also a break and could lead a writer to perceive new stimuli.

Whether or not applying the solutions listed caused a writer to become unblocked cannot be causally determined through a correlational study. These findings do provide a direction for those interested in developing writer's block interventions in the lab and present a list of ideas that may be useful to try if one is blocked and not sure what action to take first. The solutions presented in this paper have been rated as very or extremely effective by writers, and generally match up with advice offered in manuals and training programs (Dearing, 2007; Nelson, 1993; Smeets, 2008; Wallace & Pear, 1977). It has been suggested that the most effective solution for writer's block is the one that most directly addresses the underlying cause of a particular case of writer's block (Smeets, 2008).

However, solutions presented in this paper are different from those previously suggested because they are simple and easy to implement oneself compared with the intervention strategies developed to treat writer's block in labs, classrooms, or training programs. For example, calling a friend to discuss a writing project is easier and more convenient than going to a group brainstorming session or receiving training to change one's perspective about writing from a professional (Smeets, 2008). The most effective solutions found in the current study are similar to interventions developed by researchers in the past because they aim to address multiple issues associated with writer's block at the same time and their effectiveness can be explained through similar reasoning (Dearing, 2007; Smeets, 2008).

Finally, individual differences in schedule, planning, and years of experience and cause of writer's block were tested. Neither planning style nor schedule type seemed to predict the reported cause of the block. At first, this was surprising, because it was expected that more blocks would be reported by "pantsers" and by writers with more sporadic schedules because lack of consistent routine and inefficient planning has been associated with blocking (Dearing, 2007; Rose, 1980, 1985; Rosenberg & Lah, 1982; Wallace & Pear, 1977). However, if one considers that those with sporadic schedules may only be writing when they have ideas and feel motivated to write, it makes sense that they might not even consider periods when they are not writing as writer's block. No relationship may have been found between cause of writer's block and planning style because the sample size for the kinds of blocks most associated with planning (cognitive blocks; Rose, 1980, 1985) was too small. Alternatively, these results could suggest that blocking and planning style may suggest that planning style is not an important variable in determining why different writers may get writer's block. It could be that some writers simply prefer one method over another and adapt to the challenges associated with that method over time.

Daily writing did seem to predict shorter and fewer blocks in general, with those who said they wrote every day tending to report blocks lasting days or less. Those who wrote every day were also more likely to say they had never experienced writer's block. However, the order of survey questions was not randomized, so it is possible that some may answered the question in a way that was consistent with their

answer to the question on daily writing. Years of writing experience was not found to predict cause of writer's block.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current study relied on self-report data and used a non-experimental design. Therefore, it is impossible to make causal claims regarding the results. The order in which questions were presented on the questionnaire was not randomized. It is possible answers could have been influenced by socially desirable responding, particularly in cases where a writer may not want to admit to not writing regularly or to procrastinating. Not every participant completed all questions so some items might have small sample sizes. However, one strength of the current study is that it is presently the largest sample of writers that has been used for a study on writer's block. In general, the number is quite substantial for a non-student sample, especially considering many participants were highly specialized in the domain under study.

Conclusion

The results of the study provide support for previous findings that physiological, motivational, cognitive, and behavioral factors result in blocking (Boice, 1985; Flaherty, 2015; Rose, 1985; Rosenberg & Lah, 1982) and that methods that address multiple factors at the same time, such as exchanging ideas with others, tend to be very helpful (Smeets, 2008). In future studies, it would be interesting to investigate whether the most effective solutions could be considered a "match" with the reason a writer developed writer's block. Such findings would support the idea that different kinds of blocks require different kinds of solutions (Smeets, 2008). Additionally, some variables like evaluation apprehension or affective intensity could be manipulated in the lab before a writing task and different solution strategies could be compared.

Physiological and motivational causes of blocking were reported the most often. Generally, writer's block was found to occur during articulation, or the composition part of the writing process more often than during idea generation or any other stage. This might be because the majority of writers reported that they thought their blocks were caused by physiological and motivational factors. These categories of causes are different because motivational causes are domain and situation-specific (a person experiences writing anxiety or fear of criticism on a particular project) and physiological ones are general (a writer may experience blocking during a depressive episode or when they are going through a stressful change). However, motivational and physiological causes are similar because both categories of factors can result in high levels of stress and anxiety and decreased arousal (lack of drive/failure to find writing rewarding for motivational causes and lack of energy in general for physiological factors). Stress and anxiety have been found to be negatively related to success on complex problem-solving tasks (Beilock & Carr, 2005) and creativity (Nazarian et al., 2010).

The results could be used to develop experiments to test the pathways through which factors thought to cause writer's block may impact particular cognitive processes associated with writing. Motivational factors, such as evaluation anxiety, could be manipulated in the lab with a simple procedure in which one group of participants is told that their writing would be assessed, and a control group is not. Participants could then be instructed to generate ideas and write an essay. The groups could then be compared on group members' performances on tasks during different stages of the writing process. Perhaps then, the parts of the writing process most heavily impacted by fear of evaluation or writing anxiety could be determined. Similarly, physiological factors like affective intensity or general stress or anxiety could be studied by priming participants to adopt such mindsets to investigate how such states affect their performance during different parts of the writing process.

Hopefully the twelve solutions presented in this paper will prove helpful to writers struggling with writer's block. Whereas many intervention strategies have involved coaching and the completion of a series of training exercises (Dearing, 2007; Smeets, 2008), the strategies presented in this paper are easy

to perform oneself and have been rated to be very or extremely effective by writers. Moreover, they are proposed to work for the same reasons as the solutions listed in the training guides: they are aimed at addressing particular problems associated with blocking. In summary, the five most helpful strategies for overcoming blocks were found to be discussing ideas with others, working on a different writing project, taking a walk or exercising, changing writing locations or writing method, and taking a break. The three least helpful methods were found to be meditating, research, and rereading/revising work and skipping ahead. Those strategies might be less helpful because they may be less likely than other solutions to effectively address the underlying issue causing a particular block (Smeets, 2008).

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Appendix A

Informed Consent and Writer's Block Survey

[*Not all items were used in the analyses. Items that were used are marked with an asterisk: *]*

Informed Consent

Thank you for your interest in completing the survey WRITER'S BLOCK IN WORKING WRITERS conducted at the University of North Florida. The purpose of this research is to see what factors might influence writer's block. We would like to see how you experience these issues and to learn from your experiences. This survey has 36 questions and will take approximately fifteen to thirty minutes to complete. There are no foreseeable risks for taking part in this survey. Reflecting about Writer's Block in this survey might be beneficial and provide you with some strategies on how to deal with it in the future. Additionally, there will be a raffle and 6 amazon gift cards with $50 value each will be sent to the 6 winners. (To participate you would need to indicate your name and email address at the end of the survey. Those will, however, not be linked to your survey answers.)

Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. You may choose not to answer a question or to withdraw from the survey at any time. Survey results are made anonymous by Qualtrics, the online survey used to complete this data. Data will be stored on a secure, password-protected computer and will only be available to the primary investigator and co-primary investigator. You can print a copy of this consent form for your records.

If you have any questions about the study, you can email Dr. Guess, at dguess@unf.edu or Sarah Ahmed at n00833539@ospreys.unf.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the chair of the UNF Institutional Review board by calling (904) 620-2498 or emailing irb@unf.edu

At the end of the survey you can provide your email address and Name in case you would like to receive the results of the survey in about 6 months. Your email and name will not be associated with your data. Thank you for your participating!!

Sincerely,
C. Dominik Güss
Phone: (904) 620-1634
Email: dguess@unf.edu

By clicking on yes, you attest that you are at least 18 years of age and agree to take part in this research study.

By clicking on no you will not participate.

- Yes
- No

Previous research has identified several factors that might be related to writer's block. However, most of this research has been conducted with samples of college students. We are very thankful that you as a working writer are allowing us to learn from your experiences with writer's block. Writer's block is defined as a period during which a writer is unable to produce new material.

Do you write fiction, nonfiction or both? *

- Fiction
- Nonfiction
- Both

Which category best describes you as a working writer? *

- Career writer: journalist, technical writer, magazine writer
- Academic or creative writing instructor
- Have a profession unrelated to writing but work on several writing projects a year and publish frequently (e.g., producing one book a year)
- Full time fiction writer (majority of income comes from selling work)
- Other _____

Do you believe writer's block exists?

- Yes
- No

How long did your last period of writer's block last?   *

- A few days or less
- Weeks
- Months
- Over a year
- I have never had writer's block

When you had your most recent experience with writer's block, what part of the writing process were you at?

- Planning
- Writing
- Other _____

Which of the following best describes the kind of block you experienced? * [*This question was used in place of "what part of the writing process were you at" because it was more specific*]

- It was hard coming up with new ideas

- It was easy to come up with new ideas but hard to express them in words

- It was easy to come up with new ideas but hard to know which ones to pursue

- It was hard coming up with new ideas and finding the words to express them

- Other _____

What was the main reason you think you experienced writer's block at that time? *

- Change in writing routine

- Stressful life event (e.g., a move, marriage, divorce, changing jobs)

- Health related issue (e.g., illness, pregnancy, change in sleep patterns, menopause, medication)

- Receiving critical feedback

- Having more pressure than usual to perform well (e.g., writing to impress someone specific or to get into a specific publication)

- ~~Change in social network (e.g., breakup or new relationship; spending much more or much less time with family and friends)~~ [*This answer was omitted from the analyses. See results section.*]

- Other (7) _____

If you experienced more than one of the above reasons for writer's block, what do you think had the biggest impact on your ability to write? *

Have you ever experienced writer's block after changing your writing routine? If so, briefly state how your routine changed.

What is your employment status?

- Employed

- Self-employed

- Unemployed

How many hours a day do you write on average?

Do you write every day? *

- Yes

- No

What best describes your revision process?

- Editing after the end of a first draft
- Editing while writing

- I edit both ways and have no preference

How would you describe your work schedule? *

How do you plan out your work (for example, by using outlines, flowcharts, pictures, character sketches, timelines, etc.)? Or do you prefer to just write and let the process carry you to the finish? *

Please list three ways you come up with new ideas for writing and rate how helpful you find them on scale from 1 to 5 with 1 being not helpful at all and 5 being very helpful.

How helpful is this method?

- Not helpful at all
- Not helpful
- Neither helpful nor unhelpful
- Helpful
- Very helpful

How helpful is this method?

- Not helpful at all
- Not helpful
- Neither helpful nor unhelpful
- Helpful
- Very helpful

How helpful is this method?

- Not helpful at all
- Not helpful
- Neither helpful nor unhelpful
- Helpful
- Very helpful

When during the writing process do you seek feedback from secondary readers?

- After finishing a first draft

- After finishing a chapter

- More frequently

What genre do you write in? *

Thinking about receiving monetary reward for my work sometimes blocks my writing.

- Completely disagree

- Disagree

- Somewhat disagree

- Neither agree nor disagree

- Somewhat agree

- Agree

- Completely agree

Thinking about the praise I will receive for my work sometimes blocks my writing.

- Completely disagree

- Disagree

- Somewhat disagree

- Neither agree nor disagree

- Somewhat agree

- Agree

- Completely agree

I have found it hard to find the motivation to write or come up with new ideas after receiving payment or praise before completing a project.

- Completely disagree

- Disagree

- Somewhat disagree

- Neither agree nor disagree

- Somewhat agree

- Agree

- Completely agree

I have become blocked after receiving feedback critical of my writing.

- Completely disagree

- Disagree

- Somewhat disagree

- Neither agree nor disagree

- Somewhat agree

- Agree

- Completely agree

When I had writer's block, I was experiencing more daily stress than usual.

- Completely disagree

- Disagree

- Somewhat disagree

- Neither agree nor disagree

- Somewhat agree

- Agree

- Completely agree

To what extent do you agree with the statement "emotional highs and lows enhance my ability to write"?

- Completely disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Completely agree

When my life is running smoothly, I have trouble coming up with new ideas.

- Completely disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Completely agree

I am often more productive when anxious or upset.

- Completely disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Completely agree

I produce higher quality work when writing in an intense emotional state.

- The quality of my work is better

- The quality of my work is lower

- I do not notice a difference in the quality of my work

I am most productive at writing when I feel calm and relaxed.

- Completely disagree

- Disagree

- Somewhat disagree

- Neither agree nor disagree

- Somewhat agree

- Agree

- Completely agree

Have you ever developed writer's block at the same time as going through a physiological change such as pregnancy, menopause, after starting a new fitness regime, diet, or medication? If so, please state the change.

Have you ever felt blocked after starting a new medication or recreational drug? If so, what kind of effect did this medication produce (e.g., calming, energizing)?

Do you find eating sugary snacks or drinking caffeinated beverages during your writing session give you more energy and/or help you stay focused?

- Yes. Name the food or drink (e.g., coffee): _____

- No

Before you start writing, do you have a specific plan for what you will do if you get writer's block (e.g., "if I get stuck, I will write for 1 hour")? If so, please briefly describe your method.

Writing with a particular reader in mind helps me stay focused.

- Completely disagree

- Disagree

- Somewhat disagree

- Neither agree nor disagree

- Somewhat agree

- Agree

- Completely agree

Please list 3 things you do when you get writer's block and rate how effective you have found these strategies to be on a scale from 1 to 5 (not effective at all to extremely effective). *

Strategy 1 _____

Effectiveness of strategy *

- Not effective at all

- Slightly effective

- Moderately effective

- Very effective

- Extremely effective

Strategy 2 _____

Effectiveness of strategy *

- Not effective at all

- Slightly effective

- Moderately effective

- Very effective

- Extremely effective

Strategy 3 _____

Effectiveness of strategy *

- Not effective at all
- Slightly effective
- Moderately effective
- Very effective
- Extremely effective

I find it helpful to discuss my ideas for my writing with friends, family, or other writers.

- Completely Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Completely agree

I find it helpful getting feedback early in the drafting process.

- Completely Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Completely agree

I have a supportive social network I can discuss ideas with when I need help (E.g., friends, writers at a workshop or club, writer's forum/web).

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Demographics *

Gender *

- Male
- Female
- Other/do not want to disclose

Age *

Do you have another job besides writing? If so, what is your job? *

How many years have you been writing professionally? *

How did you first get excited about writing?

Is there anything important related to the topic that we have not asked and that we should know?

If you would like to receive a copy of the research report, please write down **your email address and**

name and we will send it to you. We also would need to be able to contact you if you win the $50 gift card.

Your email address and name will not be connected to the answers you provided on the survey. It might take about 6 months until the report is finished.

Appendix B

Answers to the Writer's Block Survey

Cause of Writer's Block

- Change in writing routine
- Stressful life event
- Health issues
- Receiving critical feedback
- More pressure than usual to perform well
- Stress may be related but not a specific incident. Writer's block is like I'm completely burned out with no more ideas left. Dull, blank, empty.
- All of the above, any of these can disrupt the process, none more than the other.
- Probably just burned out slightly from continued high production 5+ books a year
- Who knows?
- Perfectionism
- Consistent rejection by my partner.
- Different reasons. For me the block is often related to the work itself, not so much outside influences.
- I think that I thought I had planned my story clearly, but I kept realizing that there were factors I hadn't considered, and this prevented me from being able to imagine the world/scene as clearly as I needed to.
- The first three items, especially stressful life events.
- not concerned about writer's block. My life does not depend on my writing to survive.
- My own mind, self-doubts, perfectionism, fear of judgment
- Demanding professional work schedule diverting attention from creative work
- Publication of a book and time spent promoting it.
- Depression
- I'm in a writing group, and even did a public reading from my work in progress this spring. It was an unnerving experience, and I think that's what stifled me.
- Burned out
- I ebb and flow naturally, especially when I'm not receiving a lot of positive feedback for my pitches as a freelancer.
- Burnout. Too much going on, not enough time to recharge, too many writing commitments and a disorganized brain as a result.
- I write on deadline, even if I have nothing in particular to say. I must come up with 800 words every Monday, rain or shine, and they must meet a standard of quality.
- Never had writer's block.
- burnt out
- all of these
- The same as I put in previous question. I found it hard to sit down and write as I was coming to the end of the novel and my mind kept telling me I wouldn't be able to live up to the expectation I had created with the rest of the book. So, my mind went blank.
- Complicated topics that needed to be thought through.
- A lack of connection to or interest in the particular topic.

- None, writers block doesn't occur because of an outside influence but because you can't find words to express what you are feeling.
- Stressful life plus health-related issues plus changes in social network plus receiving critical feedback; combination of factors
- Not having time.
- I had not planned well enough in advance, so I had to make up part of the story on the go.
- Internal things, rarely, if ever, external.
- All of the above. I have a harder time writing when there is high stress in my life.
- My second response would be change in writing routine but that is directly related to #2.
- busy promoting books #1 and #2--not time to write #3
- I believe writer's block is the writer's brain or gut telling her there's something wrong with the story.
- Bad experience with my last publisher.
- Reading a really good book and feeling like crap because I don't think I could ever reach that level.
- I don't know.

Answers for Part of Writing Process When Block Occurred

- It's difficult to sit and begin. Hardest part, regardless of any idea.
- I had the broad strokes of a story but was stuck on plot details.
- I usually experience what people might call writers block when I have failed to plan my stories sufficiently and know where I want to go in a story, but not how to get there
- Just don't enjoy it. Don't "feel" it.
- I was fixated on what needed to come next and could come up with ideas for everything except what I was stuck on.
- At first onset, it was easy to come up with ideas, but the writing lack the spark my novels use to have. Then it was easy to come up with ideas, but hard to know which ones to pursue because of the changing market, and my changing tastes as a reader. I no longer read romance novels, so I have no desire to write them. I've thought about starting a non-romance series, and I have a great idea, but I've lost my passion and drive. I feel no desire to dedicate the time and energy it takes to write at the professional level I wrote at for …. It's just gone. I was a professional artist before I sold my first novel, and now… I find myself eager to return to painting. That's where my creative passion lies now.
- I had ideas and felt I could most likely express them adequately, but I couldn't find the confidence that I was going in the right direction. I think I was paralyzed by fear that I was ruining my project by pursuing the wrong ideas.
- It was hard coming up with new ideas and the motivation to write.
- Ideas are not a problem. Words are not a problem. The writing can be. Writer's block is something different, something that can happen even when I have ideas and words. It's a getting stuck despite not because of.

- There comes a point where you feel you may have lost the spark of the original idea or come to doubt the idea was that good anyway. Revision process can also be a stumbling block.
- it was hard getting the overview I needed to put the book together
- It was hard to get past the fear that I was going to mess up the partial stories I already had in process. Mid-way panic.
- I knew what needed to be expressed but didn't know how to structure them or fit them into my existing project.
- The ideas flow, if it becomes hard to express, I work on a different project.
- write what I feel - edit later
- It had nothing to do with ideas. It was existential.
- It was hard to accept that the work was good enough
- I feel like there are points where I am able to develop content very well, but then hit a roadblock about how to sound professional and how to make them easily understandable for readers with different academic backgrounds
- Had ideas, wrote them down on notepad so they wouldn't evaporate. Reluctant to plunge into manuscript to work them in at appropriate gaps.
- Have ideas, know what to write, but procrastinate
- Making time to write
- Never had writer's block.
- couldn't come up with an ending for any of my ideas
- I found it hard to sit down and write as I was coming to the end of the novel and my mind kept telling me I wouldn't be able to live up to the expectation I had created with the rest of the book. So, my mind went blank.
- Ideas are never an issue for me but figuring out how to express them in words is the most difficult, especially in the beginning. Choosing ideas to pursue is a distant second.
- Totally debilitating; I felt like I lost my identity as a writer
- It was hard fleshing out the idea. The writing part is not nearly as difficult and time-consuming as the planning and outlining stages.
- It was hard to transition from where the story was at to where I needed it to go.
- I feel procrastination plays a big part. But I tend not to plan my work. Maybe, for me, this is what blocks me.
- With several directions the plot could take to reach the ultimate goal, I hit stammied at which path to take.
- difficulty organizing
- I believe writer's block is the writer's brain or gut telling her there's something wrong with the story.
- It's hard to articulate. I had lots of ideas, but they went everywhere and required too much to fix what came before. I felt like everything I had written was utter shit, and everything I wrote in the moment was also garbage.

Full List of Writer's Block Solutions

- Take a break from writing for a few days but less than a week.

- procrastinate
- Start again the next day
- Walking or driving
- Jump from the work on which I'm currently engaged to another.
- Keep trying to write
- Keep writing.
- N/A
- Meditate for five minutes
- I leave work in progress file tabs open so I can poke through a story and hopefully get an idea to continue working on it.
- Take a walk
- Stare at the page, reread what I wrote last, and try to make myself write more words on the scene
- Read
- Make a list, take some notes.
- Exercise/ movement
- writing till gibberish becomes useful
- Write for specific amount of time/pages
- Read
- Talk to a trusted writer friend
- Switch up locations or methods of writing - write using a pen, a typewriter, etc.
- I haven't had writer's block in a decade.
- Meditation yoga.
- Step away from the project. Let it rest and then come back and read it with a fresh outlook.
- Go on a walk
- Usually I get stuck for ideas to flesh out the plot, so I do more research about the subjects involved.
- take a walk; get up and move
- Schedule focused time
- Free write in journal, instead of computer
- I copy beautiful sentences that others have written, replacing the words with my own sentences.
- Wait it out
- Stop writing, decide tomorrow is another day, and walk away from the computer until the next day.
- freewriting
- Call my writing partner to wail, then strategize.
- Reading writing related books and magazines
- Run
- Crank up the jams
- I have to walk away from it for a while
- "Write the junk out" - type gibberish for a few minutes.
- If I can't think of anything to write, I move on to some chore or something else that needs to be done.
- I guess I am lucky that I have never experienced writer's block. I write to get the story out.
- Give up

- Ride it out
- Wait. Blocks develop from overwhelming situations.
- ignore writing altogether
- Internet searches of relevant topics
- Go for a walk.
- Get coffee
- Change to a different manuscript. I usually have two or three going at once.
- Get up and do something else.
- I read the work of authors I admire to become inspired.
- Stop writing and go for a walk to think about the place I am stuck on.
- Read
- Change scenery write in a different physical location.
- Go for a walk
- Don't write
- Do Pilates
- Take a break
- I go for a walk
- Walk away for a period of time and return when I'm feeling more motivated.
- Write in bullets rather than sentences
- Free writing
- I avoid writers block by.... organizing ideas, news items, etc. for future projects
- Go for a walk, exercise, or do some light housework.
- Read
- Watch/read/listen to news.
- Never had writer's block.
- Take a break.
- doesn't happen
- Read my manuscript from the start.
- Play a piece of music which has the feeling of the scene I want to create.
- Go and do something unrelated to writing.
- physical exertion
- Take a break and go outside/exercise
- Take a break, ideas will eventually come to me and it helps create some distance.
- Stop writing for a day
- Look at past articles to update or repurpose.
- Take a nap. I come up with a lot of ideas when I'm between sleeping and waking.
- do research
- Power through with free-flowing writing where the quality doesn't matter so I can edit later.
- Review notes from classes I've taken.
- Read a book.
- I work on something else. Something else might be more interesting or pressing to me, so that's why I can't focus on another thing.
- N/A
- Reread over the previous day's writing and revise a little so I can carry on from there.

- Try to do freewriting and stop focusing so much on producing something that has to be publishable
- Write ten th8ngs that wouldn't happen next.
- Go out and take a walk
- 1. Step away from it. Go for a walk, take a swim, anything but forcing myself to sit there and stare at the keys 2. Only allow me one break as stated above, then put butt in chair and write, even if it feels like crap.
- Allow myself to take a break
- changing to another work in progress
- I don't believe in writer's block
- Writing sprints (through a Facebook group). Someone schedules a writing sprint, often me, and I attempt to get several hundred words written in a half hour so that I can post my progress.
- Please see the previous comment.
- Agree with myself to write a specific amount, i.e., 100 words, one paragraph, or one page.
- Skip ahead
- do something else
- I write through it. (see previous answer for example.)
- talk with other writers about their experiences with writer's block.
- double my efforts next day
- Go do something else for a while
- Doing mundane chores
- Get up and walk around -- remove myself from the situation for a few minutes/hours. Come back to it if I have the time.
- Take a break from writing.
- Do research.
- N/A
- Review my outline and rewrite it if necessary
- Turn off the damn TV and turn on some music without words. (I love classical anyway.)
- Gamble. I said go to a hotel. I used to go to Vegas. For a week or more at a time. And read and write. There will be a point you can't do any more. When your brain is overloaded and you're guessing where the} goes. At that point, you can go down and completely turn off your brain and gamble. Just know you're losing money.
- Skip ahead to a different section
- Put away my computer and write longhand.
- Just write. Free writing.
- Drink alcohol
- Day drinking
- Write with friend in room (without sharing our work)
- Free write
- Do something totally PHYSICAL instead of mental, and away from a screen. I have to get my brain out of the unhelpful grooves I'm rolling in. Yard work, a hike, even sex can shake it loose.
- Edit work instead of trying to create something new.
- Read.
- Switching to another less demanding project.
- Talk through my plot/character dilemma with a close friend

- Put that manuscript aside and let it stew in my brain for a time while I work on something else. Later I may run across an idea for the writing I set aside and can start on it again.
- go to a space where I can be alone and quiet and undisturbed for as long as possible
- Avoid distractions
- Take a break
- I forget about the work I'm trying to do and write on prompts that are rich and suggestive.
- Write daily anyway, in a forced way
- Force myself to write to a certain page number
- do something else
- Stick to Morning Pages until something breaks loose.
- Switching to a different project idea.
- Take time away from the project
- Talk it out with colleagues
- I take long drives
- Edit what I've done up to that point, then continue writing from there.
- If I feel a piece is not going anywhere, I put it aside and come back to it later. Rated 5
- I guess I am lucky that I have never experienced writer's block. I write for me.
- Come back to it later
- journal
- Talk. Attempt to maintain or establish social contacts by explaining what's happening.
- edit older work
- Write on a hot topic in the world or my life.
- Read.
- Go for a walk
- Talk with critique partner.
- Driving and talking to myself
- I watch movies written by screenwriters I admire.
- Take a break and come back to writing the next day.
- Do something else
- Work on another piece.
- Read
- Write other things
- Take a shower
- Start something new
- I keep to my routine
- Going for a walk.
- Switch up what I'm writing about
- Writing something new
- I avoid writers block by brainstorming with my best friend
- Free write. By hand most effective.
- Take a walk or do the laundry or something
- Talk with others, ask opinion.
- Never had writer's block.
- Have a shower.

- doesn't happen
- Read beautiful writing in my genre
- Write a different scene.
- Read for a while
- social isolation
- Change my task so that something gets accomplished
- Write something else. Again, ideas will eventually come to me. This however can cause you to write things which could work to overcome your other problem, but it also distracts you from the block.
- Work on a different project
- Look on niche websites to see most views on articles.
- Walk my dog. I find being outside helps to clear my head.
- read another author I like
- Just resting the current project working on something else.
- Review previous scene
- Watch TV or a movie.
- Self-interrogation I will talk to myself and ask why something isn't working. Usually it's an issue with a character and I haven't figured out what they're thinking yet.
- Take a break and give myself some space from writing so I can recharge. Obviously, there was a reason I wasn't able to work and a week off can help.
- Try to do something else like listen to music or take a walk
- Tarot cards
- Call my critique partners
- Exercise
- taking a break
- I leave my Word doc open, close other programs, in order to have as few barriers to starting writing as possible.
- Take a brief break and go outside. Walk around a bit. Or go fix a cup of chai tea.
- Seek out character driven writing prompts.
- reread what I've written
- I read through what I've already written.
- I read my favorite authors.
- journal
- Switch to researching something relevant to what I'm working on
- Researching relevant or related topics
- Talk through the writer's block with my writing group.
- Read a good book
- Talk through whatever I'm having trouble working out with another writer.
- N/A
- Take a break
- Umm...I don't know, because I don't really actively work on eradicating writer's block; either something comes, or it doesn't and I'm not going to worry about it.
- Play video games. I love games. But they can also be a hindrance. If you play games you've played a billion times, they will be shower thoughts, or walks in the dark, or gambling. They will be mindless. Meditation works because it's turning off your brain, in a way. You don't have to get

in a yoga stance and chant. Taking showers works. In hotels, I would take so many showers my skin would dry out. Because it's relaxing and brainless.

- Brainstorm on paper or by voice memo
- Print out what you have and work with a hard copy.
- set timers (10- 15-minute intervals)
- Day drinking away from my partner and our kid
- Keep in mind I can always go back and fix it later
- Edit other stuff
- Get on FB and / or Twitters d check out writer friends and see what they've shared & posted lately. This can actually be a pretty practical tool; I've found great articles, exercises, and ideas this way.
- Write with no purpose, i.e. without a goal in mind but just to write out descriptions or voices or ideas.
- Edit something I write that's already complete.
- Resting my mind by reading or re-reading my favorite books.
- Waste time on the internet
- Don't have another one.
- have a deadline to deliver written work
- Have a plan or outline
- Read a book instead
- I try to stop thinking about the story I'm working on, and work on an older story.
- Sign up for a workshop/class/group
- Use "Omni writer", a software program that somehow helps me to continue putting words on the page
- read
- Take a break. Read something new. Walk. Hike. See a movie, a play, go to a museum.
- Watching TV
- Talk to friends and colleagues about the project
- Change tasks or get active for 20 minutes
- I read "trash"
- Work on a different story.
- … I write more for my enjoyment and the enjoyment of readers. This is the top reason I don't worry about writer's block.
- I guess I am lucky that I have never experienced writer's block. I write with abandon.
- Reread notes or drafts
- write a character sketch
- Read. It's productive in a period of unproductivity.
- pursue a different artistic endeavor
- Brainstorm
- Confide in close writing friends.
- Talk to someone about ideas
- Skip scene and move forward.
- Skipping ahead of the stumbling block.
- I watch the news hoping for inspiration.
- Create a more detailed outline

- Go somewhere
- Stimulate the brain in a different way, such as watching a movie or reading a story in a different style / genre.
- Play a video game
- Do work for hire or book marketing work.
- Take a nap
- Work on something completely different. For example, if I get stuck while working on a novel, I'll switch gears and do some work for one of my clients.
- I trust in the process and that ideas will come
- Immersing myself in the arts (museum, listening to singer/songwriter, reading a book, etc.)
- Take a break and go for a walk
- Creating a structure within the piece, notes to myself about what I want to say
- I avoid writers block by reading genres that are outside my comfort zone
- Procrastinate. (Social media, short fiction, video games.)
- Answer the question: What am I trying say? Let be a ramble or rant, just get something started. You can't edit a blank page.
- Begin to write and let the process shape the narrative instead of using narrative to express preconceived idea
- Never had writer's block.
- Read a book.
- doesn't happen
- Take a few days break
- Play previous chapters with text to speech.
- Plow through it.
- focusing on technical aspects of the process
- Force myself to write a draft just to get words on paper
- Ask for advice. See what other people think. While you usually won't use what they suggest their ideas can kickstart you brain.
- Hash things out with another writer
- Social Media
- Word sprints. They get me over the reluctance to put my ideas into words and it's a fun challenge.
- critique work of another person
- Taking a day off
- Revise a related scene.
- Do mundane chores.
- Changing perspective Sometimes the issue is that the story's focus is misplaced. I will focus on one character when I should be looking at another.
- Talk to friends about my story and get support.
- Try to switch up writing soundtracks or the device I'm using
- Read something in the same genre.
- Watch TV
- Read a book
- drinking coffee or snacking
- Rituals and triggers--I put on yoga pants, put on noise cancelling headphones, fix a cup of tea, etc. prior to writing.

- Try a different environment, like the library or a coffee shop (especially one I don't often frequent).
- Take a breath, break, walk around
- wait until later
- I read and critique for others in process.

Planning Style

- First, a very spare outline (bullet points) Second, a paragraph or page detailing each chapter-- basically narrating the action and dialogue ideas. Third, drafting the story, not necessarily in order of the scenes. As I write, I continually go back and revise the outline.
- write first them add structure later
- Some index card plotting, some free thought outlining, then write. At that point either it will go, or it won't.
- I do outlines by request of my publishers and have learned to love them. Although working without one on another WIP, although I have always plotted out the next chapter or two with a general idea where the plot is going.
- I usually have a general idea of where I'd like the piece, I'm working on to go, but am usually surprised by where I end up.
- All of the above. Outlines, almost always, but I'm not always able to stick to my outlines.
- Index cards and/or Post-It notes.
- I don't pre-plot, though I keep timelines and bibles for existing series. I write for discovery so it's more the second question.
- I experiment with my process regularly to see what works. Currently, I write a high-level overview of the story, then a fuller outline in prose form. After I have a full outline, I will usually break the story out into scenes before I start writing.
- What planning? It's all in my head and stuff works itself out as I go; I hate notes.
- LOTS of notes. Pictures. At least know the ending. Know big stuff in between.
- Outlines at the beginning organized by Acts; after starting, notes and sketches on paper, and voice memos on my phone during long commutes to talk things out to myself.
- I write novels using a general outline. Short stories are written as they come.
- Outline
- I always wrote a detailed outline before I started. That didn't mean I stuck to it, but it helped me know where I wanted to go.
- Some of all.
- I write without plan
- It depends upon what I'm writing. Nonfiction just comes, then I whittle down the truth. Fiction takes planning.
- Brainstorm on 3x5 cards. Mostly just write without planning.
- Sticky notes
- Most of the above & then some. Timelines, cards of events/scenes I can physically lay out & shuffle around, sketch books, notes in my phone, google doc folders full of pictures and articles & stuff that informs both my process and my project. My outlines tend to be partial and flexible.
- Mostly pursue storytelling not extensive planning.

- It depends. For the book, I'm required to have a proposal with chapter outlines. It is very research-based, so I type a TON of notes. Then I figure out my main themes in the chapter. Then I write in segments, interspersing the research with memoir. Then a LOT of revising. I did write a timeline for the first time recently and found it very helpful.   But I also believe in the organic process.
- List. Outlines. First line. A sentence. Read or edit what I've written and go from there. Just start. It depends on the project and where I am in the project.
- I have a fairly concrete outline and overall concept of the work before beginning to write but I am open to the serendipity of changes and transformations that happen as the work progresses.
- I write rough outlines and amend them as needed.
- I think on the idea for a time then suddenly start writing. When the first rough draft is done, I go back to revise and flesh out the plot and characters. Nowadays, it's only about halfway through the first draft then I start revising because I'm stuck in the sagging middle of two novels.
- prefer to write first and think later; will use timelines and data charts when things get complicated
- I use a rough outline for short stories. For novels, I outline and use a story board to map out the scenes and chapters.
- I write a long list of notes and thoughts first, braiding together my ideas, and then I begin to write. I don't really outline or make pictures or the sort.
- I do write outlines. I try to plan scenes, and then write the individual scenes out.   Oftentimes, the plan changes mid-draft, but it's good to have a plan going in. I do occasionally write without an outline, and I write the whole time white knuckling, scared shitless.
- Write & let the process carry me to the finish. I start with a kernel (an image or a spot of language) and discover as I go.
- Outlines. Also, timelines, but only for book-length projects. However, I rarely am able to stick to timelines, and end up writing for long stretches, under pressure, right before deadlines
- the process carries me. I don't divide between planning & writing
- Notes and process. In revision I map the work.
- Write and let the process carry me to the finish, though I am starting to get more into outlining.
- General outline serves as a guideline, not a blueprint, and the writing process is very organic. I am always willing to adjust to improve the story
- Outlines, dictate/transcripts, format, proof
- I write and let the process unfold. I edit as I go until it's what I wanted.
- I usually let the process carry it, as the characters will take over a lot of times, and better material than I'd planned results. For longer works, I'll do a timeline to make sure it matches the story arch.
- Many times, I will flesh out an idea in my mind. Sometimes I will outline a story. Always use character sketches which are usually done as the character emerges in the story. I find each character and his or her description must fit the personality, and the personality needs to fit the overall story as does the character itself.
- I just write. If I have ideas that don't flow like I want I write anyway and rearrange at a later date. The whole point is to get the ideas on the page to begin with.
- Both
- a combination. I might start with an outline, but it always changes
- Each project is different. I use whatever tools are needed to complete it.
- Outlines and timelines. Rough sketch overviews of movements and scenes

- I let the process carry me to the finish.
- Free writing, character sketches, later in the process I outline
- Brief outline then let the process lead me.
- I do both, depending on the project. Typically, I write scenes and let the process carry me and then pause to outline, then go back to scenes. And so on.
- Depending on the project, I will either divide or conquer a section at a time, if applicable. If I am doing design work, I will draw out abundant the document to look.
- I usually start with character descriptions and get a rough idea of the plot, then dive in.
- I am firmly in the pantser (or organic, as I heard someone else call it) camp.
- I have a combination of spreadsheets and mind mapping.
- I follow a loose spread sheet - kind of like the one JK Rowling created for Harry Potter.
- Outlines and timelines
- Timelines usually.
- Pantser. Use outline after writing has begun to know where the holes are
- Rough simple flowcharts / outlines, general ideas.
- I've used outlines in the past, but most of my work is done by simply diving in and seeing where it goes. I often pound out a rough draft and then do an outline before heavily revising.
- I use outlines.
- Outline. Scene list but often lets the story go where it needs
- I nearly always outline for NF and anything work-related. For fiction, I tend to just write.
- I begin at the beginning and end at the end unless required by an editor to submit an outline first
- To do lists and single tasking.
- I keep a file of notes and let the process carry me to the finish once I start.
- For a feature article, I'll usually go back through my interview notes and highlight important concepts. Then I'll write out each important concept on a piece of paper and order them in a way that makes the most sense. Then I write using this as a guide.
- In the absence of an assignment and deadline, I write until the story is told.
- Basic idea, then write. Most of the story is revealed through writing. I usually stop around halfway and make some plans for the second half.
- I spend 50% of my time and effort on the first 25% of the piece, no matter how long. The first chapters are disproportionately important to readers. They should be able to read the first 25% and the last 10% and have it made sense. The middle is the fun of being along for the ride. Once the beginning is set, I have momentum and the tone, priorities and logical flow are set and I just go on.
- Unless it's a very short piece of work, I will always write a skeleton draft first, & plan each paragraph.
- Reported work: lots of paper lists and a whiteboard workload/deadline calendar. Fiction: lots of paper outlines and noodlings, and I've been using Scrivener to break this down and organize work into a more coherent outline with manageable chunks.
- If it's a reported piece I "chunk it out" meaning I know what my subheadings will be and that helps me shape the piece as I write my draft. Then I let it sit and go back to it before my deadline to make sure it's tight.   If it's an opinion piece I write it out (usually feels like a rant or emotional vomit) then I let it sit and come back to it later that day or the next morning and really challenge it with more focus and purpose and possibly data and anecdotes.   regardless of writing I live the

rule Let It Sit - never fire off something you just wrote even if it's a timely op-ed. Take a deep breath and put a few hours between the column and submission.

- Write, and let piece evolve. MANY times, a column has changed from what I thought I was going to write in the process of checking facts and learning a new one that changed my perspective.
- Rough outline and then plough through.
- No structured plan; I write out of order, a snippet here, a snippet there, and then fill in the gaps.
- outline, timelines, character info
- outlines, pictures, timelines
- I write and let the process carry me to the finish line.
- I use outlines to plan and timelines since I write historical fiction.
- planning (use the whole toolbox)
- I alternate between planning and writing. Sometimes after a first draft, I will reverse outline and then adjust.
- I write whatever I think about and try to figure out what the story is. After I have a general idea I then slow down and outline my full story before I continue writing.
- Very rarely plan. I may sketch a general idea/synopsis, but typically I write whatever comes out - team pantser.
- Write and let the process carry me to the finish.
- Outlines, timelines, a lot of Post-it notes
- I used to write and edit and let the story evolve along but this process never got me to the finish, so I switched to writing a first draft and an outline with a solid beginning, middle and end. This works much better for me.
- I write a skeleton script which can be seen as a first draft, so I have the structure and then I keep editing and adding details to it.
- Storyboards and islands. I seem more blocked when attempting to write in chronological order
- I plan out an idea in my head and then I write. I follow the characters where they lead even if they take me off the planned course.
- I outline on larger projects (novels, 50,000 plus words). For short stories and novellas, I haven't really bothered except for maybe a few notes scribbled on random sheets of paper which get discarded once I've put that particular idea into the story.
- Outlines, always.
- I try to brainstorm and create at least a basic outline before the first draft, then let the story lead me, then come back and restructure the outline before starting revisions.
- I use outlines, I draw mind maps on paper, and I do character sketches. In the past I've been way too detailed with this sort of thing. Now I try to have a brief sketch and to plan ahead before each writing session, so I don't get stuck, but motivation is still a huge issue.
- Index cards.
- I usually just start writing and get my ideas down. Then I go back and revise. For longer works, I bullet point out a sequence of events.
- I'm mostly a pantser - I go where the story takes me. I do keep a list of interesting events or scenes that I would like to incorporate into the story.
- Plan?? I'm a pantser. But I sometimes talk with my partner about the work and ask him questions about my character's. "Why would _____?" "And why would _____?" He comes

up with reasons and they are good. He also says I need to plan out the book. Together, we got it figured out, and it's still difficult to know how the second chapter should go.

- I outline, have character sketches and timelines
- I have a basic outline and a character schematic, but often I have to make changes to the outline from comments or suggestions from my book coach.
- Mild outlining that tends to change as I write
- I am a pantser--I write as the flow comes
- I plan my work using scene cards as defined in the Lisa Cron book STORY GENIUS.
- I don't outline, but I do jot down notes when they come to me. I envision the next scene, or the next several scenes, but don't write down anything other than notes and tidbits of dialogue. I've tried timelines, outlines, character sketches, etc., and none of those techniques bring the story "alive" for me.
- I use an outline like this.   Opening set up/MC in natural world: Initial Challenge: Reaction/choice she makes: Mini Crisis/New Goal: Edge of Adventure/working toward a new goal: Point of No Return/ fully commits to new goal: Complications/testing & stakes raised: Despair/major setback: Transformation/pulling herself together to face final obstacles: Climax/faces final obstacle: Resolution/ outcome of final confrontation:
- I use generalized plot points based on the Heroine's Journey, though I am very interested in both Lisa Cron's and Jennie Nash's approaches. Detailed outlines, flowcharts, etc. (listed in the question) will stop me in my tracks and paralyze me. Writer's block.
- Outlines, character bios, timelines, a journal with other thoughts, even a doc entitled "working notes" for other things I need to look out for.
- just writ, then develop outline and plan
- I am a plantser, lol. I do not outline, but I mentally plan. Then I write and let the story come.
- I let the process carry me