

# Writing Strategies

**Stuck? Just can't relate?  
Procrastinating?**

**Want to get an A?**

# Stuck?

It happens to everybody sometimes.

- Freewrite. Set a timer, and just start writing (or typing). Begin with “I’m really stuck because \_\_\_\_\_” and don’t stop writing until the timer goes off.
- Go back to your reading or class notes, and begin by writing about one idea or piece of information you find. Once you have written about it, then describe how it relates to your paper.
- Create a graph or map of the ideas and information you are working with.

# “I don’t understand the assignment.”

If you have a written assignment from the professor,

- Reread it. Rewrite the assignment in your own words. If you have time, talk with the professor to see if you have paraphrased it correctly. Tutors in the writing center can also help you.
- Highlight any words that indicate the kind of thinking you are being asked to do: explain, analyze, describe, apply, demonstrate, predict, identify.
- Look back in your class notes and find times when your professor did the same kind of thinking. When did she explain, or analyze, or apply, or predict? How did she do it? Use her presentation as a model.
- What materials are you asked to use? Data, original sources, library research, interviews, class notes? Get these materials out and choose two or three specific details you can work with.

# No written assignment?

- Look at other course materials for information about the kind of work the professor requires.
- The syllabus may state “course goals;”
- Lecture notes may indicate the kinds of work the professor is expecting.
- On a Blackboard site, look under “course documents” and “course information” for handouts or supplements that explain what the professor is looking for.

Talk with the professor after class or in office hours.

1. Choose a verb: explain, analyze, describe, apply, demonstrate, predict, identify.
2. Ask “in our papers, were you hoping that we would analyze \_\_\_\_\_ in terms of \_\_\_\_\_” or “apply \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_”?
3. As soon as you can, write down what the professor said, so you will have the instructions with you later.

# “I tend to procrastinate.”

1. Give yourself small assignments. Instead of “today I will write a 5-page paper and get an A,” say to yourself “today I will write down everything I can think of about one important idea in my paper,” or “today I will write about three specific details I plan to include in my paper.”
2. Write informally for 20 minutes each morning. Then collect everything you have together and choose the best parts to revise into a finished paper.
3. Write a bad first draft. Get something on the page, and then make it better bit by bit.

# “This writing has such a strict format that I can’t say what I really think.”

Lots of college students have this experience.

Try writing about it.

You might start to see some relationships between the two sides of the chart.

Experiment with different writing “voices.” Write the way the professor talks. Write like Jon Stewart imitating the professor. Write like another student who talks a lot in class.

This will give you more flexibility as a writer. You may not want to keep writing this way after the class is done, but you might pick up one or two strategies you want to add to your repertoire.

I think I’m supposed to say. . .

But I really think. . .

My professor keeps saying. . .

But I just wonder whether . . .

The assignment says. . .

But I want to write about. . .

# “I just can’t relate to this material.”

Many students find that if they ACT interested, they actually GET interested. Try acting interested, and you can find a way to relate to the material.

When people are interested they:

- Ask questions
- Immerse themselves
- Try to solve mysteries

Try doing these things, and you will find yourself relating to the material. You may find a new interest.

“I have always gotten good grades on writing before. . .”

Writing in college is discipline-specific. Sociologists do not write exactly like philosophers or nurses. Writers need to use the language of the field they are studying. This is confusing for people (like students) who frequently move from one field to another.

Try new things in your writing. Experiment and play around. The more ways you have to write, the more options you will have in your future as a writer and a thinker.



# ALL professors value. . .

Professional-looking work, sentences that flow, and correct spelling and punctuation.

1. Do not proofread on the computer screen.
2. Print out a copy of your paper. Read it out loud to a friend. Read the sentences out of order.
3. Check issues you know tend to crop up for you, whether they involve apostrophes, homonyms like its/it's, or sentences that get tangled up in the middle. Then go back to the computer to complete your final edits.

# Student Success Centers

**For more information on being a successful college student contact the Student Success Center.**

**119 Payson Smith Hall, Portland  
780-4040**

**119 Bailey Hall, Gorham  
780-5652**

**119 Lewiston-Auburn College, Lewiston  
753-6500**

**or e-mail: [studentsuccess@usm.maine.edu](mailto:studentsuccess@usm.maine.edu)**

**Student Success Advisors are available to help you.**