



Writer's Block and Getting Started

A writer's block is the feeling of being unable to write. It is different from writer's cramp, which is stiffness of the hand caused by writing for a long time. Three different kinds of block have been diagnosed: physical, procedural and
 5 psychological (Smith, 1982). Beard and Hartley (1984:258) have neatly summarised the main differences:

Physical blocks occur when the writer is tired and it just becomes too much of an effort to continue. Procedural blocks occur when the writer cannot decide what to write
 10 next. Psychological blocks occur when the words should come, and could come, but the writer cannot bring himself or herself to let the words appear on the paper.

One of the main difficulties in writing for native speakers of English is the process of 'getting started'. A questionnaire was sent to academics at a university in England and one in
 15 Canada by Hartley and Knapper (1984:158). They posed the question 'What do you like least about writing?' A common response was: 'Writing the first paragraph'. Hartley and Knapper commented that 'Almost every respondent confessed
 20 to experiencing writer's blocks'.

If writing the first paragraph presents difficulties for native speakers of English, the problem for non-native speakers of English must be at least as great. This was confirmed by Jordan (1993:75) who conducted a survey by questionnaire of
 25 overseas students studying at a British university. Based on their experience in their own countries when writing an essay, 67% of the students admitted to having difficulty in starting.

Various suggestions have been made to overcome the
 30 problem of 'getting started' in writing. One fairly common one is to begin by simply jotting down ideas or notes on paper (Hartley and Knapper, 1984; Northedge, 1990). In other words, to get what you want to say down on paper as quickly as possible. 'Editing, polishing, changing, resequencing and
 35 the like can be left until later. At this stage it does not matter if sentences are incomplete.' (Beard and Hartley, 1984:253)

References

- Beard, R.M. and J. Hartley (1984: 4th ed.). *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. London: Harper and Row.
- 40 Hartley, J. and C.K. Knapper (1984). Academics and their Writing. *Studies in Higher Education*, 9(2).
- Jordan, R.R. (1993). Study Skills: Experience and Expectations. In G.M. Blue (Ed.) *Language, Learning and Success: Studying through English. Developments in ELT*. London: Macmillan,
- 45 Modern English Teacher and the British Council.
- Northedge, A. (1990). *The Good Study Guide*. Milton Keynes: The Open University.
- Smith, F. (1982). *Writing and the Writer*. London: Heinemann Educational.

- 2 Below are various references, quotations, notes and pieces of information on the topic 'Plagiarism and its history'. Write an account of this, making appropriate use of what is provided. Acknowledge the use of sources and list the references correctly at the end, as in the example above.

Plagiarism and its History

To plagiarize = to take words, ideas etc. from someone else's work and use them in your work, as if they were your own ideas.

(Taken from the 3rd edition of *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, 1995, published by Longman Group Limited, Harlow, Essex.)

Tom McArthur (editor) noted in *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* in 1992, published in Oxford by Oxford University Press: The origin of plagiarism – from the obsolete noun 'plagiary' = a 'kidnapper or a kidnapping, theft or a thief of ideas' – from the Latin 'plagiarius' = a kidnapper or literary thief.

First recorded use of 'plagiary' = late sixteenth century. 'Plagiary' and 'plagiarism' appear in the eighteenth century dictionaries of Nathaniel Bailey and Samuel Johnson.

Plagiarism may be unintentional – unawareness of English-speaking academic conventions – acknowledge all sources . . . many study guides etc. give advice, examples, and ways sources cited.

e.g. Waters, M. and A. Waters – *Study Tasks in English* – 1995 – Cambridge University Press

L. Hamp-Lyons and K.B. Courter – *Research Matters* – Cambridge, Massachusetts – Newbury House in 1984

I. Leki, 1989 – *Academic Writing* – St. Martin's Press, New York

Article by T. Lynch and I. McGrath (Teaching bibliographic documentation skills in *English for Specific Purposes*, Vol.13 No.3, 1993) – clearly sets out format re bibliography – shows different layout for books, journals and other papers.