

Writer's block sometimes afflicts everyone who ever writes, and much like a batting slump, can be difficult to overcome. Experience suggests that writer's block arises from internal conflict, in mundane cases such as whether to organize treatment of a subject conceptually or temporally. More fundamental cases stem from an inchoate ambiguity in the writer's mind about what he thinks he's trying to convey. It sounds silly, but it is not unknown even in writing a STEM paper to realize that the salient point of the completed research actually differs from the original purpose in undertaking it.

So how to break through these invisible but formidable impediments? One way that can be useful is simply ... to write. If you don't know what to write, write that. Just keep writing. Write what's troubling you about writing. Don't stop; just write out your stream of consciousness. Pixels are cheap. Don't worry about any production values: awkward syntax, poor style, undue iteration, anything. Do not stop to look up anything, either. If there's some detail that will need to be inserted later, just write a marker for it. (Time magazine writers used to use "TK" for something "to come," the logic being that that would jump off the page at any proofreader, or spellchecker should the writer overlook it later.) Most definitely do *not* guess at any such detail, such as a date, because the better the guess, the harder it is to identify it as such.

Nowadays in the computer era, it's especially easy to implement this suggestion by way of speech recognition. Suppose you have to write a 20 page document, and find the prospect daunting. How long would it take to read the same document out loud? Maybe 20 minutes? It can be very ... comforting, liberating ... to realize how quickly this task could be accomplished. Dictate a page or two of therapeutic ruminations, thrash out the conflict, then get on track, and later go back and delete the scaffolding, as it were.

Part of the power of this method is that those of logical and ordered turn of mind will tend to speak the same way, and so oftentimes the resulting document (once cleaned up a bit from misrecognitions, etc.) features a powerful exposition.

An excellent book on this method is [here](#).