



# Writing Barrier Buster

Use this Writing Barrier Buster Worksheet to help pinpoint your student's barrier, then brainstorm specific solutions that can help them bust through that barrier, and review how well the chosen solution worked for them.

This worksheet is designed with the flexibility to be used any time your students come across a writing barrier, because a tool that works for one writing assignment may not work for another. Included:

**Barriers and Busters** lists help you and your students brainstorm ideas. You may share the lists or use them yourself during brainstorming discussions.

**Writing Barrier Buster Worksheet** guides your students through a clear, step-by-step path:

1. Discover the cause of the barrier
2. Brainstorm solutions that can help
3. Choose a concrete path to follow
4. Rate its effectiveness afterwards



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There are many reasons why writers of all ages struggle to get their thoughts and words onto a page, including writer's block, difficulty getting started, and embarrassment over grammar or spelling errors. Even professional writers use a variety of tools to get past these barriers.

This list of common Barriers and time-tested Busters, including related Tech Tips, can help you create your own unique toolbox of writer's tricks that will set you on the path to writing with confidence.

### Barriers

#### Many writers struggle with:

- **Getting initial thoughts down on the page.** A blank page can feel overwhelming.
- **Spelling or grammar errors slowing down the process.** Embarrassment or frustration can derail the flow of writing and ideas.
- **Illegible handwriting or slow typing.** Students can stumble when their writing or typing is slower than their thoughts.
- **Difficulty organizing thoughts.** Trying to write without a plan can feel disjointed and frustrating.
- **Perfectionism.** Wanting their first draft to be a perfect final draft can be a barrier to even getting started.
- **Feeling watched.** Feeling watched or judged can make any writer self-conscious. Few writers want an audience while they write.

### Busters!

#### Break Through Writer's Block

- **Free flow writing:** Set a 10-minute timer and write without worrying about spelling, grammar, sentence structure . . . just let it flow. Don't stop, or even pause, until time's up.
  - *Tech Tip!* **Focus apps:** Keep your focus by removing digital distractions with an app that blocks notifications during your dedicated writing time. Even better, leave your tech in another room and write on paper!
- **Brainstorming:** Jot down whatever ideas come to you: words, phrases, descriptions . . . just get them out of your head and onto a page, you'll sort through them later.
- **Word bank:** Make a bank of words, ideas, or phrases you'd like to use in your writing without the stress of creating full sentences or paragraphs.
- **Blank line:** Rather than get stuck on a specific word, draw a blank line (\_\_\_\_\_), skip over it, and keep on writing. That way you'll remember to come back to think about it later and don't need to stop the flow of writing.

## Snap Out of It

- **Change of space:** Give your brain a refresh by moving to a new room or place to write. Even try writing outside!
- **Switch it up:** Try switching from writing on lined paper to blank paper. Writing with a softer graphite pencil, a colored pencil, a smooth ink pen, or felt tip can change your mindset. Write on a small stack of pages or notebook as a cushion instead of a single sheet of paper.
  - *Tech Tip!* **Digital switch:** Type instead of writing by hand. Try different writing programs to see which is most comfortable for you.
- **Talk it out:** Discuss your ideas with someone. Speaking your ideas out loud will help organize your thoughts and can show you a new direction to take.
- **Try a scribe:** Dictate while someone else writes or types.
  - *Tech Tip!* **Voice dictation/Speech-to-text:** Record your speech to write or type later, or let technology be your scribe.

## Get Organized

- **Graphic organizer:** Visually lay out your ideas, research, and quotes in a way that works for you.
- **Outline:** Plan out your essay or writing by dividing your page into the number of paragraphs or chapters, then write a brief description of each part. Leave yourself space to add additional details as you think of them.
  - *Tech Tip!* **Outlining apps:** Choose an app designed to help organize your notes and thoughts.
- **Notecards:** Write one idea/subject/theme on each card, making it easy to rearrange and lay them out. Some authors plan entire books this way.
  - *Tech Tip!* **Digital notebook:** Store your brainstorm notes and ideas in digital form, to easily copy and paste into a writing program.

## Gain Confidence

- **Judgement-free first draft:** You'll edit it later anyway, so don't stress how your first draft looks, how words are spelled, grammar, anything!
  - *Tech Tip!* **Digital editing/grammar checkers:** Plan to run your writing through a digital editing or grammar checker so you don't have to think about it now.
- **Your own space:** Give yourself the freedom to write without an audience. You could move to a more private location, set up a privacy partition on your desk, or even turn your back towards a wall.
  - *Tech Tip!* **Digital space:** If you use a shared digital document for writing, ask for time to write on your own, and then let your instructor or classmate know when you are ready for their input.
- **Research:** Take some time to research your topic, setting, or time period, so you have enough information. It's difficult to write about a topic you don't know enough about.
  - *Tech Tip!* **Works cited:** Keep a digital record of your citations and references with a program designed to organize and correctly format them.

## Plan Ahead:

- **Give yourself time:** Chunk assignments into smaller, bite-sized segments, and spread them out over several days or weeks. This can also give you some mental space to edit your work after a break, and allow you to read it with fresh eyes. Writing under a looming deadline can squash creativity.
- **Practice:** Write something for yourself, without deadlines or even plans to share it. Like any other skill, writing takes practice, so find something you are interested in and write!
  - *Tech Tip!* **Typing practice:** Typing well takes practice too, so try using some fun, interactive programs to practice typing.
- **Read:** One of the best ways to become a more confident writer is by reading! Fiction, non-fiction, articles, novels, historical texts, and poetry, everything you read adds to your vocabulary and helps you become a more experienced and creative writer. Find something that interests you, and dive right in!

Believe it or not, everyone needs some help with their writing at some point. A blank page, worries about spelling or grammar, too many ideas, or too much freedom can all make writing feel hard. Writers can struggle with different aspects of the writing process at different times, and a solution for one barrier might not work for every writer, every time.

Using this worksheet can help you build up a variety of tools in your writer’s toolbox, which can help you get past those issues more easily each time.

**Let’s figure out what’s causing the struggle, think of some ways to solve it, and then try one out!**

**Barriers!**

**1. What’s your struggle?**

Example struggles:

- Getting thoughts on a page
- Spelling or grammar errors
- Illegible handwriting
- Organizing thoughts

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**Busters!**

**2. What might help?**

Example solutions:

- Free-flow writing
- Judgement-free first draft
- Speech-to-text
- Graphic organizer

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**Try This!**

**3. Which specific tool do you plan to try this time?**

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**How’d It Go?**

**4. Rate how well this tool worked for you this time. (Circle one)**

This was easy to use:	<i>Not really</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>This is great!</i>
It reduced my frustration:	<i>Not really</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>This is great!</i>

I’ll add it to my writing toolbox:    Nope     Maybe     Yes!