

A Technical Writing Handbook for Creative Writers:

A Guide to Overcoming Writer's Block

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ABSTRACT

Writer's block is a real problem that affects both novice and experienced writers. Among its many causes, there are those intrinsically linked to the writing process (Rose, 1984). The key to understanding writer's block lies in differentiating the writing processes of fluent writers and blocked writers. Research conducted during the literature review for this capstone project shows that fluent writers tend to have skills related to strategic planning (Rose, 1984; Butch & Kitsch, 2014:), flexibility (Flower & Hayes, 1981), and audience awareness (Flower, 1979; Rahmat, 2016). These three skills are habitually used in the field of technical writing. Effective technical writers employ flexible writing processes, require writing for multiple audiences, and plan actively and accordingly (Balzotti, 2018). The digital handbook designed in this capstone project aims to equip creative writers struggling with writer's block with technical writing tools related to strategic planning, audience awareness, and flexibility.

Keywords: writer's block, creative writing, technical writing tools, fluent writers

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INTRODUCTION

For almost two decades I struggled with writer's block, especially when taking on a creative writing task. Writer's block is still a lingering struggle. The difference is that now I realize that I am equipped with writing-based techniques to confront it. The realization that I can overcome writer's block by applying non-creative writing techniques to my creative writing process, came during the Summer of 2021.

It was mid-June and I had started writing a novel. I was reflecting on how to include a flashback scene in the story. I remembered an elective course I had taken during the Masters of Science in Professional Writing (MSPW) Program called *Business and Organizational Storytelling*. I fondly recalled this elective course, for it had equipped me with creative writing techniques that I often used in my professional writing tasks. It was then that I had my revelatory moment. I realized that if creative writing techniques could be used in professional writing, it seemed plausible to reverse engineer this process. In other words, it seemed like a good idea to apply non-creative, professional writing techniques to aid my creative writing process. Consequently, I experimented by borrowing paraphrasing techniques from technical writing, and user personas from information architecture, and applying them in my creative writing process. By the end of August, I had produced a 20,000-word first draft of a novel.

This background story on using information architecture and technical writing strategies to address my creative writing block motivated the preliminary research for this thesis project.

By visiting online discussion forums, I found that the most frequently mentioned struggle among writers is writer's block.

The upcoming section of this thesis project corresponds to the Problem Statement. This section explores the connection between the misconception of the creative writer and their experience of writer's block. Its intention is to portray writer's block as a real, global, and current problem. The Problem Statement concludes by proposing a solution to writer's block in the form of the thesis product.

Problem Statement

Notions of writer's block are blended with the myths that surround the creative writer and their work. Writer's block is often overlooked or viewed with skepticism. This may be a natural consequence of the many myths that surround the craft of writing. Misconceptions range from the perfectionist myth that idealizes the prolific writer as the lone genius, to that of creativity being an unavoidable consequence of epic struggle (Rettig, 2011, pp. 219, 243).

Having such notions regarding creative writing and writer's block made sense in the early to mid-1900s. In 1908, Sigmund Freud wrote an essay describing the creative writer as a "strange beast" (Kaufman, 2010). Some forty years later, a psychiatrist named Edmund Bergler, who claimed to never have seen a "normal" writer, coined the term "writer's block." Bergler treated writer's block as a condition involving mental issues (Acocella, 2004).

A recent study where 70 undergraduate students were surveyed on their writing process found that the majority associate writer's block with an inability "to produce a consistent flow of ideas" and a lack of "motivation or inspiration to write" (Wimmersberg, 2015, p. 35). Yet, as Janzer (2016) states, the creative writer's work depends on much more than the "idealized stroke

of inspiration which is [but] one short, fleeting part of the creative process. [In reality], the creative process extends well beyond the moment of inspiration” (Janzer, 2016, p. 62).

Writer’s block is a struggle familiar to both novice and experienced writers. According to Moore (2018), writers experience blockage in the following three different forms. The first form consists of an inability to write despite having a strong urge to do so (p. 351). A publicly known example of this form of writer’s block is J.K. Rowling who admitted to struggling with writer’s block while rewriting the ninth chapter of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Trombetta, 2018). The second form of blockage occurs when a writer experiences only being blocked in a specific genre. For instance, Samuel Taylor Coleridge who was prolific in his journalistic writing struggled to write in his preferred genre, poetry (Flaherty, 2004, as cited in Moore, p. 351). The third form of writer’s block is not a blockage in the conventional sense. It is a feeling of dissatisfaction with the writing process and the written product. Franz Kafka is said to have struggled with this form of writer’s block since he is said to have burned 90% of what he wrote (Batuman, 2010, as cited in Moore, 2018).

Although Anthony Burgess (1973, as cited in Acocella, 2014) refers to the notion of an “American literary block,” what is certain is that writer's block isn’t limited to a single region or language. *Syndrôme de la page blanche* and *la panne de l’écrivain* are French terms that refer to blockage struggles (Moore, 2018). Writer’s block is also a reality among Spanish-speaking writers (Phinney, 1991, as cited in Castillo, 2014). Furthermore, Lee and Krashen's (2003) study reveals that Chinese college students experience writer's block related to premature editing and failure to develop strategies, regardless of whether they composed in English or in Chinese.

Writer's block is a real, complex struggle that is more than a lack of inspiration. It is experienced by novice and experienced writers alike. Writer's block is also a global struggle.

Studies have shown that writer's block is not limited to writers of a certain region or who speak a certain language. This thesis project aims to develop a digital product that will help creative writers overcome writer's block. Literary devices and storytelling tools are currently being used in business writing. This thesis project borrows this notion of applying techniques from one field of writing to another. In other words, the thesis product intends to provide technical writing tools to aid creative writers struggling with writer's block.

Inquiry Questions

As a result, the development of the product designed for this thesis was guided by the following inquiry questions:

- How does the Technical Writing Handbook for Creative Writers provide credible content?
- How does the Technical Writing Handbook for Creative Writers satisfy readers' need for new content on writer's block?
- How does the Technical Writing Handbook for Creative Writers keep content interesting and relevant at the same time?
- How does the Technical Writing Handbook for Creative Writers acknowledge that it may not be the right solution for every blocked writer?

Product Purpose and Project Expectations

This product design thesis has two main expectations. Its first expectation is to produce a thesis report that is worthy of backing up the relevance and necessity of the designed thesis product. In relation to the thesis product, it is expected to be a practical and accessible tool for fellow creative writers.

The original aim of the thesis product was to offer professional writing tools as aids to the creative writer's block. However, it was concerning that *professional writing* is perceived as a confusing term within the writing community. Schrijver & Leijten (2019) found in their study that professional writing has diverse connotations. For example, Couture (1992, as cited in Schrijver & Leijten, 2019) uses professional writing to signify "technical writing" as an opposing field to "administrative writing." Bathia & Bremner (2014, as cited in Schrijver & Leijten, 2019), give "professional writing" a broader scope, using the term to refer to various types of professional communications. Margaret Atwood (2004) uses the term professional writer to refer to all writers who write as a profession, including novelists like herself (p. 363). Thus, so as to avoid ambiguity, the thesis project altered its focus from *professional writing* to *technical writing*.

Writers in the field of technical writing are highly valued for their multiple skills. Technical writers require skills to meet the needs of multiple audiences, adapt to different kinds of documents, and manage multimodalities within the same document. Additionally, writers in this field must adapt to the variations in pace and time of both their audience and the potential technical changes they are writing about (Killingsworth & Gilbertson, 1986).

In summary, the thesis product proposes a digital handbook that provides technical writing tools to aid creative writers in their struggle with writer's block. The following Literature Review section provides background research on the main approaches to writer's block, the difference between fluent writers and blocked writers, and an overview of technical writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

When discussing writer's block, terms such as "resistance" (Thorn & Bohannon, 2020), "writing apprehension" (Boice, 1993), and "procrastination" (Clark, 2016) are used as synonyms. This may cause confusion when trying to find ways to overcome writer's block. For this reason, in the context of this literature review, writer's block is best defined as "the inability to begin or continue writing for reasons other than a lack of basic skill or commitment" (Rose, 1984, p. 18). This literature review takes a solution-oriented approach towards writer's block, through its three main sections.

The first section begins with an overview of the affective and cognitive causes of writer's block. The second section of this literature review examines how fluent writers and blocked writers approach their writing processes differently. It begins with a brief overview of the stages of the writing process. Then, this second section identifies the three common skills that differentiate fluent writers from blocked writers. These skills are audience awareness, flexibility, and strategic planning.

Finally, the third section of the literature review aims to identify solutions to cognitive causes of writer's block within the field of technical writing. This section begins by exploring the historical background of technical writing. Then it determines how technical writers use audience awareness, flexibility, and strategic planning in their writing tasks. Lastly, this third section concludes by identifying connections between technical writing and creative writing.

Two Main Approaches to Writer's Block

Research in composition shows that writer's block is a multifaceted problem (Baker-Brodersen, 1988). A recent survey involving 146 fiction and non-fiction writers revealed that the four most frequent causes of writer's block are physiological, motivational, behavioral, and cognitive (Ahmed, 2019). These causes are commonly classified into two broad approaches: affective (Boice, 1990) and cognitive (Rose, 1984).

Boice's Emotional Causes of Writer's Block

In the mid-1980s Robert Boice examined more than five thousand recordings of writers thinking aloud during their writing sessions. Through this study, Boice found seven emotional themes experienced by writers with high and low levels of writer's block. These themes are work apprehension, procrastination, dysphoria, impatience, perfectionism, evaluation anxiety, and rules (Boice, 1985, as cited in Ahmed, 2019). In later years, Boice (1993, as cited in Moore, 2018) ranked the six most common emotional causes of writer's block. These affective causes of writer's block are (1) internal censors, (2) fear of failure, (3) perfectionism, (4) trauma from bad writing, (5) procrastination, and (6) mental health disorder. The following paragraph briefly explains each of these causes.

Boice (1990) explains that *internal censors*, the first most common emotional cause of writer's block, is commonly known as a writer's "internal critics" (p. 8). The second most common emotional cause is *fear of failure*. Boice associates fear of failure with writing apprehension and writing anxiety (p. 9). The third common emotional cause is *perfectionism*, which is defined as "wanting to produce something better than what is usually published" (Boice, 1993, p. 29). However, Boice (1990) denotes that some studies approach perfectionism as a writing problem independent of writer's block (p. 10).

Regarding *procrastination*, the fourth most common cause of blockage, a survey on students reveals two types of procrastinators. The first type responds to fears of failure (evaluation anxiety, perfectionism, and low self-confidence). The second type of procrastination was due to the students' aversiveness towards the task of writing (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984, as cited in Boice, 1990). As for the fifth common emotional cause, writer's block may originate from a negative early experience, such as from classroom trauma (Boice, 1993, p. 26). Finally, Boice mentions *poor mental health* as the sixth most common emotional cause of blockage, which he associates to a writer's writing habits (p. 27).

Rose's Cognitive Causes of Writer's Block

While Boice's studies focused on the emotional causes of writer's block, Rose studied the cognitive variables that influence writer's block. Rose (1984) defines the cognitive approach as "a sometimes reductive but sometimes illuminating study of the way we deal with information and solve problems" (p.12). He states that there are six cognitive variables causing writer's block that are manifested when writers face complex writing tasks. These six causes are rigid rules, misleading assumptions about composing, premature editing, poor or inappropriate planning, conflicting strategies, and inadequately understood evaluative criteria (p. 10).

Studies reveal that Rose's cognitive causes of writer's block are directly related to difficulties found in the writing process. The most frequent causes of blocking that appear during the composing stage of the writing process are premature editing (Rose, 1984), incremental planning, and working with inappropriate rules that slow them down (Baker-Brodersen, 1988, p. 50). A more recent study shows that students working in a classroom environment experience writer's block related to teachers' expectations, poor writing strategies and skills, difficulties with complex tasks, and attitude towards writing instruction (Adams-Turkiendorf, 2008, p. 1).

Concordantly, Rose's most successful study reveals that blocked undergraduates "were all operating either with writing rules or with planning strategies that impeded rather than enhanced their composing process" (Wimmersberg, 2015, p. 35). Although it's been more than three decades since the publication of their studies, Boice and Rose's studies are still the most relevant and prominent approaches to writer's block.

Recent Interpretations of Affective and Cognitive Approaches to Writer's Block

Before the early nineteen-eighties, writing teachers used to consider the origin of writing difficulties of their students to be primarily one of expression. However, in the early nineteen-eighties, due to the kinds of struggles observed in their students, writing teachers began embracing the cognitive approach to writer's block (Bizelle, 1983, as cited in Baker-Brodersen, 1988).

More recent studies reveal an array of perspectives and labels used to classify writer's block. Yet, there is a consensus acknowledging its two main approaches, affective and cognitive. According to Moore (2018), there are two broad, interconnected impediments between a writer's creativity and their ability to produce satisfying work. The first impediment is the writer's "incomplete problem-solving process," which occurs during their writing process. Such impediment could manifest as a struggle to come up with the plot of a story or find a rhyme in a poem. The second impediment is "emotional interference," in context to which Moore cites Boice's six affective causes of writer's block (p. 351).

For Kaufman (2002) the two major categories that affect creative writers are internal forces and external forces. He suggests that internal variables (e.g., intrinsic motivation, instability, impulsivity) are more relevant influences than external variables (e.g., environment) in the development of a creative writer (p. 27). Emphasis on this distinction is key in order to

separate emotional causes from cognitive causes, which are linked with the intricacies of the writing process.

Herring (2016) classified blocks into writer-in-progress blocks and work-in-progress blocks. Herring states that writer-in-progress blocks are connected to the writer's feelings and beliefs (p. 44). On the other hand, work-in-progress blocks relate to the issues of the writing product, like issues with structure and plot (p. 48).

In summary of this section, by examining these two opposite approaches to writer's block, it is plausible to situate writer's block in the context of the writing process. On the one hand, there is writer's block caused by elements external to the writing process, associated with emotions. Such causes include fear of failure, anxiety, and perfectionism. On the other hand, there are types of writer's block directly linked to the internal aspects of the writing process, which are associated with cognitive causes. Such causes relate to steps within the stages of the writing process, such as, planning and editing.

This literature review has a solution-oriented approach towards writer's block. For this reason, the next section takes on a cognitive focus based on the notion that the act of writing requires two sets of cognitive processes. The first is a linear, routinary process associated with decision-making. The second cognitive process is inclined to creativity, which involves the writer's ability to combine unrelated ideas in new ways (Kaufman, 2009, as cited in Ahmed, 2019, p. 12).

As an additional conclusive thought, regardless of their differences, Rose (1984) and Boice (1990) both acknowledge that writer's block is complex and multimodal. In this sense, Rose suggests it is necessary to first determine if the blockage experienced by a writer is "rooted in some complex emotional reality or social conflict" before searching for cognitive causes of

writer's block (p. 14). Similarly, Boice recognizes working to improve writing skills as an effective antidote to writing problems (p. 123).

Understanding the Distinctions Between Fluent Writers and Blocked Writers

This second section of the literature review aims to comprehend how fluent writers and blocked writers approach the writing process. This section begins with a basic overview of the three stages of the writing process, as an attempt to familiarize with the writing scenario. This is followed by an overview of the studies that show how fluent writers and blocked writers approach different stages of the writing process. Finally, this section concludes by identifying and exploring the three key skills that distinguish fluent writers from blocked writers.

Stages of the Writing Process

In the context of the writing process, it is important to consider writer's block in relation to its three basic stages, prewriting, writing, and rewriting. Although these are not rigid stages within the process, they are the stages most writers go through (Murray, 1972). Beginning the writing process with an understanding of these stages or subprocesses, helps determine how fluent writers navigate through these stages. In this context, Murray (1985) states that "experienced writers refuse to leave on a trip through a draft without a map. The map may be in the head or on paper, but the writer needs a sense of destination" (p. 223). In consensus, Moore (2018) denotes that, "not all writers have been formally taught, but all must go through some version of the inner process in order to write" (p. 354).

Fluent Writers versus Blocked Writers

The key to overcoming writer's block may come from understanding how fluent writers compose (Baker-Brodersen, 1988). As Flower and Hayes (1980) conclude in their study of the

Rhetorical Problem, “good writers are simply solving a different problem than poor writers” (p. 30). In this context, studies in brain activity of creative writers reveal that novice and expert writers use different parts of their brain during the creative writing process. Ernhalde et al. (2014) found that even before writers begin drafting, inexperienced and experienced writers show activities in different regions of their brains. For instance, when brainstorming, novice writers show activity in the visual center, while experienced writers’ brains show activity in the region involving speech.

Studies from the 1970s and 1980s identified patterns in how fluent writers write in comparison to struggling writers. Baker-Broderson (1988) suggests that fluent writers rely on intellectual skills (p. 19). These early studies identified patterns in writers’ skills related to planning (Flower & Hayes, 1980), audience awareness (Flower, 1979), and the degree of flexibility/rigidity applied when approaching rules (Rose, 1980). In support of these early studies, subsequent studies examine how fluent writers and struggling/blocked writers differ in their planning, audience awareness, and flexibility in their writing process.

Planning

Planning is defined as the predetermination of a course of action aimed at achieving a goal (Hayes & Roth, 1979, as cited in Haas, 1989). Bereiter and Scardamalia (1982, as cited in Haas, 1989) use the terms knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming to differentiate the planning strategies of novice and expert writers. Similarly, Hayes and Flower’s (1986) study finds that extended planning and drafting time is linked to increased text quality.

In Butch and Kitsch’s (2014) study, 56 undergraduate psychology students were observed in the prewriting, drafting, and revision stages of their writing process. This study found that

when writers are aided by content prompts and rhetorical prompts before they begin their writing process, they tend to invest more time in planning and drafting. Consequently, the time spent in the prewriting stage can be reflected in the quality of the text produced by these writers.

Conversely, a lack of a plan for their work may lead to a writer abandoning their work prematurely due to a lack of ideas (Ahmed, 2019). For this reason, it is necessary for writers to plan strategically. Similarly, Mcphee (2013, cited in Castillo, 2014), who refers to the writing process in journalism, suggests that having a preplanned structure eases the stress of writing and results in a better organized and flowing article.

According to Rose (1984), the problem is “not simply that students don't know strategies, it's that some of them don't truly understand the planning process. They learn a pattern, but not the mental operations the patterns represent (p. 108).

Audience Awareness

Flower (1976) values audience awareness in her study on writer-based and reader-based prose. When a writer uses writer-based prose they write for themselves. Conversely, writers who use reader-based prose are those who deliberately attempt to communicate something to the reader (p. 19). Flower suggests that “good writers strive for reader-based prose from the very beginning: they retrieve and organize information within the framework of the reader/writer contract” (p. 34).

In a more recent study on writer's block, Rahmat (2020) states that good writers analyze their audience before they begin their writing process (p. 4). Moreover, a previous study by the same author examines how audience awareness affects undergraduates during their research writing. This study found that students who were taught to focus on their audience became more aware of the different stages of their writing process (Rahmat, 2016, p. 94).

Flexibility

One of the earliest researchers approaching the lack of flexibility as a problem for struggling blocked writers is Mike Rose. As previously mentioned, a rigid approach to rules is one of the causes of cognitive writer's block (Rose, 1984). As part of his paper *Rigid Rules, Inflexible Planning*, Rose interviewed ten UCLA students on their composing process. The study found that blocked students seemed to depend on inflexible rules and plans which are inappropriate when composing (p. 30). Thus, Rose concludes that "rules about grammar, about process, about style, about form should not be taught as dicta" (Rose, p. 104).

Research on writing suggests that students who are perceived as strong writers demonstrate flexibility in their writing style (Snow, Allen, Jacovina, Crossley, Perret & McNamara, 2015, p. 40). This is related to strong writers' ability to effectively maneuver a variety of subtasks while generating text (Flower & Hayes, 1981, as cited in Snow et al., 2015). Moreover, "skilled writers do not simply reuse language or linguistic features in multiple writing tasks, instead, they assess each writing situation and adapt accordingly (Graham & Perin, 2007, as cited in Snow et al., p. 43).

Wallace (1987) states that "most composition teachers realize that even fluent writers may be blocked because they cannot find the right approach to a particular subject" (p. 33). In other words, fluent writers can overcome writer's block by changing their approach. This means that good writing is an ability, or a set of abilities, that are eminently teachable (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

This section of the literature review concludes on four positive notions. First, all writing processes go through roughly the same stages of the writing process (Murray, 1972). Second, writer's block is a reality for experienced, inexperienced, fluent, and struggling writers (Wallace,

1984). The difference is in how writers prepare for and approach blockage when it occurs. Third, fluent writers struggle less than blocked writers because they approach the writing process with strategic planning, audience awareness, and flexibility. Fourth and finally, skills required in overcoming writer's block are acquired through learning (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

Technical Writing

This third and last section of this literature review explores the field of technical writing where writers must be actively flexible, audience aware and plan strategically. This section begins with an overview of technical writing as a field. This is followed by a brief explanation of how technical writers apply audience awareness, flexibility, and planning in their writing tasks. And finally, this section concludes with studies that correlate technical writing with journalism and creative writing.

The History of Technical Writing

Wright (1987) states that "technical writing is cognitively more complex than nontechnical writing because it merges with the general design and management skills" (p. 377). To better understand this statement, it is necessary to explore the history of technical writing. Today technical writing is a respected profession with many colleges and universities offering solid degrees in technical writing. However, this was not always the case. (Robinson, 2020).

In the late 19th century, technical writing existed as a knowledge-sharing medium exclusive to engineers and scientists (Longo, 1997). However, after World War II engineers and scientists were required to focus on improving the efficiency of technology. Consequently, the responsibility for the production of engineering knowledge shifted from engineers to specialized technical writers (p. 61). At this time in history, technical writing instruction transitioned from

the sciences to the liberal arts (p. 63). In practice, technical writing became a separate practice from engineering (p. 65).

As technical writing evolved, so did its conception of the audience. In the nineteen-sixties and seventies, audiences were grouped organizationally by job function or by their level of experience. Then, in the nineteen-eighties and nineteen-nineties, influenced by cognitive psychology and social construction, technical writing treated its audience as doers, learners, and collaborators. Today, "technical communicators often move back and forth through these various approaches to the audience" (Houser, 1997, p. 156).

In summary, today technical writing is more inclined to engineering than to writing disciplines that traditionally belong in liberal arts. Nonetheless, technical writing exists independently as a profession with its own associations and journals (Robinson, 2020, pp. 264 - 265). Technical writing's historical background puts it in an interesting position among the fields of writing. In other words, technical writers are hybrid equipped with knowledge familiar to scientists and engineers, and the writing instructions familiar to creative writers and journalists.

Flexibility, Audience Awareness and Strategic Planning in Technical Writing

Technical writers are required to be flexible on multiple levels, such as, in adapting to different document formats, using different style guides, foreseeing the needs of various types of readers, and working with multimodal documents. In the early eighties, Hendry (1985) foresaw the usefulness of flexibility in technical writers. "Using flexible, multi-operational plans and strategies will not only help technical writers produce effective prose but also help them contend with time and money constraints" (Hendry, 1985, p. 81). In technical writing there is no single, universal approach that guarantees success, requiring technical writers to develop a diversity of skills. (Wright, 1987).

Balzotti (2018) perfectly summarizes how flexible approaches, audience awareness, and strategic planning are skills actively used by technical writers:

Effective technical writers must learn to employ informed and flexible processes for writing and speaking, including finding or creating ideas about which to write, collecting evidence and essential data, planning, and drafting, editing and proofreading, and designing or presenting a message meant for specific readers. All of this requires technical writers to analyze different aspects of audience, purpose, and context to convey information clearly and efficiently in written, oral, and visual media (p. 1).

Technical Writing in Relation to Other Fields of Writing

This subsection of this literature review overviews studies that suggest applying technical writing to other fields of writing. For instance, Olson (1989), an English and journalism professor at Bartlesville Wesleyan College, contemplates the resourcefulness of applying a technical writing technique for her students. Olson states that journalism students need guidelines in how to analyze audiences and need to know that their audience may influence their writing style. She claims there is an oversight of audience awareness within news writing.

In contrast, technical writing instructors offer detailed instruction on the topic (Olson, 1989, p. 3). For example, Houpp and Pearsall's (1988, as cited in Olson, 1989) technical writing textbook provides its readers with the types of audiences and how each affects the content, organization, and writing style of the writer. In summary, Olson concludes that "using technical writing teaching methods and literature could help news writing students learn to consider their readers (p. 6).

Moran (2009) suggests a connection between engineers and creative writers. He reveals that a handful of acclaimed writers were formerly engineers. Such writers include Fyodor

Dostoevsky, author of *Crime and Punishment*, Nevil Shute, author of *On the Beach*, and L. Sprague Decamp, author of the *Conan and the Barbarian series* (p. 1). This is also true of current American novelists and poets who were previously engineers before becoming novelists and poets.

Moran's (2009) study serves as a basis to hypothesize that by borrowing writing techniques used in technical writing, creative writers are sure to improve their writing skills to the extent necessary to face writer's block. In summary, the examples illustrated by Moran and Olson both seem to suggest that a background in engineering knowledge and technical writing is beneficial for writers in other fields. On the one hand, technical writing may provide better audience awareness to journalism students. On the other hand, Moran identifies a pattern in engineers who have become published fiction writers. This seems to suggest a positive influence of technical skills on creative writing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are various ways to approach writer's block. The two main approaches in the study of writer's block are the affective approach and the cognitive approach. This literature review focuses on the cognitive approach due to its direct correlation to the writing process. This literature review examined the writing process based on how fluent and blocked writers approach it differently. It was possible to determine three skills that characterize fluent writers: strategic planning, audience awareness, and flexibility. These three skills are used in technical writing, a field of writing that has influences in engineering and liberal arts.

In response to this literature review, the product developed for this thesis project is a digital handbook creative writers can use to aid blockage experienced at different stages of their writing process. The conclusions of this literature review confirm the resourcefulness of

technical writing. Consequently, the thesis product aims to provide technical writing tools in strategic planning, audience awareness, and flexibility, to help blocked creative writers.

The main section following this Literature Review section is the Methodology section. This Methodology section aims to serve as a descriptive guide through the developmental stages of the thesis product.

METHODOLOGY

This Methodology section is divided into four main subsections, Needs Analysis, Design Implications, Product Description, and Limitations. The Needs Analysis subsection describes how data was collected and analyzed in order to determine if there is a need for the thesis product. This is followed by the Design Intentions section that explains the main goals for the thesis product. Next, the Product Description subsection provides a detailed explanation of the thesis product, by using the mockup of the product found in Appendix C. Finally, the Limitations subsection discusses the challenges observed in designing the thesis product.

Needs Analysis

This Needs Analysis is divided into two sections. It begins with the Data Collection subsection which provides a brief detail of the research for this thesis project. This is followed by the Data Analysis subsection which examines the strengths and weaknesses of similar products and consequently determines if there is a need for the thesis product.

Data Collection

This subsection briefly explains the stages involved in the data collection for this thesis project, and consequently for the development of the thesis product. Appendix A assists this section with visual aids to clearly explain each data collecting on stage.

Research for this thesis project was conducted online via a search of user-based opinions of related and similar products. Instead of visiting popular platforms like Facebook and Twitter, data was collected from slower-paced platforms like Reddit, Quora, and Goodreads. Markel (2016) acknowledges the usage of online discussion boards as quick sources of practical advice

(p. 124). He states that successful communicators visit discussion boards to gain insight into new ideas (p. 8). In these selected platforms, user opinions seemed to be more constructive, argumentative, and varied.

Once Reddit, Quora, and Goodreads were identified as the source platforms for data collection, research began based on Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA). QCA is a research method used to systematically interpret and describe the meaning of qualitative data (Schreier, 2012, p. 1). This research method seemed to be appropriate for this thesis project, especially for its usage of patterns and themes. The data collection for this thesis project used keywords to search for patterns and themes.

The first level of research aimed to identify books similar to the thesis product. Guided by a premade keyword searching criteria (see Table A.1. in Appendix A) the objective was to compile a varied but relevant list of similar products (handbooks on writing). Such similar products include creative writing books and books written exclusively on writer's block.

Different selection criteria were used for different sources (see Tables A.2. and A.3. in Appendix A). For instance, creative writing books were selected based on their role in aiding writers and on whether they approached writer's block. However, books on writer's block were selected based on whether they provide writing advice as solutions to writer's block.

The second level of data collection aimed to identify the resourcefulness of similar products. Thus, the main source was Goodreads, the world's largest book review website. Goodreads book reviews of similar products were read in search for patterns and themes related to similar products' strengths and weaknesses. Table A.3. in Appendix A compiles quotes and paraphrases of the more frequent types of reader reviews of similar products.

Data collection also took place by examining the content of similar products. The list of books on creative writing and writer's block that were read in search for relevant themes can be found in List A.1 in Appendix A. were read in search for themes related to the thesis product. Themes related to the thesis product include: (a) the usage of writing tools to aid writer's block; (b) the usage of planning, audience awareness, and flexibility to aid writer's block; and, (c) the usage of technical writing tools in creative writing.

In summary, a combination of concept-driven and data-driven strategies were used during the data collecting stage of this thesis project. The subsection that follows intends to interpret the data that was collected.

Data Analysis

The general aim of this section is to analyze products that are similar to the thesis product. This data analysis section seeks to determine similar products' approaches to writer's block, and their strengths and weaknesses. Thus, the terms "similar products" and "books" are used interchangeably when referring to books on creative writing with insight on writer's block, and books written specifically on writer's block.

This subsection examines the limitations and strengths of similar products. It also analyzes the most recommended and most similar products with the intention of identifying qualities worth borrowing in the design of the thesis product.

Similar products and their solutions to writer's block

Findings from the data collection reveal that around 60% of the books on creative writing refer to the subject of writer's block. Regarding books specifically written on writer's block, an estimated 60% provide writing tools and advice as solutions. The rest of the books on writer's

block provide non-writing solutions based on psychology, neurology, spiritualism, productivity, and motivation.

From similar products that offer writing-based solutions, this study found more than 30 types of writing-related suggestions to overcome writer's block, as detailed in the following pie graph. According to this data, the most frequently mentioned ways to treat writer's block are freewriting, writing prompts, and writing exercises.

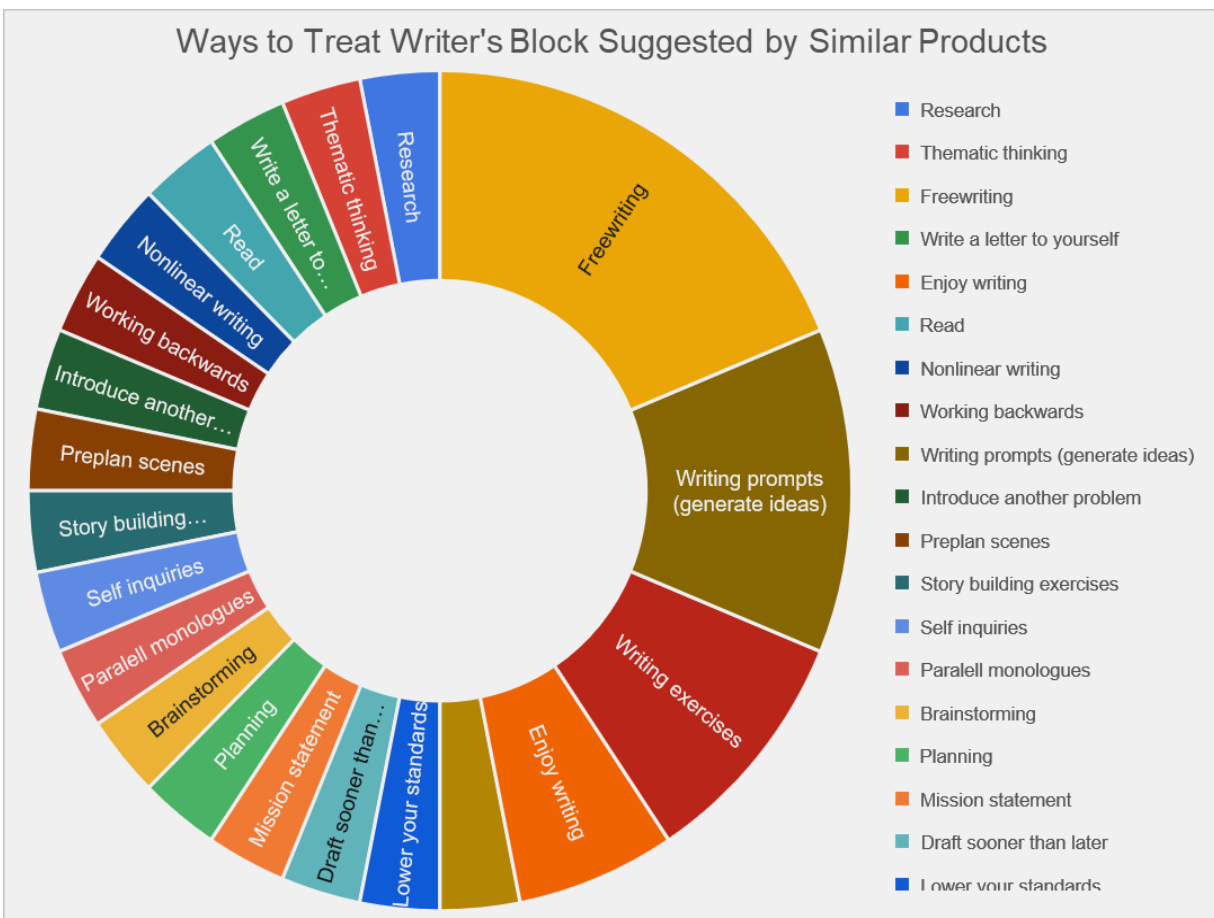


Figure 1: Types of solutions to writer's block suggested by similar products

Similar products and their limitations

Through reader reviews on Goodreads, this thesis project found that although a technique is recommended by several books, this fact alone does not guarantee its effectiveness. For

example, Anne Janzer's *The Writing Process* provides techniques in freewriting, generating ideas, and productive writing habits. Many reader reviews on Goodreads described its content as *repetitive*, and a *validation of existing material* (see Table A.4. in Appendix A).

Break Writer's Block Now! by Jerrold Mundis and *Conquering Writer's Block* by K.M. Weiland received similar criticism. Reader opinions for these books include "reminders of well-known strategies" or "not offering anything new"(Goodreads, 2021). In fact, criticism for offering “no new content” was the most frequently found weakness in similar products.

The following table paraphrases the limitations readers encountered in similar products.

Weaknesses found by readers in similar products	
Too close to home On the surface it succeeds, but offers nothing new Most advice is what I already know Advice found in blogs Much of it is common sense	No new content
Lack of depth Uses unfamiliar examples (e.g. Star Wars) Expected help on writing, instead got self-help Most advice is for novice writers Repetition of content throughout the book Doesn't deliver what was promised Use of stereotypes (considered offensive by readers)	Unhelpful content

Figure 2: Two-column matrix paraphrasing the limitations observed in reader reviews of similar products

The first block in this two-column matrix paraphrases the most frequent opinions left by Goodreads book reviewers. The second block compiles patterns of discontentment expressed by readers. In summary, the fact that a technique or tool is frequently mentioned does not guarantee its effectiveness. On the contrary, it could be argued that when a technique is repeatedly mentioned in various books, readers perceive it as unhelpful. In order to identify the strengths found in similar products, the subsection that follows analyzes the most recommended products.

Strengths found in similar products

Interestingly there was one book that was consistently appreciated and recommended across all researched three platforms, Quora, Reddit, and Goodreads. This book is Stephen King's *On Writing*. Moreover, it was the subject of discussion on almost every Quora and Reddit discussion group on *helpful books for creative writers*.

No other similar product was as consistently appreciated. For instance, Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird* and William Zinsser's *On Writing Well* were mentioned in most Quora and Reddit discussions. Yet, upon examining reader reviews on Goodreads, it was found that opinions on whether these books are helpful, varied considerably. On this note, this needs analysis section encountered a surprisingly significant finding related to the value of moderation in humor and in a conversational tone.

All three writers, King, Lamott, and Zinsser use humor in a conversational tone in their work. However, this needs analysis found a pattern of readers expressing discontentment with Zinsser's sense of humor and Lamott's voice as a writer. This difference in narrative styles can be observed in how Lamott and King each describe dealing with writer's block.

Lamott (1995) begins by empathizing with the blocked writer. For instance, she describes the experience of being blocked by stating, "we have all been there, and it feels like the end of the world. It's like a little chickadee being hit by an H-bomb" (p. 181). Instead of seeing writer's block as a block, she associates it with feeling empty. Consequently, as a method of overcoming writer's block, Lamott's advice is to write a page on how much you hate writing (p. 182).

Similar to Lamott, King begins his approach to writer's block by narrating his own blocking experience. This occurred during the time he was writing his novel, *The Stand*. King (2000) recalled being 500 pages into writing the novel when he "didn't know what to write".

King describes being unable to find a way to continue writing for weeks. Based on this experience, King advises using thematic thinking as an aid to writer's block (p. 206). He suggests beginning with writing the story and then letting it progress into themes (p. 208).

Similar product most like the thesis product

Among the examined products related to writer's block, *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer* by Roy Peter Clark appears the most similar to the thesis product. Clark (2006) believes "a writer's goal is fluency" (p. 9). Through his book, he proposes a writing toolkit to help writers gain proficiency and fluency (p. 11). Clark reveals that the writing tools he shares are those he collected from books on writing, work experience, and from teachers and fellow writers. This honest revelation of the consulted sources provides a sense of reliance on the product.

Clark's (2006) book offers various tools similar to those that the thesis product. These include techniques on how to read for content and form (p. 272 - 274), and a section on blueprints that is related to helping writers with planning (p. 155 - 249). Yet what significantly differentiates Clark's book from the thesis product is in their approach to treating writer's block.

Similar to King, (2000) Clark (2006) proposes a solution to writer's block based on a single technique. Clark states, "the so-called "writing block" is a product of some kind of disproportion between your standards and your performance" (p. 261). To avoid or overcome writer's block, Clark suggests a writer should lower their writing standards (p. 262).

In conclusion, based on this research it is understandable why King (2000) and Clark's (2006) books on writing are well received by readers. Both texts seem to have at least the following two key positive traits in common. First, both these authors build their advice based on personal experience, told using a narrative tone that is enjoyable to read. Second, both King and

Clark don't lightly mention a technique. They provide background knowledge in addition to follow-up examples and complementary writing advice. The table below paraphrases the strengths Goodreads reviewers found in similar products. Many of these strengths are those that characterize Clark and King's works.

Strengths found by readers in similar products	
Concision Simplification of complex ideas Practical advice The notion of a writer's toolbox Easy to understand Enjoyable narrative style Encouraging Honest approach to writing	Qualities appreciated in books about writing
Writing techniques supported by research, examples and exercises Learned more about developing the writing process Writing advice supported by relatable examples	Aspects readers associate with resourcefulness

Figure 3: Two-column matrix paraphrasing the strengths observed in reader reviews of similar products

Needs Analysis Conclusions

This Needs Analysis subsection concludes on three reflective notions. First, a lack of new content is the biggest weakness in similar products. On this note, readers have complimented similar products that provide a different approach to using known techniques. Second, in relation to how effectively similar products approach writer's block, single approaches to writer's block do not seem to satisfy readers. For example, readers criticized similar sources that offered too much information on neurology, motivation, or spirituality (see Table A.4. in Appendix A). Overall, readers expressed a need for balance and combined aid for their writer's block. For example, readers appreciated how King and Clark's works balanced writing advice with research and examples drawn from personal experience.

Third and finally, there is currently no similar product offering what is proposed by the thesis product. In other words, it is safe to conclude there is a need for a product that offers creative writers a solution to writer's block based on building skills familiar to technical writers. The following Design Intentions section states the priorities that need to be considered in the thesis product.

Design Intentions

Guided by findings from the Literature Review and from conclusions drawn in the Data Analysis, this subsection determines the following three intentions of the thesis product.

Design Intention 1: Inform on the Complex Nature of Writer's Block

First, the literature review acknowledges the complex nature of writer's block. Researchers from opposing approaches to writer's block (affective and cognitive) recognize the validity of treatments from both approaches (Boice, 1990; Rose, 1984; Moore, 2018). Furthermore, Boice (1990) conducted a year-long experiment on college professors who were experiencing writer's block. His study found that applying a combination of motivational, psychological, and writing help was the most effective way to treat writer's block (p. 19).

The thesis product intends to inform its readers of the complex nature of writer's block. The goal is to help its readers identify the right approach for the type or types of writer's block they are experiencing. This intention aims to be accomplished in the Introductory section of the thesis product.

Design Intention 2: Prioritize Strategic Planning, Flexibility, and Audience Awareness

The literature review also found that fluent writers have three skills that help them avoid and overcome writer's block. These three skills are audience awareness, strategic planning, and

flexibility. These skills also happen to be frequently used in the field of technical writing. Consequently, the thesis product intends to offer technical writing tools focused on helping creative writers build skills in audience awareness, flexibility, and strategic planning. This is intended to be accomplished in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 of the thesis product.

Design Intention 3: Repurpose Commonly Known Writing Tools

Third, the data analysis subsection of this thesis project found that the most common limitation readers observed in similar products is that they provide content readers already know (see Figure 2 in the Data Analysis section). This thesis product intends to avoid this by providing a technical writing angle to writing techniques that may already be known or familiar to the intended audience.

Freewriting, for instance, is one of the most common writing techniques suggested in similar products. When suggesting a well-known technique like freewriting, the thesis product aims to go beyond offering what readers already know. In other words, the product intends to explain how it is used by technical writers. Immediately following this explanation, the product intends to suggest ways to use freewriting to build flexibility skills as creative writers. This is the intended structure for every writing tool suggested in the thesis product. The section that follows illustrates how these intentions were incorporated in the design, structure, and content of the thesis product.

Product Description

The product developed for this thesis project is titled “A Technical Writing Handbook for Creative Writers: A Guide to Overcoming Writer’s Block.” Due to the wordiness of the product’s name, hereinafter it is referred to as “the handbook”, “the Technical Writing Handbook”, or “the thesis product.” Likewise, for the purpose of avoiding confusion, the target

audience of the thesis product will be referred to as “blocked writers” or “readers.” This Product Description section provides an overview of the handbook's design decisions, content, and structure.

Design

Regarding its presentation, the Technical Writing handbook is an electronic book (eBook) that intends to be available on multiple electronic devices. According to research, the preferred format used for eBooks is electronic publication (Epub) over PDF. This is due to most electronic reader (eReader) apps (except for Kindle) being compatible with ePub (Harman, 2018). For this reason, the product aims to be formatted and available as an ePub document.

In its attempt to provide navigability the handbook takes into consideration the strengths found in similar products (see Table in Data Analysis). This is reflected in its use of single color-coded headings, a uniform sans serif typeface, and balanced use of white space, throughout the whole document (see all Figures in Appendix B). The Table of Contents was kept concise in its wording and layout to help with navigability (see Figures B.2. and B.3. in Appendix B).

Additionally, the handbook aims to have a professional but friendly appeal to its readers. Following the examples of similar products written by Stephen King and Roy Peter Clark, the handbook incorporates narrative elements and attempts to use a friendly, semi-formal tone.

Content

The Technical Writing Handbook consists of a “How to Read this Handbook” introductory section, three chapters, and an Appendix. The “How to Read this Handbook” section, provides a guide to approaching writer’s block and on how to read the book to meet their needs. The second, third, and fourth sections make up the chapters of the book. Each chapter contains tools related to Strategic Planning (Chapter 1), Flexibility (Chapter 2), and Audience

Awareness (Chapter 3). The last section of the handbook is the Appendix which contains complementary material (recommendations of other books on writer's block and style guides).

The "how to read this handbook" section

Writer's block is experienced differently by every writer. The "How to Read this Handbook" section helps blocked writers identify their struggles and understand the different ways to use the handbook.

This section begins by informing on the complex nature of writer's block. This is followed by the 'Writer's Self Evaluation.' It then concludes with a step-by-step guide of what to expect from the Technical Writing Handbook.

The *Writer's Self Evaluation* is the key element of this section. It was developed by comparing the studies by Rose (1984), Boice (1990), and Ahmed (2019). The evaluation's primary intention is to help blocked writers identify their type or types of writer's block. It also encourages the blocked writer to reflect on their current writing situation based on where they write and what they write about.

In the "Beyond What You Know" section, the handbook explains that many writers limit themselves to writing what they know, when in fact they should write what they find interesting. The difficulty to generate ideas being a common writer's block struggle, this section encourages exploring the genres and themes that interest them.

Upon taking the "Writer's Evaluation," there may be blocked writers who identify their cause of blocking to be from external factors (emotional, environmental). For these types of blocked writers, the handbook provides the Appendix section which includes a list of books on psychology, motivation, and writing books best suited towards their needs.

Chapters of the handbook

The tools detailed in the Table of Contents were selected after revising through the technical writing books detailed in List A 2. in Appendix A. The most consulted resources were: *Technical Communications* by Mike Markel, *Technical Writing Essentials* by Jon Balzotti, and *The Microsoft Manual of Style*.

The handbook has three chapters, one for each of the three main skills that characterize fluent writers, strategic planning, flexibility, and audience awareness. By skimming through the Table of Contents (see Figure in Appendix B), readers are able to determine a technical writing tool in relation to one of these three main skills. Readers can also navigate through the handbook with ease, guided by the color code on the top of each page.



AUDIENCE-AWARENESS

Figure 4: Screenshot exemplifying the color-coded heading from the thesis product

The following provide an overview of each chapter and a brief example of how one writing tool is presented in each chapter.

Chapter 1: Strategic planning provides technical writing tools to help blocked writers improve their planning skills. As detailed in the Table of Contents, these tools include progress reports, researching techniques, wikis, note-taking, and reading strategies.

An example of a technical writing tool that can help improve a creative writer's planning skills is Note-Taking. This handbook provides insight into how technical writers take notes of

abstract ideas. Additionally, it exemplifies how technical writing involves active strategic planning in stages as early as during data collection/research.

Chapter 2: Flexibility provides technical writing tools to help blocked writers build flexible ways to approach their writing process. These technical writing tools include freewriting, information evaluation, templates, Microsoft's principles on style and voice, and design thinking.

This chapter exemplifies technical writers' flexibility skills, by examining how they use templates. Being able to adapt quickly to multiple templates requires flexibility skills. This chapter explains how technical writers identify good templates from bad ones, and the considerations they take when drafting templates.

Chapter 3: Audience awareness provides technical writing tools to help blocked writers build flexible ways to approach their writing process. These technical writing tools include cross-culture communications techniques, style guides, audience profiles, and Microsoft's guidelines for testing jargon.

The subsection that follows provides a complete sample of *Style Guides*, a technical writing tool that is part of this chapter (also available as part of Appendix B).

Structure

This subsection uses visual aids to illustrate how each writing tool within each chapter is structured. To guarantee navigability each section on writing tools used the same basic structure. As detailed below, each section begins with an explanation of how the tool is used by technical writers. This is followed by tips on how to use it within the creative writing process. It then concludes with a detail of the sources mentioned in the section.

Technical Writing Tool

- How technical writers use this tool
- Suggestion on how to use this tool in the creative writing process (illustrated through hypothetical scenarios, in context to stages of the creative writing process)
- Consulted Sources

Figure 5: Content screenshot informing on the structure of the sections on technical writing tools

Based on this template, the following is an example of how Style Guides, a technical writing tool in Chapter 3 of the handbook, is structured. The section begins with an explanation of the technical writing tool.

AUDIENCE-AWARENESS

Style Guides

How technical writers use style guides

A style guide is an instructive document that provides a standard procedure to achieve uniformity when drafting a document. Technical writers use various types of style guides, ranging from general ones like the *Chicago Manual of Style Guide*, to brand guidelines like the *Netflix brand guidelines*.

Figure 6: Content screenshot explaining a technical writing tool

This is followed by suggestions on how this tool can be used by creative writers.

How creative writers can use style guides to build audience-awareness

Technical writers require mindfully considering the cultural variables that come into play when preparing a document for audiences from unfamiliar backgrounds. According to Mike Markel, communicating effectively is challenging because technical writers write not for a culture, but for people who may come from one or various cultures.

Markel doesn't suggest the usage of style guides as a multicultural communications tool. However, he encourage "reading some basic guides to communicating with people from other cultures".

The Economist Style Guide, for example, dedicates a whole section to comparing British and American English. It provides a side by side comparison of how cultural differences are reflected in something as subtle as in a sentence arrangement.

An example of how a fiction writer effectively uses the cultural knowledge of her readers is Sally Rooney. In her latest book, *Beautiful People Where Are You*, Rooney cleverly relates with a young generation of readers.

For instance, instead of writing,

Eileen browsed through Aidan Lavelle's Facebook.

Rooney writes,

"Eileen scroll down mechanically, almost inattentively, to view the most recent updates, as if spurred by habit rather than spontaneous interest".

Notice how she captures the attitude and body language familiar to her habitual social media users. It is as if she's communicating an inside joke.

Figure 7: Content screenshot explaining how to use a technical writing tool to build audience awareness skills in creative writing

The section includes a suggestion for a writing exercise related to the writing tool.

Audience Awareness Exercise #1

Search the web for a style guide that speaks the language (demographically or based on interests) of your target readers. As you browse through this style guide, take notes of your impressions.

Figure 8: Content screenshot suggesting a writing exercise

Finally, the section concludes with a mini reference section.

SOURCES

Markle, M. (2016). *Technical Communication*. Bedford/St. Martin's. Eleventh Edition.
Perelman, L. et al. (1996). *The Mayfield Handbook of Technical and Scientific Writing*. Retrieved from <https://www.mit.edu/course/21/21.guide/>
Wroe, A. (2018). *The Economist Style Guide*. The Economist.
Rooney, S. (2021). *Beautiful People, Where Are You*. Macmillan USA.

Figure 9: Content screenshot exemplifying how sources are referenced in the mini reference section

Mini reference section

The handbook attempts to provide credibility for the technical writing tools it provides. At the same time, it attempts to avoid overwhelming its readers with hyperlinks or in-text citations within the main text. For this reason, at the end of each description of a technical writing tool, the handbook includes a small reference. This mini reference section makes it easier for readers to consult the source related to the reading, without having to turn to the back of the book. This reference section is added in addition to the global reference section found at the end of the handbook.

The section that follows is the Limitations section. It provides insight on the areas that the designed thesis product requires improvements.

Limitations

This section discusses any potential challenges or areas where the product requires more work/or focus.

Length

According to reader reviews of similar products, a product is valued for the amount and depth of content it offers. The thesis product offers compact content within a 60-page handbook. Had the thesis product been lengthier, it may have provided more writing tools, but it would have also risked offering information that overlaps with that of similar products. In summary, if this product is to be published, it would be undervalued for its length.

Credibility of the Author

Handbooks are valued based on the experience and previous work of their author. Based on this notion, a future concern for this product is that if it is sent to a publishing house, it may be rejected for the lack of expertise of the author. Following this line of logic self-publishing on Kindle is an alternative. Interestingly, among the similar products that were reviewed for this thesis project, a selected few were digital eBooks that were self-published. Although readers today are familiar with self-published eBooks, many readers on Goodreads approached these self-published books with skepticism. Among the most frequent observations, readers addressed the low price, poor editing, and lack of depth in self-published books (see compiled read reviews in Table A.4 in Appendix A).

Originality

Drawing from resourceful textbooks and manuals on technical writing, the thesis product aimed to remedy its author's lack of experience on the subject of technical writing. Consequently, an extra effort was put into finding reliable credible content. At the same time, an effort was made to add originality by drawing correlations between the technical writing tool and a reference from the creative writing world.

Narrow Approach

Since the thesis product focuses exclusively on offering tools related to audience awareness, flexibility, and planning, it risks not meeting the needs of a wider audience. For future considerations, a solution to this limitation may lie in offering a product that provides writing tools for each of Rose's (1984) cognitive causes. These causes are rigid rules, misleading assumptions about composing, premature editing, poor or inappropriate planning, conflicting strategies, and inadequately understood evaluative criteria.

In conclusion, this Methodology section provided a lengthy insight into the stages involved in the development of the thesis product. It began with the data collection and the data analysis, through which a need for a product like the thesis product was determined. The conclusions from the data analysis additionally guided the thesis product into considering the readers' expectations. The developed thesis product was then described and preliminarily examined in the Product Description and Limitations sections, respectively. The following Product Analysis section provides an in-depth examination of the developed thesis product based on the inquiry questions introduced at the beginning of this thesis project.

PRODUCT ANALYSIS

In the Data Analysis subsection, three key themes were found in the limitations and expectations expressed by readers of similar products (books on creative writing and books on writer's block). These three themes are: (a) a lack of new content, (b) readers' expectations for in-depth writing help, and (c) an appreciation for a combined treatment to writer's block. This Product Analysis section examines these themes by answering the inquiry questions that guided the product development. These inquiry questions are as follows:

- How does the thesis product provide credible content?
- How does the thesis product satisfy readers' need for new content on writer's block?
- How does the thesis product keep content interesting and relevant at the same time?
- How does the thesis product acknowledge that it may not be the right solution for every blocked writer?

These inquiry questions are paraphrased in the subheadings of this product analysis.

Providing Credible Content

In order to answer the inquiry question related to providing credible content, it was necessary for the thesis product to focus on providing quality content. This required strategically examining reader reviews on technical writing resources. It was, therefore, necessary to learn what criteria technical writers use to determine if a technical writing book or handbook is "resourceful" or not. This thesis project the way readers found the following patterns expressed on Goodreads reader reviews. First, readers described "rereading it" or "going back to it" to these sources. Second, readers stated the book/handbook was recommended by someone in the field, either a colleague or someone in academia. Consequently, using expressions like "reread" and

“recommended by someone in the field” as criteria to find credible technical writing books, made it possible to compile a list of helpful technical writing resources (See List A.2. in Appendix A).

The most consulted technical writing books for the thesis product development were: *Technical Communications* by Mike Markel, *Technical Writing Process* by Kieran Morgan, and *Technical Writing Essentials* by Jon Balzotti.

Once a relevant technical writing tool was identified in two or more of the mentioned technical writing resources, this tool was then paraphrased and incorporated in the thesis product (see Figure B.9 in Appendix B). To guarantee the credibility of the content, the designed product provides a mini reference section that immediately follows the description of the writing tool (see Figure 9 in the Product Description).

In summary, this thesis project ensured the credibility of its content first, during the stage of data analysis, and later during the drafting of the thesis product.

Satisfying Readers’ Need for New, Interesting and Relevant Content

Readers’ need for new content is related to the product's originality, which was achieved by providing creative ways to use a technical writing tool. This is done by explaining how the technical writing tool can be repurposed to aid the creative writing process. This creative outlook is supported with examples and suggestions of writing exercises (see Figures B.9 and B.10 in Appendix B).

As mentioned in the Data Analysis subsection, readers of similar products preferred books that provided writing advice using a narrative style of writing rather than those written in a textbook-like style. This seems to be why readers recall the content of books on writing by King, Clark, and Lamott, even years after reading them. Research during this thesis project determined

that handbooks on writing and on writer's block are valued for the writing advice they provide but also by how enjoyable they are to read. For this reason, the thesis product attempted to use an approachable writing style as shown in *Figure 10*.

Take comfort in the fact that not all writers have the luxury of having a sacred writer's cabin up in the mountains. In his memoir *On Writing*, Stephen King said he wrote his early works while working in a laundromat washing bed sheets. John Grisham wrote his first novel in legal pads while working as a lawyer. Haruki Murakami, who owned a jazz bar, spent his nights after work

Figure 10: Content screenshot from the Introductory section of the handbook

In relation to relevant content, during data analysis this study found a significant number of valuable resources from technical writing books that are applicable to creative writing. For example, Laplante (2019) provides ways to use rhetorical devices when composing, and a useful guide to substituting the usage of the term 'very' (p. 31). However, such content was not included in the handbook for two reasons. First, it would have risked overlapping with the content found in general handbooks on writing. Second, it would have risked diverting from the purpose of the product, which is to aid the creative writer's block.

For this reason, the following criteria were actively used while developing content for the thesis product:

- **criteria 1:** content applicable to writer's block, and
- **criteria 2:** content that isn't offered with the same intention by similar products.

Acknowledging That the Thesis Product May Not be the Right Solution for Every Blocked Writer

As found in the early stages of this thesis project, treatments for writer's block are just as diverse as its numerous causes. In practice, the thesis product offers a solution to writer's block that is limited to aiding the writing process through technical writing tools. It doesn't offer advice on how to overcome writer's block based on productivity, motivation, or studies based on psychology or neurology. It would therefore be deceiving to recommend or promote the thesis product as the right or effect tool applicable to all types of writer's block.

As Boice (1990) concludes in his study on writer's block treatments, to guarantee an effective treatment for writer's block it is necessary to consider all the elements that may be causing it. Based on this notion, the ideal handbook would be one that offers a complete combination treatment to writer's block.

While the thesis product is unable to offer such a complete and resource, it found a way to offer an honest approach. The thesis encourages a combined approach, by acknowledging that it is but one of many types of aids to writer's block. The handbook informs readers of the nature of writer's block and encourages taking a self-evaluation to identify their blocking struggle. In addition to this, the handbook provides readers with a list of what their books on writer's block. Such acknowledgments/honest approach comes with the risk of readers abandoning the handbook at an early stage of their reading.

For instance, a blocked writer whose sole cause of blocking is due to an inadequate writing environment may find no use for this thesis product after taking the *Writer's Self Evaluation* (see Figure B.6. in Appendix B).

Nonetheless, the thesis product intends to exist as a complementary resource to all other handbooks/books on writer's block, by including three key elements.

The concluding and future implications section that follows summarizes the main findings from this thesis project and its product development. A summary of the three main sections of this thesis project that concludes with reflections on future implications is provided.

CONCLUSION

This Conclusion section provides a chronological summary of the main findings from the Literature Review, Data Analysis, and Product Analysis sections of this thesis. The Literature Review is worth mentioning since its findings acted as a significant preliminary step to determining the need for the thesis product.

Conclusions from the Literature Review

The literature review helped show that among the various causes of writer's block, there are those intrinsically related to the writing process. These causes are described as cognitive variables (Rose, 1984).

It was also determined that the difference between a fluent writer and a blocked writer is not due to fluent writers not experiencing writer's block. It is a fact that writer's block is a struggle for both experienced and prolific writers. This said the key difference between a fluent and blocked writer is in how they approach the writing process. Consequently, this difference was reflected in how different writers approach struggles like writer's block that come with the writing process.

Studies examined in the literature review concluded that fluent writers have skills that make it easier for them to overcome or avoid writer's block. In summary, these skills are audience awareness, strategic planning, and flexibility, which happen to be skills habitually used in the field of technical writing.

It was important to include the findings from the literature review in this conclusion section since they provided a preliminary assertion of the need for the thesis product. The purpose of such a product is to help creative writers build skills in audience awareness, planning,

and flexibility. Knowing this allowed the Methodology section to examine similar sources (books on creative writing and writer's block) and collect relevant content for the thesis product (technical writing books).

Conclusions from the Data Analysis

Through the Data Analysis subsections, this thesis project discovered three main findings. Firstly, the frequency in recommending a writing tool does not guarantee it as being the most useful. On the contrary, including a frequently mentioned writing tool in a book, is seen by readers as a weakness, or as lacking new content. Readers of similar products, however, seemed to appreciate when a book offers a different way of approaching a writing technique they are familiar with.

Second, a balanced approach seems to be preferred regarding both writer's block and the writing process. An example of this was seen in readers' appreciation for *On Writing* by Stephen King. King's book provides a balance in writing advice, life advice, and good storytelling.

Finally, in relation to the thesis product, the Data Analysis safely concluded that no other similar product offers aid to creative writer's block based on skill-building through technical writing tools.

Conclusions from the Product Analysis

The development of the thesis product was influenced by the themes identified in the data analysis. The three themes that helped answer the inquiry questions that guided this section are related to new content, in-depth writing help, and a combined approach to the writing process and writer's block. Through an analysis that combined these themes and inquiry questions, it was possible to draw conclusions summarized in the following statements.

First, the handbook developed through this thesis project provides technical writing tools that were carefully selected from sources considered to be resourceful by technical writers. Second, this handbook provides original content. It suggests ways to repurpose technical writing tools for the benefit of blocked creative writers. Third, the development of the thesis product used a set of criteria to actively avoid including excessive or irrelevant content.

The last and most important conclusion is that the thesis product aims to provide an honest outlook on writer's block. Based on this notion, the thesis product intends to inform and guide readers in their journey to find the right treatment for their writer's block. Even at the risk of having readers realize that the thesis product is not the right product for their type of writer's block.

Additional Findings

The main limitation encountered for this thesis project was the surprisingly limited number of recent studies on writer's block and technical writing. This realization is both a cause of concern and a wake-up call for future studies.

Most key studies about writer's block and collected on technical writing were conducted between the late nineteen-seventies until the early nineteen-nineties. For example, studies like *Rhetoric and Relevance in Technical Writing* (Killingsworth & Gilbertson, 1986) offer useful insight for technical writers and creative writers alike. However, this study dates back almost four decades. On the subject of writer's block, the only recent studies that were found were those by Moore (2018), Rahmat (2020), and Ahmed (2021).

Contrasting the scarcity of recent peer-reviewed research on writer's block and technical writing there are currently numerous blogs and internet posts on either subject. However, the excess content online makes it difficult to identify credible information.

Through this reflection, this study intends to encourage more studies on both writer's block and technical writing.

Future Implications

Motivated by the abovementioned conclusions, this thesis project suggests the following implications to consider for future related studies or product developments.

Considerations for Different Mediums

Writers must consider writing not only for multiple audiences but also for multiple channels and devices (Tidwell, Brewer & Valencia, 2020, p. 118). Future studies may find correlations between the devices used by readers to read on (kindle, tablets), or their preference for a particular format (eBooks, audiobooks). Considering the target audience's medium preferences may provide writers with insight on how to adapt aspects like structure, hierarchy, and pace to these considerations.

During research for this study, it was found that there is a significant amount of books on writing available as audiobooks. To date, on Audible there are more than 1400 titles available under the subgenre *Writing and Publishing*. For this reason, it is necessary for informative and educational writers to consider adapting a narrative style of writing.

Obtaining Content from Academia

During my time in NYU's MSPW program, I found valuable reading material that I find myself revisiting and recommending. During the development of this thesis project, I revisited three of these valuable reads. These texts include *Technical Communications* by Mike Markel, *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott, and *Information Architecture* by Peter Morville and Louis Rosenfeld. Based on this notion, in future studies, it would be interesting to compare

recommended books used by different curriculums of technical writing and creative writing programs.

Given the historical background of technical writing, which was discussed in the literature review, it would be interesting to examine how the types of books used academically changed over time. In order to see patterns in the types of course texts used in these writing programs and validate their resourcefulness by comparing student reviews to the reviews found in online discussions.

Future Implication for Similar Products

Through the research conducted for this thesis project, it was possible to draw connections from two very different fields of writing, creative writing, and technical writing. Based on the research method used and platforms visited in this thesis project, this study encourages exploring correlations among other fields of writing.

Overall, the findings for this thesis project are optimistic and humbling. On a positive note, it was possible to determine a need for a *Technical Writing Handbooks for Creative Writers: A Guide to Overcoming Writer's Block*. But more importantly, acknowledging that the thesis product alone cannot solve every type of writer's block, placed a higher value in combining approaches. For instance, offering a combined treatment to writer's block has the potential to accurately aid various types and forms of writer's block. Similarly, this study suggests the benefits of combining techniques from different fields of writing.

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Appendix A

Data Collection

This appendix contains tables and visual aids that inform in detail the stages that were involved in data collection for this thesis project.

Table A.1.

Keywords and Patterns used to Guide the Stages of Data Collection

Data collection after literature review	
Search for patterns in reader reviews (Goodreads)	
Sources type:	user reviews, user forums (Goodreads)
Keywords used to guide data collection	best + helpful + recommended + creative writing books, writing books, writer’s block books, technical writing books
Search for patterns in similar products	
Source type	Creative writing books, writing guides, books on writer’s block, books on technical writing
Keywords used to guide data collection	In creative writing books and general writing guides
	writer’s block + writing habits, blockage, writing struggles, fluent writers, writing process
	In books on writer’s block
	writer’s block + Fluent writers, writing habits, writing strategies, writing skills, writing process, writing tools
	In books on technical writing
	writing tools, writing skills, writing strategies, writing process, flexibility, rules, structure, strategy, reader-awareness, audience

	awareness
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Table A.2.

First Set of Criteria used to Select Relevant Similar Products

Book Categories	Criteria on Reddit	Criteria on Goodreads	Criteria on Quora
Creative Writing	Recommended by more than one user in a single discussion group	Mentioned on the list of most popular creative writing books	Recommended by more than one user in a single discussion group
Writer’s Block	All books that resulted from searching “writer’s block” were included.	*Not enough discussion groups were available (less than two) on Quora. Instead, all the books on ‘writer’s block’ that made it to Google’s recommended list of books were included.	
Technical Writing	Recommended by more than one user in a single discussion group	Mentioned in Goodreads’ list of best technical writing books	Recommended by more than one user in a single discussion group

Table A.3.*Second Set of Criteria used to Select Relevant Similar Products*

Book categories	Criteria used to select books to consult for the content development of the Creative Writer's Handbook
Creative Writing	Mentioned in more than one Reddit discussion group or mentioned in more than one Quora discussion group
Writer's Block	More than 10 reviews on Amazon and more than ten reviews on Goodreads
Technical Writing	Mentioned in more than five Reddit discussion groups or mentioned in two or more discussions on both Reddit and Quora

Table A.4.

Compilation of Goodreads Reader Reviews

Book	Writing-based solutions to writer's block	Compilation of reader reviews
The Midnight Disease by Alice Flaherty	n/a	n/a (Doesn't provide writing-based suggestions)
Four Seasons of Creative Writing by Bryan Cohen	n/a	Writing ideas that are "too close to home" - readers expressed having expected more enlightening ideas, fresher ideas; topics familiar for to only American readers/writers; readers expected writing techniques
Writing Habit Mastery by S.J. Scott	Approach to overcome writer's block by turning writing into a habit	Reader expectations: "what I look for in books on writing is inspiration to write, and interesting research"; The good: The advice revolves around making time to write, committing to writing, and sticking with it", brief, organizing, easy to read; The bad: "on the surface it succeeds, and yet there is nothing new or overly interesting
Around the Writer's Block by Rosanne Bane	Freewriting, time management habits	The good: helpful on procrastinating, applicable to creative endeavors additional to writing, self-help book, focus on play; approach explaining brain functions was appreciated; The bad: "clunky writing", needs organization, "focuses mostly on brain science"; "aside from the focus on play, didn't contain much I hadn't read elsewhere"
Conquering Writer's Block by K.M. Weiland	Freewriting, write a letter to oneself, plot twist, new angle, enjoy writing, read, take a break	The good: Short and concise (brevity is appreciated by most readers), easy to read (many readers reread the book), readers are skeptical because the author admits to not believing in writer's block; The bad: Doesn't offer anything new but rather reminders of well-known strategies

Book	Writing-based solutions to writer's block	Compilation of reader reviews
<p>The 7 Secrets of the Prolific by Hillary Rettig</p>	<p>Strategies used by prolific writers: overcoming perfectionism, non-writing techniques (time management, coping with rejection), writing tips: freewriting, working backwards, reading out loud, nonlinear writing, enjoy writing</p>	<p>The good: inspirational, encouraging, reorganizes good advice writers already know; The bad: readers expressed discomfort with hyperlinks and disorganization within the book; motivational, repetitive, too much author's opinion, various users mention being offended by the use of stereotypes, opinionated, good first sections but the second half wasn't well received by readers</p>
<p>The Story Template by Amy Deardon</p>	<p>Writing exercises, ways to overcome writer's block during writing: "introduce another problem", preplan scenes; freewriting, story building exercises (character, plot, setting development)</p>	<p>The good: good on story structure, practical exercises; "the closest it can get to a formula about writing a story"; concise; The bad: basic content</p>
<p>On Writer's Block by Victoria Nelson</p>	<p>n/a</p>	<p>n/a (Doesn't provide writing-based suggestions)</p>
<p>The Writer's Process by Anne Janzer</p>	<p>Freewriting, generating ideas, productive writing habits</p>	<p>More for beginner writers, validation of existing material, no new material, readers expected more cognitive science approach to writing, repetitive</p>
<p>The War of Art by Steven Pressfield</p>	<p>n/a</p>	<p>n/a (Doesn't provide writing-based suggestions)</p>

Book	Writing-based solutions to writer's block	Compilation of reader reviews
<p>On Being Stuck by Laraine Herring</p>	<p>View of writer's block as a "pause", a sign to pay attention to something. Treatment based on making self-inquiries; encourages creating a "foundation too kit" consisting of practices, prompts, movement activities, playlists</p>	<p>Provides motivational/inspirational help. The good: short, easy to follow chapters; The bad: repetition of content, advice not taken seriously by readers, small font; Reader expectation: more help on crafting than self-help.</p>
<p>Write. 10 Days to Overcome Writer's Block. Period by Karen Peterson</p>	<p>Parallel monologues, brainstorming, to-do lists</p>	<p>Too much focus on the left/right brain talk.</p>
<p>Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer by Roy Peter Clark</p>	<p>Writing techniques: planning, mission statement; Motivational on approach to writing, draft sooner than later, rewriting, keeping a daybook, reading for form and content and genre, types of reading. Technique suggested on overcoming writer's block: lower your standards</p>	<p>The good: readers value practical writing advice and the notion of a writer's toolbox, concise, simplifies complex ideas, easy to understand; The bad: seasoned writers indicate advice is mostly useful to novice writers; Distinction from thesis product: has a "particularly handy for journalism and persuasive writing"</p>
<p>Break Writer's Block Now! by Jerrold Mundis</p>	<p>Exercises to get going on writing; scheduling exercises</p>	<p>The good: a concise read, blend of psychological tips and writing exercises, several readers recommended it for stressed writers; The bad: most advice is what they already knew</p>

Book	Writing-based solutions to writer's block	Compilation of reader reviews
<p>Robot Coconut Trees by Kelsey Horton</p>	<p>Freewriting</p>	<p>The good: "the best self-help book"; inspirational; The bad: "reinforces stereotypical ideas about writing"; "expected more specific advice"; Note: criticized for offering "advice as a self-published writer"</p>
<p>Bird by Bird by Anne Lamott</p>	<p>"I no longer think of it as a block. I think that it is looking at the problem from the wrong angle"; advice: acceptance</p>	<p>The good: resonating; encouraging, "enjoyable read", rereadable; "uses examples, metaphors, analogies that help you understand"; "manages to hit the fears about writing"; "has an enviable conversational writing style"; The bad: "learned more about the Anne Lamott than I learned about writing"; advices are too familiar; "doesn't say much that hasn't been said"; "good as an autobiography"; dislike of the author's voice or as an individual</p>
<p>Three Story Method: Foundations of Fiction by J Thorn and Zach Bohannon</p>	<p>Approach based on the six elements of Aristotle's Poetics: plot, structure, genre, theme, character and world and story archetypes. Acknowledges two types of writers, pantsers and plotters</p>	<p>The good: useful in story structure and general writing advice; The bad: Much of the examples are based on Star Wars, readers unfamiliar with Star Wars felt at loss; Readers complain about the "three story method" not being explained or not explain with sufficient depth; Reader expectations: new writing advice, not a repetition of advice the authors provided in their podcast</p>
<p>Story, Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting by Robert McKee</p>	<p>Do research</p>	<p>Overall: lengthy read, written for screenwriters but appreciated by writers from other genres; academic; The good: "the rare writing book where I learned something major in every chapter"; clear advice; deep/dense in a good way; The bad: verbose, "pompous" writer's voice</p>

Book	Writing-based solutions to writer's block	Compilation of reader reviews
On Writing by Stephen King	Thematic thinking	The good: enjoyable read, "mix of tried-and true pieces of advice"; "book that makes you want to write"; anecdotes appreciated by most readers - even for readers who don't read King's books; reliable advice ("trust" used several times in reviews); The bad: "more autobiographical than about the craft"
Zen of Writing by Ray Bradbury	n/a	n/a (Doesn't approach writer's block)
Writing Fiction by Janet Burroway	(Ref. Natalie Goldberg) "the best way out is any way that help you avoid the cycle of guilt, avoidance, and pressure"	Overall: a long read, appreciated in a classroom setting, solid content; The good: useful prompts; solid, "a good textbook for an undergrad English major"; The bad: "formulaic approach"; author's opinions and assumptions weren't appreciated
Writing Down the Bones by Natalie Goldberg	(Borrowing the idea from a Zen saying) "Write when you write. Stop battling yourself with guilt, accusations, and strong-arm threats"	The good: enjoyable writing style; inspirational; practical, easy writing exercises; The bad: not for everyone (Zen, spirituality); repetitive; "I would have liked the content to cover a wider range of the writer's craft"
On Writing Well by William Zinsser	"Forget the competition and go at your own pace. Your only contest is with yourself"	The good: solid advice (most mentioned for: target audience, uncluttering, editing); focused on non-fiction writing; content and style compared to 'Elements of Style'; The bad: repetitive content; extensive-read (mostly unappreciated): "this book could have been shortened to 50-100 pages"; author's humor isn't for everyone; appreciated for the first two sections, not for its entire content

Book	Writing-based solutions to writer's block	Compilation of reader reviews
The Art of Fiction by John Gardner	n/a	n/a (Doesn't approach writer's block)
Reading Like a Writer by Francine Prose	n/a	n/a (Doesn't approach writer's block)
The Emotion Thesaurus by Angela Ackerman	n/a	n/a (Doesn't approach writer's block)
Draft No. 4 by John McPhee	"Get away from the computer, lie down somewhere with pencil and paper"	Overall: collection of essays; memoir-like; The good: good narrative style; humor and conversational style appreciated by readers; good advice on structure; The bad: "more stories than writing advice"; "unhelpful use of diagrams"

List A.1.*List of Revised Similar Products*

Creative Writing Books

Story, Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting by Robert McKee
On Writing by Stephen King
Writing Fiction by Janet Burroway
Writing Down the Bones by Natalie Goldberg
The Emotion Thesaurus by Angela Ackerman
On Writing Well by William Zinsser
The Art of Fiction by John Gardner
Reading Like A Writer by Francine Prose
Draft. No. 4 by John McPhee

Books on Writer's Block

The Midnight Disease by Alice Flaherty
Four Seasons of Creative Writing by Bryan Cohen
Writing Habit Mastery by S.J. Scott
Around the Writer's Block by Rosanne Bane
Conquering Writer's Block by K.M. Weiland
The 7 Secrets of the Prolific by Hillary Rettig
The Writer's Block: 786 Ideas to Jump-start your Imagination by Jason Rekulak
The Story Template by Amy Deardon
On Writer's Block by Victoria Nelson
The Writer's Process by Anne Janzer
The War of Art by Steven Pressfield
On Being Stuck by Laraine Herring
Write. 10 Days to Overcome Writer's Block. Period by Karen Peterson
Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer by Roy Peter Clark
Break Writer's Block Now! by Jerrold Mundis
Robot Coconut Trees by Kelsey Horton
Bird by Bird by Anne Lamott
Three Story Method: Foundations of Fiction by J. Thorn and Zach Bohannon
The Successful Author Mindset: A Handbook for Surviving the Writer's Journey by Joanna Penn

List A.2.

List of Consulted Technical Writing Books

Books on Technical Writing

The Microsoft Manual of Style

Handbook of Technical Writing by Gerald J. Alfred, Charles Brusaw, and Walter Oliu

Technical Communications by Mike Markel

Developing Quality Technical Information by Michelle Carey

Technical Writing Process by Kieran Morgan

Pocketbook of Technical Writing for Engineers and Scientists by Leo Finkelstein

Technical Writing: A Practical Guide for Engineers and Scientists by Philip Laplante

Technical Writing Essentials by Jon Balzotti

Appendix B

Thesis Product Mockup

This appendix contains previews of the developed thesis product.

Figure B.1.

Product Mockup - Cover Page

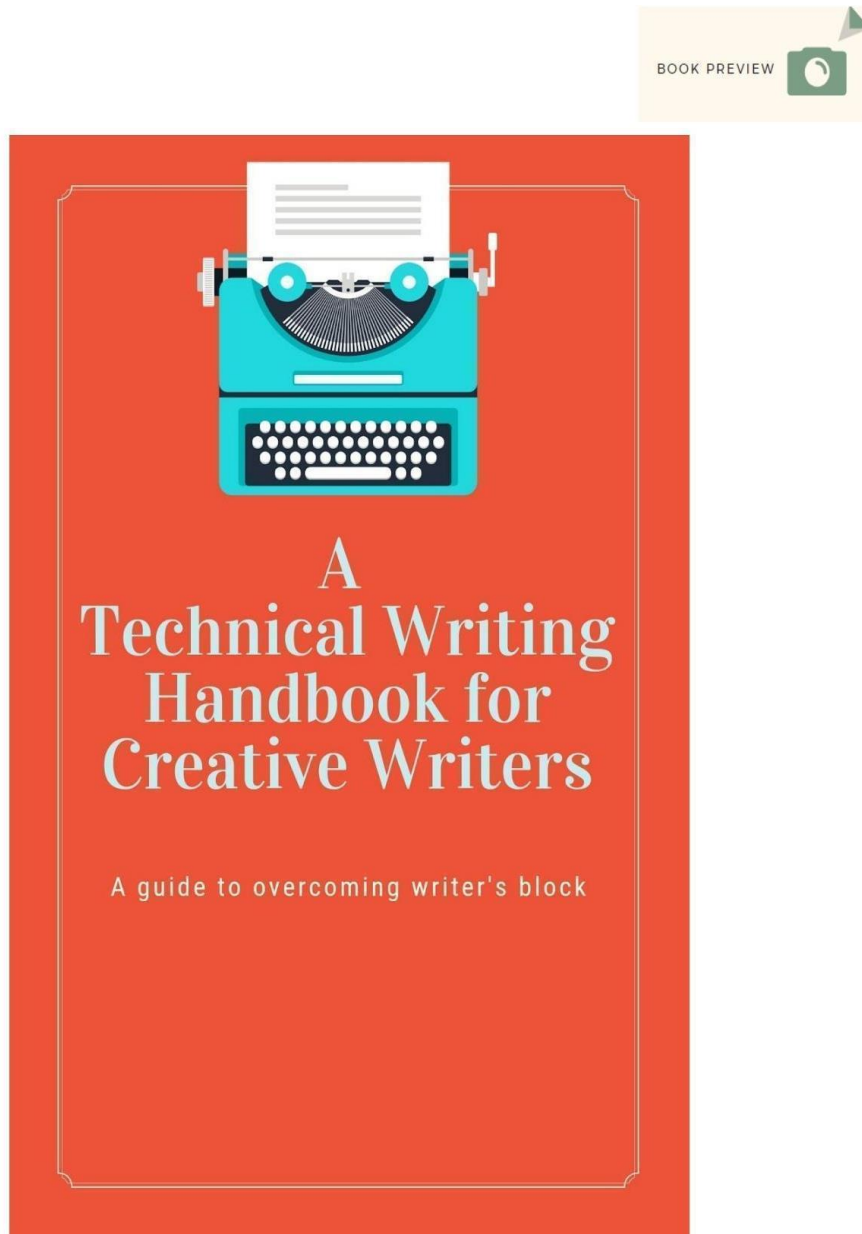


Figure B.2.

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Figure B.3.

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Figure B.4.

Product Mockup - Content Page 1



HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

Identify Your Block

I strongly suggest that the first step you should take is to identify your writer's block.

Imagine you have a headache. Before reaching for the medicine cabinet, take a moment to wonder what caused the headache. *Are you going through a stressful moment? Is it because you stayed up last night? Is it because of a hangover?* Based on my own experience, I've learned that straining my eyes causes pain between my eyes. Whereas when I feel sensitivity around my eyebrows and temples, I know it's the sinuses. When I'm stressed, I know my headache is accompanied by a stiffening of my neck and shoulders. This doesn't mean everyone who experiences these three types of headaches has the exact same symptoms. In sum, I know which are the causes for the types of headaches I experience. I am also aware that these causes are particular to me as an individual. Most importantly though, although I am yet to find the ultimate cure, I am certain that when a headache comes my way, I am prepared to overcome it.

Hopefully, you're not as well-acquainted with headaches as I am. What I do hope is that you take this as an analogy, and adopt a similar approach to the struggles that come from having writer's block.

Every writer's experience of writer's block is different. The goal of this handbook is to help you determine what causes you to experience writer's block and equip you with tools to help you face it.

Figure B.5.

Product Mockup - Content Page 2



HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

On the next page, you will find a *Writer's Self-Evaluation*.

The *Writer's Self-Evaluation* aims to help you:

Goal # 1: Identify your writing places

Goal # 2: Identify what causes your writer's block

Goal # 3: Break the misconception that all writers are bound to "writing what they know", and in its place, adopt the more uplifting possibility of "writing what interests you, what sparks your curiosity".

I strongly encourage you to take a moment to take this test before you continue reading this handbook.

Note: The Writer's Self-Evaluation was developed by merging the writer's block tests of Mike Rose (1984), Robert Boice (1990), and Ahmed (2019).

Figure B.6.

Product Mockup - Content Page 3



Writer's Self Evaluation

What are you curious or interested to write about? E.g. themes, genre, topics Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Tick off all the applicable boxes based on what you are currently experiencing

<p>At what stage of the writing process are you? / Are what stages do you experience writer's block</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Planning <input type="checkbox"/> Generating Ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Writing 1st Draft <input type="checkbox"/> Rewriting 2nd + Drafts <input type="checkbox"/> Revising 	<p>What struggles are you experiencing when you attempt to write?</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>Environmental Causes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Distractions What kind:_____ <input type="checkbox"/> Uncomfortable Writing Area <p>Cognitive Causes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Related to rules (grammar, composition) <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Too much planning <input type="checkbox"/> Early or constant editing <input type="checkbox"/> Coming up with ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties Composing </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>Psychological Causes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Motivation <input type="checkbox"/> Work apprehension <input type="checkbox"/> Procrastination <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety <input type="checkbox"/> Perfectionism <input type="checkbox"/> Dysphoria <input type="checkbox"/> Physiological Causes What kind:_____ </td> </tr> </table>	<p>Environmental Causes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Distractions What kind:_____ <input type="checkbox"/> Uncomfortable Writing Area <p>Cognitive Causes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Related to rules (grammar, composition) <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Too much planning <input type="checkbox"/> Early or constant editing <input type="checkbox"/> Coming up with ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties Composing 	<p>Psychological Causes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Motivation <input type="checkbox"/> Work apprehension <input type="checkbox"/> Procrastination <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety <input type="checkbox"/> Perfectionism <input type="checkbox"/> Dysphoria <input type="checkbox"/> Physiological Causes What kind:_____
<p>Environmental Causes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Distractions What kind:_____ <input type="checkbox"/> Uncomfortable Writing Area <p>Cognitive Causes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Related to rules (grammar, composition) <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Too much planning <input type="checkbox"/> Early or constant editing <input type="checkbox"/> Coming up with ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties Composing 	<p>Psychological Causes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Motivation <input type="checkbox"/> Work apprehension <input type="checkbox"/> Procrastination <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety <input type="checkbox"/> Perfectionism <input type="checkbox"/> Dysphoria <input type="checkbox"/> Physiological Causes What kind:_____ 		

What are you curious or interested to write about? E.g. themes, genre, topics

Where do you write?

Name 3 available place you are comfortable writing in (e.g. local library, cafe, kitchen counter)

What are you excited to read about?

Figure B.7.

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HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

The Write Place

Sometimes it's in the mindset rather than the environment.

Take comfort in the fact that not all writers have the luxury of having a sacred writer's cabin up in the mountains. In his memoir *On Writing*, Stephen King said he wrote his early works while working in a laundromat washing bed sheets. John Grisham wrote his first novel in legal pads while working as a lawyer. Haruki Murakami, who owned a jazz bar, spent his nights after work writing at his kitchen table. This said, it's important to find a writing place that works for you. This should be somewhere you associate with the act of writing, somewhere you can write habitually. It is for this reason, that during the *Writer's Evaluation*, you were encouraged to think up not one but three places you call your writer's fort (if place #1 is unavailable you have two other places as a backup).

Figure B.8.

Product Mockup - Content Page 5



Who should read this book

First and foremost, this handbook is tailored to meet the needs of creative writers who wish to have the tools to overcome writer's block during their writing process.

However, this book may also encourage technical writers to use their set of tools differently, creatively.

Figure B.9.

Product Mockup - Content Page 6

**AUDIENCE-AWARENESS****Style Guides****How technical writers use style guides**

A style guide is an instructive document that provides a standard procedure to achieve uniformity when drafting a document. Technical writers use various types of style guides, ranging from general ones like the *Chicago Manual of Style Guide* to brand guidelines like the *Netflix brand guidelines*.

How creative writers can use style guides to build audience-awareness

Technical writers require mindfully considering the cultural variables that come into play when preparing a document for audiences from unfamiliar backgrounds. According to Mike Markel, communicating effectively is challenging because technical writers write not for a culture, but for people who may come from one or various cultures.

Markel doesn't suggest the usage of style guides as a multicultural communications tool. However, he encourages "reading some basic guides to communicating with people from other cultures".

The Economist Style Guide, for example, dedicates a whole section to comparing British and American English. It provides a side-by-side comparison of how cultural differences are reflected in something as subtle as in a sentence arrangement.

An example of how a fiction writer effectively uses the cultural knowledge of her readers is Sally Rooney. In her latest book, *Beautiful People Where Are You*, Rooney cleverly relates with a young generation of readers.

Figure B.10.

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AUDIENCE-AWARENESS

For instance, instead of writing,

Eileen browsed through Aidan Lavelle’s Facebook.

Rooney writes,

“Eileen scroll down mechanically, almost inattentively, to view the most recent updates, as if spurred by habit rather than spontaneous interest”.

Notice how she captures the attitude and body language familiar to her habitual social media users. It is as if she's communicating an inside joke.

Audience Awareness Exercise #1

Search the web for a style guide that speaks the language (demographically or based on interests) of your target readers. As you browse through this style guide, take notes of your impressions.

SOURCES

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