

# 14 Tips for Banishing Writer's Block

*By Don Mahoney*

[Every writer's had to face what William Faulkner called the tyranny of the blank page.

You're ready to write, but nothing seems to come. Writer's block.

We asked AWAI Board Member Don Mahoney – who is also one of the fastest copywriters around – how he deals with writer's block. Here are his "14 Tips."]

## If You're Stuck at the Very Beginning

In this case, you probably don't have enough information about your project. You will probably fix that when you ...

1. Identify your creative time – early a.m., late night, whatever. That's when to attack your work.
2. Study what's working and, if possible, what's not working. Sometimes your client's marketing director can give you copies of promotions that flopped or competitors' promos that mailed only once.
3. Research, research, research. Read promotions and immerse yourself in the product, whether it's intellectual (written material) or physical (vitamins, gold coins, air filters, whatever). Google everything that's related to your subject.
4. Identify the "point of maximum anxiety" of your prospect: what keeps your prospect up at night.
5. Identify the USP (unique selling proposition), the big idea of the main promise of your product.
6. Make an outline and begin filling it in.
7. Start ANYWHERE! If you can nail the headline and lead first, great! If not, write anything – the offer, the reply, the back cover, the close (think of the last thing you'd say to someone to get them to buy this product, then start working your way toward that line), sidebars, centerfolds, flyers, bios, premium copy, ANYTHING!
8. Set some reasonable goals for what you want to achieve each day in your writing.
9. "Almost cheating": Type the name of the project, the date, and your name in the upper left corner. Then type a page, something like a memo to yourself and other readers. Describe what you see as the core message of what you're about to write. Include a rough idea of how you expect it to look when it's done.
10. "Cheating": Jot down notes and ideas as you prepare. Then transfer them to your computer, punching them up as you

go. Guess what? You're already past the "empty page."

11. "Advanced cheating": If you know you always tend to have a problem with empty pages, record your first conversations about the product with the marketing team. You can use a little handheld recorder to do this. Transcribe the recording, and delete any fluff and irrelevant material. Start organizing any useful material into notes and/or sections of your project.

## If You Get Stuck Anywhere Along the Way

This should help you get out of the funk ...

12. Take a break. Run, walk, meditate, go bicycling, listen to music ... then come back to it.
13. If that doesn't work, you need to do more work. Go back to your research and dig some more. Go back to your outline and see if some part doesn't jump out at you as ready to go.
14. Brainstorm with another writer.

If you use these 14 techniques, you should have banished writer's block. If it persists, put your work away and get a good night's sleep. Start fresh in the morning and, in all likelihood, you'll nail it.

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## 1 Response to "14 Tips for Banishing Writer's Block"

I enjoyed reading this piece by Don. I was not able to get to experience him much as he passed just a month or so after I joined AWAI. But he is one of the founders and for that I am grateful. Seeing him in his writing and through the eyes of those who cared for him is a blessing and a help to my copywriting experience! Thanks Don and AWAI!!

*Wanda F Sewell* – over a year ago

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