



Conversation

Avoid The Page

For most people, talking is easier than writing. As students write, they frequently, and perhaps unconsciously, ask themselves whether their writing is “good enough.” That pressure can prevent them from experimenting on the page.

One way to avoid this worry is to avoid the page. Encourage students to talk out their ideas in order skip the miserable step of staring at a blank page.

Why It Works

To use conversation as an essay generator, students should pair up. Since sharing thoughts is an exercise in vulnerability, allow for comfortable, not unfamiliar, pairs.

Give them prompting questions to begin the conversation. Opinion-based rather than fact-based questions can be especially helpful. Including “what do you think” in the questions lessens the pressure.

Obviously we don’t actually want students to write only about what they think or felt, but if they begin by speculating, they can then evaluate their answers based on evidence.

Move To The Page

After the conversation, ask students to jot down what they discussed and a few words of WHY the ideas work and WHAT EVIDENCE they might use to support each idea. If they cannot explain a “why” or point to any evidence, they can delete the item.

Separate The Steps

Dividing this process into two distinct stages – generating ideas and then evaluating ideas – is more productive than treating them as a single stage, which is often how we expect students to work. If students can list six or seven (or more!) possibilities and only then explore which of those can reasonably be supported, they avoid the writer’s block that is often caused by self-judgment.