



## Turn Negative Self Talk Into Clarity

Students often say “I’m a terrible writer” or “Writing is my worst subject.” Even if they don’t believe in their own potential, avoiding self-directed insults is the first step in the process of improvement.

## Help Students Locate Their Challenges

Simply banning negative self-talk is not helpful, though, as it merely buries those thoughts rather than eliminating them. Instead of blanket prohibitions, I ask students to begin by focusing their self-deprecating comments. What do they mean when they say they’re bad at writing? They might mean that they find it difficult, and so I encourage them to say instead, “I find writing difficult.” Over time, I ask them to hone that statement: “I find getting started difficult.” “I find editing difficult.”

Or they might say, “My writing isn’t good,” so I ask them to hone that statement: “My thesis statements lack arguments” or “My ideas are disorganized.”

## Employ Techniques To Overcome Challenges

Once students locate their challenges, they can explore solutions. If students note that getting started is difficult, then we can discuss techniques to overcome that particular difficulty: pre-writing conversation, avoiding deletion, handwriting, or timed free writing. If they struggle with organization, we can work on techniques to take a jumbled piece and rearrange its parts. They begin to see solvable problems and not a generically “bad writer.”

## Improve Students’ Confidence

If students articulate several challenges, they can tackle one at a time, and you can note improvement to continue a cycle of positivity. Improving students’ confidence, even for small changes, can refocus negative self-talk on growth rather than weakness.