



Aim: how to approach problems with writing assignments.

Technique: group discussion.

Resources

Room facilities

Computer with projection
Whiteboard
Whiteboard marker pens

Take with you

Stopwatch or timer app

Online

[Infographic depicting writing process for essays](#)

Timings (minutes)	Activity
0 – 15	Begin the session by asking what aspect of writing they struggle with most. Take a look at the Skills@Library Academic writing page to tackle any common problems, whether it's not knowing how to get started or not understanding the question that was set. It may be worth brainstorming some ideas about what creates the best work and writing environment.
15 – 40	If students have trouble getting started or staying focused you could simulate a short version of the 'Shut Up and Write' session that Skills@Library run: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (For this it's best if you ask them to bring in something they are working on prior to the session). Have a go at writing for a set amount of time together - perhaps 10 minutes or so. You can have a 5 minute break with snacks and then



	<p>carry on for another 10 minutes. The idea is to get everyone used to focusing on one thing and not getting distracted by phones etc. while using the power of peer pressure to keep you going with your work. It becomes a more social activity and you are rewarded by having a break together and being able to have a chat about how it went and share what you might be struggling with. (If you find this useful, you could run your own extended version of this with 25 minute writing sessions and see how</p> <p>OR</p>
15 – 25	<p>If students are having trouble organising their thoughts or starting the process of writing, an ‘automatic writing’ exercise could be quite useful. Students could focus on an assignment they are working towards or recap their last lecture.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is where you pick a set amount of time (5 minutes is a good start) and get everyone to write continuously for that period. “Once you begin writing, you don’t stop for the entire time or pages. If you run out of things to write about, then you write "I’m out of things to write" or "nothing more to say" or even "this is a silly exercise". Repeat the phrase to keep writing until something else comes. It is important that you don’t stop and think about what you are going to write which is a different kind of writing and even uses different parts of your brain.” This website has some more instructions: http://www.point-to-creativity.com/automatic-writing.html
25 – 40	<p>If structuring their writing is an issue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A useful technique is to pick out the first line of each paragraph of your work and write them out chronologically and try to gauge whether it follows logically and leads to the conclusion that you have made. You could see if others in the group agree or not and why. If it doesn’t follow, it could highlight two things. You might find that some of the points just need rearranging slightly for it to follow more logically. Alternatively, it might suggest that the paragraphs themselves perhaps need a sharper topic/focus sentence to encapsulate the content of it.• Some people find it easier to talk through something rather than explain it in writing. To help with that you could put everyone in pairs and let them take it in turns to either read their work aloud to each other or summarise the points they have made in each paragraph and see if the other person follows the structure you have chosen or if they feel it needs more work. Talking through the structure and your main points can help you to clarify whether you have

	<p>perhaps missed something that may have seemed obvious to you at the time of writing (but not to others in the field) and helps to make sure it leads to your conclusion clearly. It's almost like converting your writing into a presentation to make sure the content is well organised. Take a look at the Pomodoro Technique for inspiration.</p>
40 – 50	<p>Wrap up session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mention that the Skills@Library team offer a variety of workshops that revolve around planning and structuring essays, proofreading etc. which might be a good way to gain some more tips.• If they found that any of these techniques worked for them, encourage them to meet up again in their own time as a group to help them focus and then treat themselves to a reward afterwards.