Feeling Stuck? 5 Ways to Clear Your Mind and Be Your Most Productive Self

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You can be in flow one day and out the next. While earning my doctorate, I worked full-time while running a business and engaging in a dysfunctional marriage. I had committed to doing everything I had set out to do with no consideration for the impact of the pressures on my life.

But one day, I found myself unfocused and uninterested in completing my work. I sat at the computer for a while, but nothing came. I couldn't produce. Does this sound familiar? If it does, you have experienced a mental block.

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Spotting the signs

I was in the middle of my doctoral program with tons of papers to write, but I was stuck. It lasted for days. Although that was the first time I had experienced a mental block, it wasn't the last.

I realized I was prone to mental blocks when I was engaging in long periods of mental stimulation, experiencing prolonged stress, and in a highly creative period. Here are some signs to watch out for in yourself:

- Feeling frustrated and overwhelmed
- Trying to push through to finish a task but feel stuck

- Difficulty completing any tasks that required me to think, strategize or create
- Trouble producing anything of high quality
- Finding it hard to describe how you're feeling and what you're experiencing

One of the hardest things about experiencing a mental block is that it cannot be seen, which makes it hard to identify. Furthermore, a mental block can happen to anyone, varies in length and can happen at the most inconvenient time. They can range from acute to severe.

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Contributing factors

Several factors can contribute to mental blocks. Some of them include:

1. **Mental exhaustion**: As in my case, I was overworking my brain muscles all day and night by constantly engaging in creative activities. I was experiencing mental fatigue from excess decision-making. My life was structured so that all decisions had to pass through me and couldn't be delegated to someone else. My brain was exhausted.
2. **Lack of sleep**: With 24 hours in a day, eight were dedicated to my full-time job, six were going to my business, two were for traveling back and forth and three were used for cooking, bathing and spending time with my family and friends. On average, this schedule left me with five hours each day to sleep. The recommended amount of sleep per day is six to eight hours. I was not giving my brain enough time to rest to function correctly.
3. **Environmental disorganization**: Your workspace should reflect the clarity you want when working. When my environment is in disarray, I have the most difficulty

focusing on a task. When I earned my doctorate, I was in a dysfunctional marriage. My ex-husband was verbally abusive and battling drug addiction. He would often throw fits and destroy the apartment. On days I would arrive home, items would be all over the floor and out of place. I would need to leave home to think clearly. This was one of the contributing factors to my staying so busy and out of the house as much as possible.

4. **Impostor syndrome**: I doubted my experience and abilities at the highest level while earning my doctorate. It felt like I was in an in-between space where I had years of professional experience, but I didn't feel like an expert in my field. This led me to question my abilities and hesitate before writing a paper. I wanted everything I submitted to be perfect and I feared judgment. So instead of creating, I would find myself stuck on validating myself.

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Overcoming a mental block

Once you can identify the root cause of your mental blocks, that is half the battle. The next half consists of taking some actions to help overcome it so you can accomplish your goals. Here are a few things to try:

1. **Turn up your physical activity**: This is my go-to anecdote. We are full of energy, and mental blocks are created when that energy becomes stagnant. Engaging in regular physical activity helps prevent and remove blocks that occur. Physically, exercise pumps blood to the brain, which can help us think more clearly.
2. **Grab a coloring book and start coloring**: Coloring is relaxing and allows you to get your creative juices flowing without using much brain power. It can help your brain and body relax to improve brain functioning. When

coloring, various parts of our brain's cerebral hemispheres are activated.

3. **Schedule your sleep**: Putting your sleep on your schedule helps to regulate the amount you get. By getting more sleep, your brain has time to relax.
4. **Meditate daily**: Meditation is a powerful tool that can help us remove distractions and negative thoughts. It helps us to get in touch with our subconscious mind and release the thoughts holding us back. It also produces peace within us, which helps us gain clarity in any situation.
5. **Tap into music**: Music can serve as a form of therapy to help us process emotions and act as a calming agent. Listening to music also has incredibly positive effects on our brains.

The most important thing to remember when feeling stuck is that stepping away from what you are working on is always an option. Take some time to relax and shift your focus. After all, continuing to work will only frustrate you, which is never helpful. Instead, take the time to try some of the suggestions above.

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