• **Go into your own writing space with few expectations and an open mind.**
  Avoid criticizing any awkward phrasing or grammatical mistakes or even bad ideas, just try to get whatever you are considering for any writing center out in some way or another.

• **Don’t give up.**
  If an idea does not come immediately do some research, dig around a little bit on the Internet or in the library, and take notes. In the Writing Center, we answer questions with reference books and resources, but you might need to look harder in your own writing space to get going.

• **Ask yourself questions.**
  In the Center, consultants ask questions to connect ideas, clarify ideas, and expand on ideas. Ask questions like why am I taking this position? How do these three themes or ideas connect? Do I have a thesis? (This last one is VERY important).
  If you do have a thesis or think you have one, ask if it can be proven. Does it need to be proven? Or is it so obvious that it is not a compelling or controversial idea?

• **Reverse Outline.**
  Once you’ve gotten some writing done, you might be wondering if you have any organization. To check the flow of your paper, make an outline after the fact.
  - Does each paragraph have a specific point—-that supports your original thesis?
  - Are there topic sentences, or do you jump abruptly from one idea to the next?

• **Read your drafts aloud.**
  Reading aloud helps catch grammatical errors, awkward phrasing, and spelling. Sometimes reading aloud can help you detect clarity issues, redundancy, and places in your paper where you move too quickly from one idea to the next.
  Hearing, seeing and understanding what you’ve written can help you find problems on the global and organizational level as well as on the grammatical, sentence structure level.
  By reading aloud, you also place yourself more firmly within the reader position and distance yourself from your writing. This enables you to be more critical in your revisions.

• **Pat yourself on the back.**
  Writing is hard. It takes time, practice, and attention to detail. Remember, you are not alone: even consultants use these techniques to improve their own writing and get past any blocks.

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The Writing Center  
Bender Library Commons  
202-885-2991  
[http://www.american.edu/cas/writing](http://www.american.edu/cas/writing)