





## DO ENGINEERING STUDENTS FEAR THE BLANK PAGE?

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Have you ever stared at a blank white page and felt your heart pound loudly, your palms sweat, and your mind scream, "Aah... Scary, not today!"? Turns out, you're not alone. For many Diploma engineering students, writing essays in English feels like the ultimate battle. The authors explore deeper into this anxiety-ridden world of academic writing, shedding light on why these tech-savvy minds struggle when it comes to penning their thoughts onto paper.

### The "Write" Kind of Stress

Writing is hard enough in the first language, let alone in the second language. Nearly half of the Diploma engineering students surveyed admitted to having high levels of writing anxiety. Some reported feeling like their thoughts get jumbled under time pressure, while others dreaded their instructor's red-pen critiques. It is a common struggle to worry about grammar, choose the right words, or just make sense of technical jargon.

Why does writing feel so tough? For English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, there is always a language barrier. Writing in English is not just about putting together some words, but it is about conveying complex ideas with precision. When **grammar** rules lurk in the shadows, and lack of **vocabulary** suck out creativity, even the best ideas struggle to shine.

In addition, nothing strikes fear into a writer's heart like the dreaded red pen. Many students are haunted by the possibility of harsh **feedback received**, imagining every error circled, underlined, and judged. To make matters worse, the relentless **pursuit of perfection** can leave students paralyzed before they even begin, overwhelmed by the pressure to produce flawless work.

### **Types of Writing Anxiety**

Writing anxiety takes many forms. Some students experience **cognitive anxiety**, overthinking every word and second-guessing themselves. Others face **somatic anxiety**, which shows up as physical symptoms, such as racing hearts or sweaty palms. Then, there are those who opt for **avoidance behaviour**, doing anything but writing until the last minute. Procrastination, anyone?

### **Turning the Tables on Writing Anxiety**

Here is the good news! Writing is not an unsolvable problem. It is a puzzle, and every engineer loves a good challenge. Here are some tips for students to turn the tables on writing anxiety:

- 1) **Break it down** by tackling one paragraph or idea at a time. Rome was not built in a day, and neither is a good essay.
- 2) **Make mistakes** - yes, learning definitely happens through mistakes.
- 3) **Feedback is a friend** - shift the negative perspective where feedback is not criticism, instead it is a guide to improvement.

From instructors' side, they play a vital role here. They may need to adopt new methods to help students conquer their fears. Whether it is giving constructive feedback, focusing on practical writing exercises, or simply fostering a supportive environment; instructors can make a world of difference.

To all the future engineers out there, just bear in your mind that writing is not just a task to tick off your list. It is a tool to share your ideas with the world. Like designing a blueprint, every word you write lays the foundation for something bigger. So, whenever you face a blank page, take a deep breath and stay calm. You can nail this!

*\*The content of this article is reflective of the action research (PBM22038: Investigating English Language Apprehension among ESL Engineering Students) conducted by CML language instructors.*

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