

50 Unordinary QUESTIONS

TO KISS WRITER'S BLOCK GOOD-BYE!





why I made this resource

I've *never* met a student who didn't have good ideas and something to say.

Yet, I've worked with thousands of students who, when faced with ordinary comprehension questions or critical thinking questions about a text, "I don't know." Or, the ever popular, "I know, I just don't know how to say it." I'm well acquainted with the frustration that behind these answers - both for students struggling to articulate their thoughts and for those who *feel* something about a text but can't quite put it into words.

But, here's what I've learned: these frustrations don't come from a lack of intelligence or effort. More often, they stem from the way we approach reading: as something to decode rather than *interact* with. Traditional questions often feel stiff, formulaic, or disconnected from how we naturally think. But what if we asked different kinds of questions - ones that feel more like invitations than tests?

That's why I created this resource. These 50 questions are designed to shake up the way you engage with a text. They're unordinary, unexpected, and a little playful - because thinking critically *should* be interesting. Whether you're analyzing an academic essay, an article, or a book, these questions will help you move beyond, "I don't know" to deeper, more original insights.



how to get the most out of this resource

Don't rush.

choose a few questions that resonate with you, and time your time reflecting on them - if a specific object is named, visualize it; if a scene is set, picture it - the more you bite into a question, the more ideas you'll unlock

Mix it up.

apply these questions to different types of texts - essays, opinion pieces, creative nonfiction, scholarly journals - anything you read

Journal your thoughts.

write down your responses to reveal patterns in how you think and take the pressure off needing to remember

Use it in discussion.

these questions make great conversation starters for study groups or class discussions - so be sure to star your favourites for quick reference

Make it personal.

the best insights come when you connect a text to your own experiences, beliefs, and ideas - so let your thoughts fly! remember - your responses aren't necessarily meant to end up in your essay - they're meant to tap into ideas that will help you develop a deeper, more original perspective

Add why, why not, or both after each question

I didn't add *why* or *why not* after every questions because no one needs that much repetition - but don't forget to tack them on as you go; asking *why*, *why not* or both will help you get the full benefits of every question and take your thinking to the next level

Include examples.

let your creativity flow, but be sure to find and record a little piece of text to support each of your ideas; you want to be able to trace your creative thinking back to the text

Read first. Answer second.

it's best to use these questions *after* you've finished reading a text to help you practice big picture thinking

Think visually.

pay close attention to the details in each question - they've been carefully selected to spark new ways of thinking; if you can't visualise an image clearly in your mind, do a Google search; if the question references a scenario, recall a time you've been in a similar scenario or pair it with a scene from a TV show, book or movie - but do your best to put yourself *in* the question

Thoughts. Not answers.

forget finding the "right" answer - there isn't one; instead, focus on finding possible answers the text supports

Make language associations.

when an image or idea is presented, think about language that's closely tied to it; for example, if you're asked to think about a photograph, think about words that come to mind when you think of photography (*film, camera, snapshot, zoom in, zoom out, resolution, lens, etc.*) and use that language to push your thinking in new directions

50 Unordinary QUESTIONS

TOP STUDENTS PRACTICE REAL THINKING.



The Argument

How strong, logical, or persuasive is the author's argument?

- 1 If this argument were a wooden bridge, what condition would it be in? Would the wooden planks be strong and secure, worn and suspicious, or missing and incomplete?
- 2 If you had to debate this author in a high-stakes argument, what's the first flaw you'd attack?
- 3 What's the "heartbeat" of this argument—the one claim everything depends on?
- 4 If this argument were a ceramic flower pot, would it be in one solid piece or would it look like it had been dropped and glued back together with noticeable cracks and chips?
- 5 Does this argument sprint toward its point, take a scenic route, or wander aimlessly?
- 6 Would this argument stand up in court?
- 7 If this argument were presented as a photograph, would it be clear and easy to see, a little blurry, or pretty hard to make out?
- 8 If you were going to put your name on this essay and have it published for all your friends and family to see, what would need to change?
- 9 If this essay were a person at a party, would it be the guest who only likes to listen to themselves and ignores what everyone else says, or the guest who listens, participates in conversations, and is genuinely curious to learn about new ideas?
- 10 If someone fully agreed with this argument, what other claims or ideas must they also accept as valid?



Style & Tone

How does the author's voice and word choice affect your understanding?

- 11 If this author were a painter, what two or three adjectives would best describe their style? (e.g., bold? chaotic? minimalistic? realistic? energetic?) How do these qualities affect the essay?
- 12 If this essay were a movie, what genre would it be? A drama? A thriller? A documentary?
- 13 Imagine this argument being delivered as a speech. What kind of speaker would the author be—passionate? dry? humorous? aggressive? personable? arrogant? witty? pretentious?
- 14 Paints often have interesting names like Cloud White, Raindrops, A Little Bit of Sugar. If you had to create a paint name for this essay, what would it be?
- 15 If you had to play a song in the background while this essay was read out loud, what song would you choose?
- 16 If this author invited you to dinner, what would you expect the atmosphere of the evening to be like? A lively debate? A formal lecture? Quiet and dull? Silent and awkward?
- 17 If you walked into this author's personal library, what kinds of books and which authors would fill their shelves?
- 18 Is this writing like a tightrope walker (careful and balanced) or a skateboarder (daring and unpredictable)?
- 19 If you were invited to meet this author for brunch, what topics and/or definitions would you want to brush up on to make sure you were able to follow and engage in the conversation?
- 20 If you were in a book-buying Secret Santa and chose this author, what book would you choose for your gift?



Form & Structure

How is the essay organized, and does it help or hurt the argument?

- 21 If this essay were a set of driving directions, would you arrive at your destination on time and in good spirits? Or would you arrive much past your ETA (estimated time of arrival) and feel frustrated?
- 22 If paragraphs were like pieces of furniture in a room, do they feel well placed, or do they need to be rearranged to improve flow?
- 23 Does the introduction “hook” you like a great first line in a novel, or does it feel mechanical? How did this affect how you read the remainder of the essay?
- 24 If each argument were a bedroom, who lives in each bedroom? messy teenagers? clean-freak parents? squabbling siblings?
- 25 Is the conclusion satisfying, or does it feel like the author ran out of gas?
- 26 If this essay were a blanket, would it be tightly woven and seamless, loosely stitched with gaps, or heavy and difficult to fold?
- 27 If this essay were a car, would it be a nice, smooth ride or a stilted and sputtery one?
- 28 If you were a director and the essay was the script you were handed to turn into a movie, would you make any changes to the organization of the material, or keep the sequencing of the material as is?
- 29 If this text were a jacket, would it be something you’d expect to find at a high-end store, a basic retail store, a second-hand store, or a garage sale?
- 30 If you had to cut one paragraph without hurting the argument, which one would it be?



The Evidence

How does the author present and support their claims?

- 31 Does the language used by the author in each piece of evidence and explanation have more in common with sand (hard to hold /not easy to grasp), glass (easy to shatter), or steel (solid / firm)?
- 32 Imagine there are 4 buckets on a desk. The first one is filled with *fact blocks*, the second with *emotion blocks*, and the third one with *expert opinion blocks*, and the last one with *personal anecdote blocks*. Does the author dip into each bucket equally? If not, what is the impact of this unbalanced selection?
- 33 If this evidence were food, is it fresh and nourishing, or does it feel processed and artificial?
- 34 Imagine the essay as a Jenga tower that's teetering and tottering. Which one piece of evidence, if removed, would cause the Jenga tower to collapse?
- 35 If this essay were published in a newspaper, would it appear in a credible one or a tabloid?
- 36 You're a publisher and this author has been accused of providing misleading or unreliable evidence. Make a case to dismiss or accept their paper.
- 37 Does the evidence resemble more of a quilt—pieces of information tied seamlessly together—or more like a patch that's been ironed onto a backpack that sits on the surface and hasn't been woven into the analysis?
- 38 If each piece of evidence was a photograph, which one piece would you say is the “most blurry” and in need of being photoshopped or retouched.
- 39 There's always that one wobbly table in a coffee shop. Which piece of evidence would most likely be given the “wobbly table” designation?



Personal Connection & Powerful Revelation

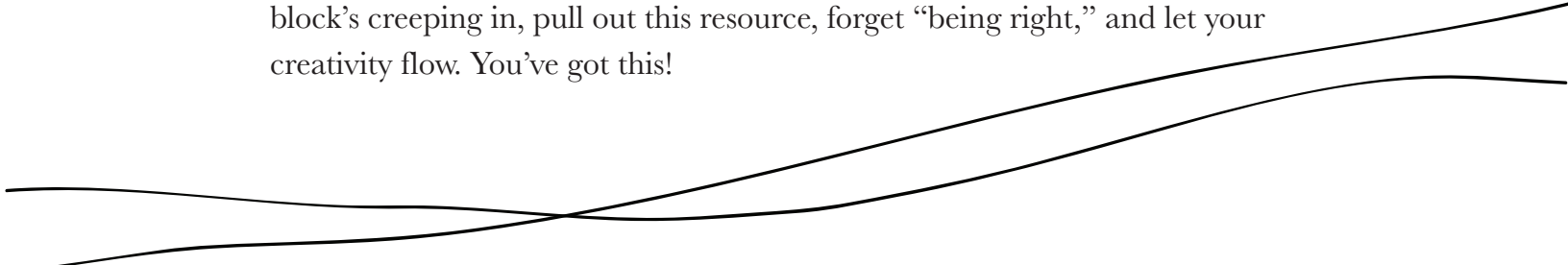
How do you connect with this essay?

- 40 If you only read the opening paragraph of the essay, would you do a Google search to find and read the rest?
- 41 Create an Instagram username for the author based solely on their essay.
- 42 You've been accused of being narrow-minded. Use this essay to show how that statement is completely ridiculous.
- 43 Imagine you're presenting this essay at a university seminar and you want to attract the right people. What details do you mention in the description to make sure you get the right attendees?
- 44 You have to create a piece of art for your room using one quote from the text. Which one do you choose?
- 45 You're at Starbucks grabbing a drink and you run into the author. How do you begin the conversation?
- 46 Does this essay reflect the author's time, or could it have been written in another era?
- 47 If this essay were a wine, is it likely to age well over time or rot and turn bad?
- 48 If this text were displayed in a museum or gallery, where would it be placed, and what pieces of art would be in close proximity? What does this say about the text's themes, style, or cultural significance?
- 49 You've been tasked with using a piece of this essay in your graduation speech. Which section do you choose?
- 50 You're the editor of a magazine, and you need to choose a photo from your phone's camera roll to feature alongside this essay. Which one do you pick?

Whoo-hoo!

You've made it to the end of *50 Unordinary Questions to Kiss Writer's Block Good-Bye!* You're ready put your critical - and creative - thinking caps on and you've challenged yourself to find new ways to tap into your own voice, speak your mind, and explain your ideas.

The next time you sit down to write and you feel the shadow of writer's block's creeping in, pull out this resource, forget "being right," and let your creativity flow. You've got this!



Ready to take the next step?

Now that you've tapped into your inner creative critic, it's time to integrate your ideas with the author's words in writing. In my 20 minute tutorial, *Quote Like A Grad*, I teach you practical strategies and helpful tips to weave your ideas with an author's seamlessly. No more copy and pasting quotes into your essay. It's time to take your writing to the next level and use quotes effectively.

GRAB
NOTE & "QUOTE" LIKE A GRAD
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It's **ONLY \$14** - probably less than your weekly Starbucks budget. Grab it now at **Writingheads.com**.

Just click on my blog, "50 Unordinary Questions to Kiss Writer's Block Good-Bye!" and you'll find it waiting for you waaaaaaaayyy down at the bottom of the page.