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# The Rubber Duck Technique

## STRENGTHEN YOUR ARGUMENT BY TALKING IT THROUGH

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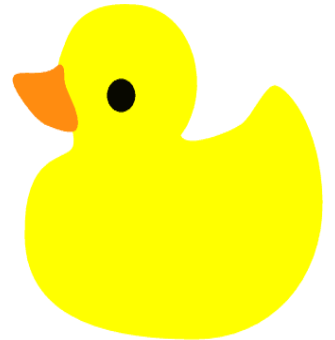
When it comes to writing papers, all of us at some point run into trouble turning our exciting ideas into strong arguments. Sometimes I get so carried away in what I'm writing that I forget to explain certain ideas or to fully develop my claims. I've found that talking through my ideas with roommates or friends helps, but they aren't always around to listen.

**Did you know that when trying to debug computer codes, programmers will sometimes force themselves to explain their code, line-by-line, to a duck?** The same technique can be applied to strengthen papers in any discipline. By explaining your ideas aloud and asking key questions, you can ensure that your argument is well thought-out, coherent, and clear.

### The Importance of Conversation

When we write, it can be easy to forget that our readers might not see our claims, or even our analysis, the same way we do. That's why it's crucial to explain your evidence and thought process for every claim you make. This gives your argument more depth, and can even help boost that word count!

The purpose of the rubber duck technique is to help you reflect on what you're writing about, and to get you thinking about which aspects of your argument need more explaining.



### Five Simple Steps!

1. **Find a rubber duck** (or any inanimate object, really). Place it on your desk.
2. **Explain the content of your paper to the duck**, taking frequent pauses.
3. **During pauses, take time to reflect on your ideas.** Ask yourself *how* and *why* questions. Are the ideas and claims of your paper fully developed?
4. **Jot down any thoughts or concerns that come to mind** as you explain your essay to the duck.
5. **Rewrite, Restructure, Revise.**

**Remember:** The most important part of this strategy is not the rubber duck, of course—or even the questions you ask yourself. Instead, the main idea is to give you space to reflect on your own words by saying them aloud, and then to write down those reflections to help you as you revise.

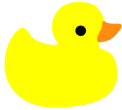
Let's try using the Rubber Duck technique to write an introductory paragraph for an English essay...

"In my class this semester, we read *The Iliad* and *The Aeneid*, and I have to somehow compare and contrast the two."

How are these books similar? How are they different?



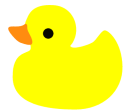
"*The Iliad* was Greek, and *The Aeneid* was Roman, but both books have scenes where the main character travels to the afterlife. It's interesting that both texts were influenced so much by their culture's beliefs about death."



How can you use the texts to show the influence of these beliefs?

"Well, the Greeks believed that, after death, a person's soul was frozen and they couldn't experience anything new. In *The Iliad*, that's shown through how Achilles acts. The Romans believed that the afterlife was a temporary stop in a cycle of reincarnation. I think that influenced how the main character of *The Aeneid*, Aeneas, pursues his goals."

Why does writing about all of this matter?



"I think that just like beliefs about the afterlife influenced Greek and Roman authors, and that such beliefs continue to influence a lot of modern writers!"

Using your notes, you could get an intro paragraph (and thesis) that looks something like this:

The beliefs of the Greeks and Romans regarding death and the afterlife greatly influenced their iconic texts. In *The Iliad*, the Greek belief that there are no new experiences after death influences why Achilles seeks for fame and glory anchored in enjoying the present. In *The Aeneid*, Roman beliefs about a cycle of reincarnation affect how the main character, Aeneas, focuses on pursuing long-term goals and protecting the people he leads. The motivations for the characters in these two texts are directly related to how their respective cultures viewed death. Even now, in modern literature, beliefs about death and the afterlife continue to influence authors and their creations.

**Bottom line:** this is just one example of how you could use the Rubber Duck technique effectively, both to generate ideas *and* to reflect on how to strengthen your claims. My example isn't necessarily perfect—we can almost always revise our writing for the better—but you can see how the process works. Asking probing questions (how? why?) and verbally explaining the topic you are trying to write about (and your interest in it!) forces you to slow down and really think about the points you are trying to convince your reader of. This sort of mindfulness will often lead you to think about new points of view, or to think of other examples that will strengthen your argument.

And, it's okay to take this process slowly...the rubber duck will always be patient with you!

*Don't be afraid to ask yourself tough questions! Good luck, and happy writing!*