

YSG: 10 TIPS FOR TACKLING CREATIVE CHALLENGES: BLOCKS AND OVERLOAD

Feeling stuck is an all-too-common part of a creative residency experience; this feeling is very real, totally normal, incredibly annoying and at the same time, very survivable. It may be that you have hit a creative stumbling block or feeling overwhelmed by the possibilities that your work is generating. While blocks are frustrating, tackling them and working *'with'* them can be imperative to moving forward with your creative practice. Following are some practical artist-tested ways to work with such a situation.

1. **Reframe your approach to the 'block'** – look at it as potential information as opposed to what you might be seeing as a failure to move forward. It's time to think about what this 'resistance' might be protecting or pointing to? During this time, residency participants may experience a rising sense of fear and it is important to acknowledge it. You may find yourself thinking "I'm wasting this opportunity", "this should be better by now" and "everyone else knows what they're doing"; in order to move forward, acknowledge where you are at and then actively take charge by trying some or all of the following (think about what might work best for you):

2. Shrink the frame (urgently)

When you're overwhelmed, your brain is trying to solve **the whole residency** at once. Don't let it.

Ask only: *What is the next small, physical thing I can do in 30–60 minutes?*

Not "finish the work", but rather:

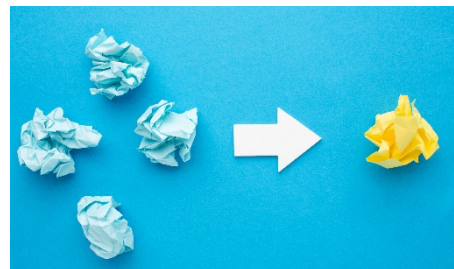
- cut one material
- write 3 sentences about what isn't working
- mix one test batch
- clean one surface
- photograph today's mess

(the momentum of these simple activities can lead to clarity)

3. Re-name "stuck" as data

Work-in-progress discomfort often means:

- the work is shifting direction
- your original plan is no longer true
- something better is trying to emerge



Instead of "I'm failing," try: *This phase is information-gathering.*

Residencies are **for** this messy middle. If everything felt resolved, you wouldn't need the time.

4. Run low-stakes experiments

Remember residencies are labs, not factories.

- Set **time-boxed experiments** (30–90 mins) with no obligation to keep results.
 - Use a constraint:
 - One material only
 - No tools you're "good" with
 - Work blind / with gloves / upside down
 - Label outputs as *tests*, not *works* —this should help you relax
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5. Separate making from meaning

The potential to be overwhelmed can strike when you try to do the following all at once:

- make the work
- understand the work
- explain the work

If you are feeling overwhelmed, for a day (or two) try the following:

- **Only make.** No artist statements. No justification.
 - If meaning thoughts pop up, jot them in a notes doc titled "*Thoughts for later.*" Maintain your resolve just make stuff; these thoughts can be handled in the future.
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6. Do a "permission reset"

Say this out loud (seriously):

"I am allowed to waste time, materials, and ideas here."

Residencies can result in artists feeling quietly pressured to be productive and impressive and YSG and AAV recognise that real value often comes from false starts, mixed test results and abandoned directions.

Remember that giving yourself permission lowers the potential for panic and that lower panic = better work.

7. Change the input, not the output

When you feel stuck stop trying harder and change the conditions:

- walk for the sake of walking – move your body to shift your mindset – don't think about documentation, outcomes and so on
- switching materials for one session

- Switch modes, not projects. Instead of abandoning the work, change gears:
 - ❖ If you're **making** → document
 - ❖ If you're **thinking** → build
 - ❖ If you're **planning** → play
- Look at something *adjacent* to your practice (not “inspiring,” just sideways)
- Do something rhythmic or repetitive (sanding, sweeping, knotting, stitching)
- Change scale: if you're stuck on a big piece, make something palm-sized

The takeaway: Fresh input unlocks stuck systems.

8. Talk it out (but selectively)

- Explain your work **to a non-artist** or to yourself out loud
 - Record a 5-minute voice memo: eg: “Here’s what I think I’m doing and why I’m annoyed”
 - Avoid too much feedback too early — it can harden the block
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9. Make a “Work in Progress container”

Residencies feel overwhelming because everything feels loose and unfinished. Create a containers and/or spaces - this actively tells your brain that ‘the chaos has a home’.

- Have one table / corner / folder where *only* current experiments live
 - Create an additional space/container for unpolished ideas: messy notes, lists of questions, sketches that go nowhere and things you're actively bored by (as you rummage in this container you may be surprised by what creative inspiration sneaks in through this door).
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10. Remember:

You are not behind; you are in it

You are not ‘doing it wrong’.

You are inside the part that no one posts on Instagram.

Being overwhelmed often means you're **actually engaging**—not skating on the surface.

