MATILDA: Oh, man.

MIKE: How's it going Matilda?

MATILDA: I can't talk I've got to write.

MIKE: Whoa. Slow down. Are you all right?

MATILDA: Well, that depends on how these next twenty-four hours go.

MIKE: Pardon?

MATILDA: I've got this paper due tomorrow morning and I haven't gotten very far.

MIKE: Well, when did you start?

MATILDA: About five minutes before you got here.

MIKE: Ahh.

MATILDA: Yeah.

MIKE: That was maybe not the best choice.

MATILDA: Yeah, no kidding. But I made it, and here we are.

MIKE: I know what it's like to write under pressure like that. Can I share some tips on how to write a good paper efficiently?

MATILDA: That can only help. Thank you.

MIKE: First, don't just start writing right away. Turning in what falls out of your head in a whirlwind of stress doesn't usually come out all that well.

MATILDA: That makes sense.

MIKE: The key is smart planning. First, make sure your topic has the appropriate scope. You want to choose the topic narrow enough that you can write substantially about it in a short amount of time, but broad enough that you're not straining to find material to fill up the pages.

Also, it helps to pick a topic that you care about. You may know a few things already from your own interests or from previous related projects which could help a lot with research. And of course, being interested in your topic makes any writing project go more smoothly.

MATILDA: That's a great tip, but research still takes a pretty long time.

MIKE: That's true. So you'll want a topic that's not too obscure, something that other writers are addressing. It will be easier to find fruitful sources in a shorter period of time.

MATILDA: Oh, what about analyzing the costs and benefits of social media use among teenagers? I saw an interesting article about bullying on Snapchat the other day.

MIKE: That sounds promising. It's certainly a current topic and one that's still unfolding as new social media apps keep developing and evolving.

MATILDA: All right, cool. I can definitely get into this topic. Do you have any other tips?

MIKE: I do. Before you begin, sketch a rough outline of your paper. Ask yourself what you want your readers to learn from your document, how you can interest them, and what you want them to be thinking about when they finish reading. It may add a few minutes to your process, but having an outline will be very useful if you get stuck later. It will also help you to keep focus and on topic. Once you've done all that, you can start writing.

MATILDA: OK. Those are all great ideas. But what if I still don't finish?

MIKE: That happens from time to time. If you can't get to the end, turn in what you have done. It's better to get partial credit than to get a zero for failing to turn in anything at all. And if you finish the whole thing later that day or the day after, you might try turning the rest in then. A sympathetic professor may accept it with only a small [? dent ?] in your grade.

And an even more forgiving professor might allow you to turn in another draft of it. So think specifically about what you'll need to add or change to improve it. And please, think about what you'll need to do differently for your next paper to avoid such a stressful situation in the future.

MATILDA: Yeah. Yeah. I know. I'll plan my time better before the next assignment. Well, I guess I'd better get started, huh. Thanks, Mike. You've helped me a lot.

MIKE: Glad to help, and good luck.