

Overcoming Writer's Block

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These tips may prove useful for overcoming other kinds of blocks as well.

Some lucky authors say they've never suffered from writer's block, but a lot of us, from the total beginner to the multi-published author, experience times when the words don't flow as freely as we might like.

There are two kinds of situations that we refer to as writer's block. The serious kind is where you've gone weeks, maybe even months, and been unable to write. If that's the case, you may have some serious things going on in your life and this just may not be a good time for writing. If you want to be writing and have the time to do it, but just can't seem to, do anything you can to stimulate your joy in life, your creativity, your enjoyment of books and reading.

Sometimes life just sucks big-time <g>. We're frantically busy with the day job, in poor health, stressed out over family issues. For some writers, writing (like reading) is a great distraction from the problems of real life, or a way of venting and/or processing what's going on in their lives. Others find they're simply too exhausted (emotionally and physically) to be able to put words on the page. The most important thing, in times of stress, is to do what you can to stay healthy, both physically and emotionally, and get through the bad time. And if you're in a really bad space, be it physically, mentally and/or emotionally, consider seeing your doctor and/or going for counselling.

The easier problem is the one almost all of us face occasionally, where we just get stalled.

An example:

When I was working on "Unwrap Me," my holiday novella in the *Unwrap Me* anthology, I knew my characters but I was having trouble figuring out where the story was going to go. I brainstormed about Christmas and all the things associated with the holidays. I thought about Christmas music... and The Twelve Days of Christmas (a partridge in a pear tree)...

And it hit me that my Christmas-loving hero was going to have the brilliant and sneaky idea of giving my anti-Christmas heroine a special gift each day for twelve days, themed to match the song – but so cleverly that she wouldn't catch on (e.g., the "geese a-laying" became an omelette made with goose eggs; the "five gold rings" became...well, you'll have to read the novella to find out <g>). That concept gave me a framework from which I could craft scenes to fit each of the days in the "partridge in a pear tree" song. And then it was full steam ahead!

If you're feeling stalled in your writing, there are all sorts of different things to try. Experiment and you'll figure out which techniques are the best triggers for your creativity (and different ones may work at different times). Here's a shopping list of suggestions to try out:

- Play music. Light scented candles or incense. Drink a different kind of tea or coffee. Pour a glass of wine or make yourself a fancy mixed drink (but don't drink too much!). In other words, make a change to your standard working environment so as to stimulate your senses and creativity, and get past your internal censor.
- If you normally write on computer, try a pretty notebook or a utilitarian lined pad. If you normally write longhand, try the computer.
- Get away from the computer and do something physical. Physical activity can shake up your mental blocks. Go for a walk, do some gardening, even do the laundry.
- Think about why you're stalled. If it's because you don't know what happens next, then pull back from the story and focus on the characters. While you're taking that walk, talk to your characters (preferably in your head, unless you're on the treadmill at home), get to know them better, and think about all the things they might do next.
- Brainstorm, either with yourself or other people. Toss out ideas, even if they seem crazy. You never know which will trigger your imagination.
- Before you go to sleep at night, think about your characters and your story, especially the thing that's stalling you. Keep a notepad beside the bed, in case you wake up with a brilliant idea.
- Just keep writing. You can always edit or even delete later.
- Don't try to make it perfect. Don't think about whether you're writing "well"; just write. If your internal critic is sitting on your shoulder, the words are likely to come out stilted and unnatural. If you get rid of the critic, the characters can speak through you. Remember, you're going to have lots of chances to edit your work later.
- Write in a different place. Get away from the desktop computer and write in the living room, on the patio, at a coffee shop, at the library.
- Write at a different time of day.
- Write something different. Don't write the next scene in your book; write a character bio in their own words, write an email from one character to another, write a short story, write a poem, write "wild mind" (see Natalie Goldberg's books).
- Try another creative activity, such as drawing or singing.
- If you can't focus on writing because your mind is cluttered with other "stuff," make a list of all that other stuff so you won't forget it, then turn to your writing.
- Give yourself a day or two off to play. Don't let not writing become a habit, though. If you're serious about your writing career, you need to make writing a regular part of your life.

And mostly, don't lose faith in yourself. Believe that you're a writer and you can do this, and one day the words will flow freely again.

If you're afraid of writing – because of fear of failure, fear of success, fear of the subject and emotions you're writing about, etc. – take a look at my article on Facing the Fear Monster.

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