

WRITERLY WIT*



ALWAYS

HELPFUL.

***SOMETIMES WITTY.**

WITH DEINA FURTH
Author, blogger, podcaster, human.

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Writerly Wit with Deina Furth

Episode 4: Overcoming Writer's Block

So far in this podcast, we've talked about how to get started as a writer, how to manage your time on social media, and how to build an author platform.

Hopefully you've found those tips helpful—I know that when I first started all of this, I was desperate for someone to give me some advice, to point me in the right direction!

This week, I want to give you some tips for overcoming writer's block. I know that sometimes it seems like there's just nothing good to work with—ideas just aren't coming to your mind. Well, with a bit of practice, you can figure out what jogs your brain into doing its rightful duty once again. So let's get started. I'm going to give you some tips based on different personality types, and how I think you might benefit!

For the shy person

If you're like me and don't like reaching out to groups, you might enjoy these tips.

When I'm feeling like my writing sucks or I just can't get the words flowing, **I'll go to a website or find a book with writing prompts and pick one.** If I can't find any that appeal to me, I'll just randomly select one. Sometimes you have to just force yourself to do something, even if it's out of your realm or you don't particularly feel excited about the idea.

The best thing about this strategy is that it forces you to expand your mind. You have to think about things in a different way than you normally would. When you do this, it opens the doors for more creative ideas to come flooding in.

Of course, you can always save your “writer's block” stories and pull them out later. You can form a collection of short stories or poetry when you have enough of them. **That's a great way to turn your writer's block into work you can actually be proud of.**

Another way to overcome writer's block when you don't want to get help from anybody is to pick up a book by your favorite authors. Look at the elements in the story. Which do you really admire? Which do you most want to emulate? Once you have an idea of where you want to end up, you'll figure out how to get started pretty quickly.

For the social person

If you're the complete opposite of a shy person and thrive when going to writing groups, you'll definitely want to try this.

Form a support group or at least get an accountilibuddy. Don't know what an "accountilibuddy" is? That's someone who you must be accountable to when setting goals. So, for example, if you've set a goal to write 5000 words by the end of this week, you tell your accountilibuddy that. If you don't reach your goal, then you have to admit it. You can make it so that if you don't meet your goal, you can't go out for that special lunch treat or maybe you have to forego your Starbucks every morning this coming week. Alternatively, if you do make your goals, you'll be able to treat yourself.

If you form a support group, make it a rule that you have to post your goals every week and follow up with them. Encourage everyone to check in during the week, too. Bounce ideas off other members and see how quickly your drive to write comes back!

When outgoing, social people have to be accountable to others, they tend to do better. They work harder to reach their goals because they don't like disappointing people, least of all themselves. Tying rewards to your strategy makes your drive even stronger, but that's not always necessary, of course. Simply by setting goals and holding yourself accountable, you will find that you can fight your way through writer's block. Perseverance is key!

For the perfectionist

There are two kinds of perfectionists in this world: The ones who think their work is so perfect that it is immune from all criticism, and the ones who think their work is never perfect *enough*, and they don't ever bother submitting it—or even self-publishing it.

Let's start with the first kind of perfectionist.

This first kind of perfectionist gets hung up creatively because **he or she will not take any suggestions.** They end up feeling stuck on an idea and eventually write something that gets them out of it. Someone gives them feedback they don't like, and they just brush it off as garbage. Then, when their story doesn't sell, they get defensive—and they end up making excuses like "No one understands what I was going for" or "I'm not letting them change this into mainstream garbage".

If this kind of perfectionist is you, listen up: You need to be able to tolerate

feedback. One guy might have a dumb suggestion for you, sure—but if editor after editor suggests you make the same changes, you might really have a problem on your hands.

The beauty of all of this is that if you fix it, you'll get much better at your craft and you'll have a much better shot at selling your work.

If you're this kind of perfectionist and no ideas are coming to your head, then chances are you're waiting on your “muse” to strike.

I'll tell you what. That's no way to be a writer. The muse strikes whenever the muse wants, and you have a career to build regardless. So since you're such a perfectionist, you'll love playing competitive games with yourself.

Try to write a certain amount of words in a set amount of time. Build up your skills. Better yourself. As you continue to get better at this, time yourself. Try to beat your best time. Keep working at whittling that time down.

Or, try to jot down as many story ideas as possible and choose your best one to work with. Even if you don't use 15 other ideas, you can still look back on them in the future. Maybe you'll want to use them then.

If you're the second kind of perfectionist—the one who thinks everything must be completely perfect before being submitted or even shown to your mother, then I feel for you. I used to be like this. I was so afraid of criticism (not that I enjoy it now, mind you) that I wouldn't show anybody anything. I was crippling myself.

You'll never realize your dream of becoming a professional writer like this. You may still very well be a writer—you enjoy writing, and you write for your own eyes—but you can't make money if you don't put it out there.

If you're this kind of perfectionist, you need to force yourself to do something. *Anything.*

When I put my first work out there for the world to see, I was terrified. But I forced myself to press “publish” and I honestly haven't looked back since.

Try doing exercises where you write for as long as you can. Sit down and write sentences. Any kind of sentence. Just keep writing. Don't stop—not to correct grammatical errors (GASP!), and not to bother correcting misspellings or think of fancy words to replace boring, mundane ones. Nope. Just keep writing. You can always go back and fix it later. **This forces you to be productive rather than passively beating yourself up for not being perfect.**

If you can't think of any ideas in general **because you're convinced your ideas are crap and not original**, try this: What's your favorite book? Great. Now strip it down to the bare bones of the story. What's it really about underneath it all? Got it? Now think of other stories that are similar.

I bet you can think of A LOT if you try.

The key to writing is not coming up with something that absolutely, 100% has not been done before. It's telling a damn good story. Who cares if your book contains certain elements that are similar to others in its genre? Tell your story well and no one will care. All they'll want is more of your words to devour.

For the busy bee

Are you feeling stuck because you're just too busy to get anything accomplished? Every time you sit down, **do you feel like your ideas are swimming in your head—you can't get a storyline straight enough to get a simple first draft written?** Or worse—your ideas just don't come at all, and all you can think of is your head hitting that sweet, sweet pillow?

Boy, do I know that feeling.

A few years ago, I worked at a job that required me to travel for weeks on end. **I lived out of a suitcase.** I ate hotel food or restaurant food most nights—at least when I didn't have a fridge and microwave in my room. **I worked at LEAST 10 hours a day, seven days a week** while away from home. Sometimes, my work required even more hours—busy days it could be 14 to 17 hours.

One time I worked 27 hours straight.

Yes, I questioned the legality of it too.

(But that's another story for another time.)

This was when I started messing around with the idea of a writing career. I tried to work on it some while at work, or a bit after I was off (if I didn't hit the hay immediately). **I got a gig writing some fiction for a guy who paid me pretty well.** I began to realize how much I enjoyed it, and from there, began writing more often for people through a site called Elance.com. **After I quit that traveling job, I began using my growing writing portfolio to land me another job where I could continue to write.**

What's the point of this story and how does it help a busy person get un-stuck? Well, you have to find that nugget of inspiration somewhere. **Something has to get you started—no matter how busy you are. You can't be creative if you don't create.**

For busy bees, I recommend two things (in lieu of becoming NOT so busy, obviously):

- 1) **Write short stories or flash fiction.** When your mind is going a million miles per hour, you can bang out 1000 words on some crazy, far-fetched idea. And then walk away. You've completed a story—no need to linger or plan any more.
- 2) **Chunk it out.** What do I mean by that? Well, I mean that you should take your calendar for the month and look at your schedule. When do you have pockets of free time? Can you make free time in the mornings before work? After the kids have gone to bed? If so, take those chunks of time and defend them like crazy. **Write your goal in your calendar so when the time arrives, you're ready to go and not wondering how to start.** So, for example, if you wanted to write a 1000-word flash fiction story about a man who decided it was high time he went to the therapist for this voice he keeps hearing, write "1k words—man goes to therapist about THE VOICES!" and you'll know exactly what to do when the time comes.

Well, that about covers it for my tips. I have plenty more at my site for you, so don't forget to check that out. And subscribe to my newsletter—never miss an update and you'll get plenty of information and ideas for writing!

Before I go, I'm going to leave you with a quote:

"If I waited til I felt like writing, I'd never write at all."

Anne Tyler, Pulitzer-winning author of *The Accidental Tourist* and *Breathing Lessons*, is credited with this quote.

I don't think I need to explain why I chose this. **If a Pulitzer-winning author says that she has to force herself to write, then you'll probably have to do so, too.** It's hard work. So overcome that writer's block and snap to it!

Be sure to visit my site, <http://deinafurth.com/>, and check out **The Short Story and Flash Fiction Society** at <http://www.shortstoryflashfictionsociety.com/> and see what Mary Papas and I have planned for this week. We just finished running a short story contest, so you can check out the winning story there.

And you can also participate in our weekly event called "Friday Story Sharing", where if you have a collection of short stories or flash fiction, or a short story that costs \$2.99 or

less, **you can link to it for free and promote it that day on our blog.** So it's definitely something that's exciting for those people who write short stories and are just looking to get their names out there.

We also have a short story markets eBook for only 99 cents per part—there are two parts—and it tells you where you can submit your short stories for publication. **And we have an eBook that's \$1.99, which is a book of 110 writing prompts,** so I think that suits this episode's content pretty well, so you might want to check that out as well.

[\[Short Story Markets Vol. 1\]](#)

[\[Short Story Markets Vol. 2\]](#)

Be sure to [check out my vlog series](#) where I talk about writing peeves, writing tips, and a whole lot of other literary-themed things on YouTube.

You can also email me with questions or comments at deina.furth@gmail.com.

So this is kind of a short episode, but **I just wanted to get you guys some tips to keep you motivated in this spring weather.** I don't know how it is where you are, but where I am it was nice for a week, and now it's cold again. And I'm just not feeling all that creative and motivated, so hopefully I can follow some of my own tips, too.

So until next time, this is Deina Furth with Writerly Wit, and I'll see you soon!