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Beat the Block with a Journal

By Mridu Khullar

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It's nearing the end of summer, and I have no credentials to my benefit these holidays. As the end of the holidays approach, I keep wondering what I have to show for the summer other than the noticeable tan, and the load of incomplete articles adorning my computer.

Having nothing to write about can be exasperating. But having plentiful to do, and not doing it out of sheer laziness or lack of interest is a whole other story. I have articles months old that haven't seen the light of day. Ah, if only I could complete them. But procrastination and laziness stand in the way. I've been telling myself that it's the heat, but with the temperatures going down again, I'm not even left with that excuse.

I have seemingly divorced myself from the half-written articles that sit there waiting on some remote folder in my computer. Somehow, I never get to completing something if I leave it midway. And this time is no different. I ended up opening the files, reading their contents, closing them with a mental note that they needed to be finished and went back to my Need for Speed racing adventure.

After an endless round of mindless car racing, I decided it was time to get back to work. Having nothing to write about, I thought I'd try my hand at a journal. Writers are always saying that keeping journals spark up your creativity, but somehow I never thought I'd be writing in one. I'd always wondered why a writer would waste her precious time writing in a journal, when she could be earning money, writing those words in an article or story.

So, I began Mission Journal by simply opening up my word processor and writing the first thing that came into my mind. Incidentally, I started rambling about how much I had wanted to achieve but with a drastic case of writer's block having swept over me the last few days, my ambitions had been reduced to dust. Before I knew it, I had written two thousand words, simply on why I couldn't write and how it was playing havoc with my spirit.

I hate to admit it, but the truth is - I was wrong. A journal is not a waste of a writer's time. It's a learning process. When a computer professional sits down to learn a new programming language, he's not

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wasting his time. He's preparing himself for situations in which his programming skills could come in handy. Similarly, a journal can be the resource a writer digs into when she's at a loss of ideas and can't find anything to write about. It gives the writer practice she needs every single day, and enables her to create a much desired momentum in her writing.

The day I started writing in my journal, was the day my month-long block finally came to an end. And as I wrote, I found my mind racing faster than my fingers could type. Soon, I was writing not only about my day, but also my holidays, my last semester and the last time the family went on a holiday together. Incidents kept springing to my mind and I was caught in the adrenalin rush. I was writing!

I had needed a spark for my creativity, and the journal had done just that. It had made given me the push that I needed to start, and once I was writing, the ideas and the words came to me like they had

never left my side.

Journals give the writer the three things she needs most: Practice, Motivation and Ideas.

Now, everyday before I begin writing my articles or stories, I simply pen down a page in my journal. If I don't feel like writing on paper, I've maintained a journal on my computer too. Not only do I get a jumpstart on my day, I also feel more energized and ready to write pages and pages of prose.

Journals can also be a great storehouse of ideas. When you think that you've suddenly become unresponsive to the ideas around you or can't find a character to fit into your stories, peek into your journal, and you'll find something priceless there. The trip to the lake last summer or the fight with your neighbor might just become incidents in your next best seller.

Journals are not necessarily diaries in which you record your personal thoughts and feelings. They can be lists of goals, pet care tips, or simply freewriting that you do everyday before you get to work. They needn't even be focused on one topic - you can introduce random thoughts whenever and wherever you like. In writing a journal, there are no rules; you simply write what you want.

As of writing this, I maintain four journals to suit my different moods. I don't write in all of them everyday, but do try to write in at least one each day. On days that I don't have too much work to do, I spark my creativity by writing in all four. Who knew, that a journal would become my best friend?

Mridu Khullar is the editor-in-chief of www.WritersCrossing.com, a free online magazine for writers. Sign up for the free weekly newsletter to get a complimentary e-book with 400+ paying markets. Also check out her e-book, "Knock Their Socks Off! A Freelance Writer's Guide to Query Letters That Sell," available at <http://www.writerscrossing.com/queries.html>

Breaking Writer's Block

By Lisa Hood

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The most fearsome enemy to any writer, attacking without warning, without prejudice and without compassion, is (gasp, dare I say it?) WRITER'S BLOCK.

I feel a bit like Harry Potter speaking Voldermort's name aloud to the horror of his fellow witches and wizards.

Writer's Block is a curse to creativity. It's as if all the characters and situations and what if scenarios, which normally ricochet around your brain have been sucked into a worm hole leaving only a void behind. It's painful, it's frightening and it's self inflicted!

Writer's Block is the residue of fear. For me, it is the fear of not being good enough. For you it may be fear of exposing yourself to criticism, fear of rejection, fear of humiliation, fear of failure, fear of success, the list could go on and on. Regardless of the fear that keeps you its prisoner, Writer's Block is your prison.

It's time to conquer your fear and get back to the business of writing.

Begin by identifying what is holding you back. As I said, I'm afraid of not being good enough. To counter this, I use a technique called free writing. I think about a situation and then write continuously for ten minutes, without stopping, without censoring any word or phrase or thought. Knowing that mistakes are acceptable, that the objective of this exercise is quantity not quality frees me from my prison.

Use every opportunity to write. If you have stalled on a novel, write a short story, an article, a poem, write in your journal, write a description of the checker at the grocery store, give her a name, a bio, a life...The idea is: JUST WRITE. I stall when editing. Sometimes I just can't look at the story any more. I get so frustrated, I just want to chuck the whole thing and start over. At times like this, it's better for me to turn my attention to a short story or write an article. Before I know it, I'm relaxed and confident.

Last, but not least, READ. Reading a good book always inspires me. Imagine if JRR Tolkien let fear stop him from writing. What the world would be missing! Every book is full of lessons you can apply to your craft. You can read a book and see the way a particular writer develops characters, overcomes obstacles or weaves their words. You may find tools to use and traps to avoid in your own work.

Lisa Hood is the author of "Shades of Betrayal" and "Shades of Revenge". She has been writing for over 10 years and is presently working on her third suspense novel, "Shades of Jealousy." She is also the Talent Liaison @ BOOKJOBBER.com. Other articles by Lisa Hood can be downloaded from

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