

Beating Perfection Syndrome so you can write

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By Angela Booth

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It's Saturday afternoon. Your partner has taken the kids to the park. You have a whole hour to write. Instead of which, you sit, staring out the window like Rodin's Thinker in jeans and a yellow sweatshirt. Why aren't you writing? A tiny item called Perfection Syndrome. You want whatever you write in this precious hour to be perfect.

During the week, you had a stream of plausible ideas. You wrote three ideas in your notebook: an article about children's first words (your six month old said 'truck'), an essay about male vanity, and a short story about a blonde with tattooed arms and a poodle.

Just now, none of those ideas seems right. You've only got an hour, so you want the perfect idea, the one that will justify the sixty minutes you're about to spend on it. Instead, you do nothing.

Perfection Syndrome can destroy your writing career. It's a killer, because if you don't recognise it for what it is, it leads to apathy. The gap between what's in your head and what manifests on the page is so wide that you may give up writing for days or weeks.

I understand Perfection Syndrome, because it's something I battle every day. The words on the screen or the page never measure up to the words in my head. I start typing, and after a sentence or

two, stop. The words "this is garbage" light up like neon in my skull, my stomach clenches, and I feel as if a ten ton weight had dropped onto my body. It's not as if I'm a new writer. I've been writing for over 20 years. Intellectually, I understand that it's important to get words onto the screen ---- any words. You can fix whatever you write. Emotionally, I want the first draft to be perfect. I've accepted that perfectionism is part of my personality, and without a personality transplant, I'm never going to get rid of it, so all I can do is out-write it.

Yes, out-write it. A practice that's helped is Julia Cameron's Morning Pages method, which is detailed in her books: The

Artist's Way, and Vein of Gold. The first thing I do each morning is write three pages in longhand. This primes the pump, and if I accomplish the Morning Pages, I know that I can count on a productive writing day, and Perfection Syndrome is beaten for this 24 hours at least.

Updating my inner "writer" image also helped. Images are the language of the right brain and the subconscious mind. Your subconscious mind is the engine which drives you. My initial image of my writing self was of a mountain climber, clinging to vertical rock and ice, unable to see the mountain peak, but terrorized by a crevasse below. No wonder I needed every word to be perfect, if the alternative was death. A more nourishing image popped into my mind. I saw my writing self as a seed-sower, the old-time kind, with a deep hessian bag of seeds, walking along the furrows of a field of fertile soil, scattering seeds with both hands. Now, whenever I feel panicked about my writing, I visualize myself as the sower, scattering those seeds. Ask yourself what image you hold of yourself as a writer.

Strategies to beat Perfection Syndrome

The first step in fighting Perfection Syndrome is to acknowledge that you've got it, and know that it's beatable. Any of the strategies below will help.

* Morning Pages: first thing each morning, write three pages in longhand. The pages don't have to be about anything. You can write three pages of whining about situations in your life, or three pages of "This is stupid, I don't know what to write". Yes, but---- you're thinking: I'm supposed to write three pages no one will ever see, much less publish? YES. Just try the process.

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* Check in with your subconscious mind. Just wonder quietly about the image you hold of your writing self. Either awake, while daydreaming, or in a dream, and image will float into your mind. If it's negative, change it to a life-affirming, encouraging and hopeful one.

* Set a target number of words for each writing session. However, set the word target and quality LOW. Even on your worst migraine day you can write 200 words of gibberish. Or, promise yourself that whenever you turn on your computer, you will write 50 words on your current project.

* Keep a writing log for each writing session for a week. List what you worked on, how many words you wrote, and how you felt before you started writing and how you felt when you finished. Your writing log will convince you that writing can alter your

moods: you'll feel better when you finish your writing session than you did before you started. It will also convince you that you can write when you're depressed, tired, or ill.

* Start a story prompts/ ideas file. A fresh idea may tempt you if you're resisting working on your current projects.

* Where else in your life do you expect perfection? If you're struck with Perfection Syndrome, it will manifest in other areas. List five of those areas, and several ways to combat each

* Perfectionism leads to procrastination: do one task each day that you've been putting off. Be willing to skimp on the task, and do it badly, but do it.

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Australian author and journalist Angela Booth writes about business, technology, health and creativity for print and online publications. She also writes copy for businesses large and small.

Is it right to long for perfection?

By ajaypats

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Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away. Aim for success, not perfection. Never give up your right to be wrong, because then you will lose the ability to learn new things and move forward with your life. Assert your right to make a few mistakes. If people can't accept your imperfections, that's their fault. Remember that fear always lurks behind perfectionism. Confronting your fears and allowing yourself the right to be human can, paradoxically, make you a far happier and more productive person. Have patience with all things, but chiefly have patience with yourself. Do not lose courage in considering your own imperfections but instantly set about remedying them – every day begin the task anew.

Things will never be perfect. Sometimes they will never even be close. Yet that is no reason to hide away from life, no reason to curse your predicament. On the contrary, it is every reason to rise up and go forth with renewed determination.

If you wait for conditions to be perfect, you won't ever get much done. If you refuse to go ahead unless you can be guaranteed of a sure thing, you'll never get very far.

It's great to aim toward perfection, yet to arrive at perfection you must cross through a lot of imperfection. To get everything just right, you must be willing to deal with things going wrong. Take this day, this moment, with all its flaws, and make the very most of it. Rather than complaining about what you don't have or where you'd rather be, make full use of where you are, of what you do have.

Aim toward perfection while also accepting the reality of what is. And excellence will surely result

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