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Thawing Your Writer's Block

By Mary Anne Hahn

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When I go through bouts of writer's block, my fingers stiffen, and my brain goes as blank as the snowy screen of a television on the fritz.

I don't know about you, but I picture writer's block as something cold—like the frozen engine of a car in the dead of winter, or the way your PC sometimes "freezes up" on you when your system gets too busy.

Looking at it that way actually helps to overcome it. Rather than feeling like you are grasping at fog, visualizing writer's block as something three-dimensional can provide you with both the strength to confront it, and the weapons to conquer it.

How can you thaw your writer's block of ice? Try any or all of the following:

1. Chip away at it. No need to write "War and Peace" in one sitting; Tolstoy certainly didn't. Fifteen minutes a day are all you need to give your writing dream some life and structure. Use them to write anything, anything at all—as many article ideas as you can think of, a synopsis of a story idea, a climactic scene in your novel, a limerick, a character sketch, step by step instructions for making the perfect omelet or what you would do if you won the lottery.

Have some fun with these 15-minute exercises, and you'll probably rediscover the truth in the adage that "time flies" when you do.

2. Light a match to it. By this I mean, don't think about the fact that you are not currently writing; rather, think about why you ever wanted to be a writer in the first place. Better yet, **write** about why you want to be a writer. Do you have stories burning inside you that need to be told? Or do you see writing as your key to personal fulfillment or freedom? Melt away writer's block by reigniting your passion for writing—the old daydreams, the past feelings of triumph or accomplishment when you finished a piece of work.

3. Carve a sculpture out of it. If you simply can't break it down or melt it away, make something from your writer's block of ice. As I did above, write about how you feel when you experience writer's

block, or what you think writer's block looks like. Maybe look for humor in it ("What did one writer's block say to the other?" "Nothing—it couldn't find the right words!" Okay, that's a bit lame, but you get the idea).

Whenever writer's block tries to come between you and your writing aspirations, don't try to avoid it. Instead, face it head on. Play with it, laugh at it, scoff at it, or befriend it. Make it something that you can take into your hands and deal with.

Turn it into one more tool that you can use to achieve your writing success.

Mary Anne Hahn is editor and publisher of "WriteSuccess," THE biweekly ezine of ideas, information and inspiration for writers. To subscribe, <mailto:writesuccess-subscribe@yahoogroups.com>

A Cure for Writer's Block

By Ruth Farmer

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Writer's block is a favourite topic of writer's, and no wonder....nearly every writer suffers from it at some crucial point in their careers. Writer's block usually comes to visit at the most inopportune times, like during projects of tremendous importance where there's not a moment to waste, or when there are firm deadlines involved and a nasty boss waiting in the next room anticipating a brilliant end-product. Writer's block is such a prevalent problem that articles, essays, books, and entire websites have been dedicated to the topic.

Thawing Your Writer's Block

How will you recognize writer's block?

It appears like a blank page or screen that doesn't change for hours or days. It feels like stress and pressure. It frustrates and angers you and causes you a great deal of anxiety. You may experience an overwhelming sense of desperation and panic. You can definitely be sure you are suffering a mild case of it if you catch yourself staring at your blank computer screen, hoping that, magically, the keys will start typing on their own, and words will appear, nicely organized into coherent paragraphs and sentences.

I think the worst case of writer's block I ever had was when I was writing my Masters thesis. It lasted for four complete years — exactly as long as my last marriage. When the marriage ended, so did the block... funny how that worked.

How often we sacrifice our own creativity for the sake of someone else. We turn off that inner light and give control to the other person, effectively killing our creative selves along with whatever drew them to us in the first place. It wasn't the first time I'd done this, but for sure it will be the last.

I've made it a personal challenge to myself not to ever give away my power again! I will fight tooth and nail to hang on to every victory no matter how small, and to build on each victory until I see myself as the winner that I know I AM!

What does this rant have to do with curing writer's block?

It's the direct result of using a quotation to stimulate creative writing. I first learned this technique from reading Sarah Ban Breathnach's *_Simple Abundance Companion_*.

The idea is to take a random quote and write whatever thoughts come to mind as you contemplate it. The quote I chose to create the above piece was Henry Ford, "Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right."

It's more apt to say that the quote chose me, rather than the other way around. I never know what I'm going to get when I reach into the box to pick a card. That way I'm not predisposed to sort through

them until I find one I **want** to write about. The whole thing with writer's block is that the ideas aren't flowing the way you want them to. By picking a random quote and writing whatever comes to mind with what you get, you allow the words and the creative energy to flow in the direction it chooses.

It's also surprising how often the random quote ends up being a message that is needed right at that moment. In this instance, I was feeling the trepidation that always comes after finishing a book and putting it out there. What if no one likes it? What if no one buys it? By the time I finished the first draft of this article, it didn't matter any more. My writer's block was cured, and my self-confidence got a boost in the process thanks to Henry Ford's eleven words from long ago.

Ruth Ritchie-Farmer is the managing editor of Ritchie Media, and the author of *Perceptions of Success: A Collection of Quotations*. Visit her on the web at

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