

STUCK!

Tips and advice from authors on getting over Writer's Block
From Doris Eraldi's Workshop, Mendocino College Lit Fest, 2013

www.eraldi.net

From Northern California author, Monica Hall

I've never really known a block per se. (I tend to procrastinate and avoid but I am always thinking 'story' so when I do sit down to write the ideas are flowing.) I'm so buried in my writing that it physically hurts to do anything else until I get this book published.

I do have a few things that work to train the brain to focus on writing:

1. Do character descriptions. Likes, dislikes, motivations, fears. Wardrobe, furniture, home, job, tall and short and any other physical or emotional points can go into this part too.

2. Think through your story from the start and head toward the finish. Write the bullet points that you want to see come to life on 3x5 cards. Now shuffle them. Read them and see if they make better sense now that they are 'out of order'. Then start rearranging and add more idea cards as needed. By the time you get them 'in the new order' you will probably have worked out some of the issues and see fresh directions for your characters to move their story forward.

3. Put on the headphones while you write or edit or brainstorm. (or drive or answer e-mails) I know that sounds too easy but it does work. You can do a song shuffle or listen to one song for days at a time. Either way your subconscious will start connecting the music to the emotions you are trying to relay and when your writers block is melted your characters will come to life.



Monica Hall

Author of Local Northern California history books and novels.

[Facebook Page - Timberbeast](#)

(novel in progress – soon to be released)

Anne Schroeder, author of Cholama Moon/The Time of Troubles/third book yet unnamed. A historical western trilogy set in Central California. Book #1 will be released in 2012.



Work on it before bed and let the brain process while you sleep. Set the alarm for 5:00 and start writing before you have time to get scared that you can't.

Anne Schroeder

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Here's a tip I got from Natalie Goldberg (Author of *WRITING DOWN THE BONES*; *FREEING THE WRITER WITHIN*, <http://nataliegoldberg.com/>) about what to do when you stare at the blank screen or paper and can't think of anything to write. Write for five minutes, or two pages, or whatever metric appeals to you, and start every sentence with "I want to write about ..." and let your hand fill in the rest. She recommends you do this exercise in longhand, so that's what I do.

Trust me, your mind hates sentences with subjects and no predicates. It will fill something in, and then you too will know.

Here's what I wrote the last time this happened to me:

I want to write about big meaningful stuff that shouts "Wisdom! Wisdom! Get Your Red Hot Wisdom Here!" I want to write about how we're all swamped by our own loneliness and how joy and fear co-exist, living together in a too-small overstuffed apartment in my head. I want to write about how life calls for courage, we have no choice but to be courageous or die. I want to write about my cat using the couch as a scratching post even though she knows she's not supposed to, is that courage to be herself in spite of my orders, or rebellion in the face of my orders, or simply because scratching one's claws feels good and at this moment nothing else matters? I want to write about how sometimes I wake up with a song playing in my head, and how I wish I knew what this meant, or if it means anything at all. I want to write about the morning I woke up with Holy Holy Holy in my head, complete with crashing organ chords and an entire church choir – a song I haven't heard for decades but somehow all the words were still there, holyholyholy lord god almighty early in the morning my song will rise to thee, and which lurked in the back of my mind the rest of the day. I want to write about how the very next morning I woke up hearing Zip a Dee Doo Dah sung by chirping Disney-esque bluebirds – what about that? I want to write about the juxtaposition of Holy Holy Holy with Zip a Dee Doo Dah and what that says about my mental state – or maybe I don't because I'm not sure I want to know.

And after this outpouring, it is much easier to sit down and write something sensible. Believe me, this trick works.

Kim Pearson on Blood Red Pencil blog
<http://bloodredpencil.blogspot.com>
<http://www.primary-sources.com/>



Lucinda Stein
2010 Women Writing the West WILLA Literary Award Finalist

Sometimes you just have to write one sentence, and the ideas start to flow.

<http://www.lucindastein.com/>

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Penny Sidoli—Author of the children's book THE LAST BEAR IN SANTA BARBARA

My experience is to enjoy it. Sometimes the brain has to do some deep thinking without forcefulness & interruption. Writers block is only a block according to commercial interests, and its anxiety is self-imposed and artificial. For literary artists, it is the time of noticing, absorbing, reflecting. Rest and draw a picture or plant a garden. One's gift of writing will emanate again like new growth, in its own time.

www.pennysidoli.com/

Nancy Godbout Jurka—Writing under the name, Anna Blake Godbout, Nancy Godbout Jurka, a Cold Spring, New York native, is an award winning published poet/writer and photographer.

I don't always look at writer's block as a negative thing. There are periods in our lives that need a break or a quiet time to renew and refresh our hearts and minds. When this happens to me, I turn to music, gardening, painting, knitting and photography. My camera and I out in the world is always dessert for my writing whether I am blocked or not. Finding new details, new places, the work of nature all contribute to refreshing the creative spirit that comes out with the pen. A self retreat is a good way to begin. But in a rushed world full of deadlines and "got to have it done NOW!" mentality, I think having a writer's block is not such a bad thing after all.

<http://annablakegodbout.com/>

<http://mountaintapestrypress.com/>

Sandra Ramos O'Briant — Author of THE SANDOVAL SISTERS and numerous short stories.



Was asked about writer's block by a college class of avid 20-year-old aspiring writers. When I told them I'd never had writer's block, they looked crushed . . . then bored. Realized later that my 20 years in business before starting my writing career was writer's block. Now, I switch gears: work on a short story, sculpt, garden, go to the dog park, have margaritas w/ gf's.

www.sramosobriant.com/

[Facebook page](#)



Amy Hale Auker —RIGHTFUL PLACE, winner of the 2012 WILLA for creative non-fiction and Foreword Book Reviews' Book of the Year Gold Medallion for essays.

Gore Vidal to those who complain of writer's block: "You're not meant to be doing this. Plenty more where you came from."

<http://amyhaleauker.com/>

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Mary Trimble—author of memoir, mainstream and coming-of-age novels with contemporary western settings.

Writers block isn't usually a problem with me. I attribute this to writing a rough outline before I start a project. The outline is fluid--I often rearrange it, add to it, take away from it, etc. When I wonder "what's next," I can refer to my outline for ideas. Also, if I think of a future scene and am anxious to get into it, I write it right then, rather than wait until it actually comes up in the story. You can always work it in later.

www.marytrimblebooks.com/

Online Resources:

Article about the 22 rules of storytelling from Pixar—my personal favorite is #9

<http://aerogrammestudio.com/2013/03/07/pixars-22-rules-of-storytelling/>