

Writer's Block? No big deal!

by Denis Ledoux



As long as a writer thinks of writing as only putting new words down on paper, then there is bound to be a writer's block problem.

"What can I do about writer's block?" I am asked regularly in workshops.

"Pretty much the same a plumber does with a plumber's block," I'll respond.

People twitter here and there. Perhaps it's because they take my response for a joke and they're anticipating a good punch line.

But, this is no joke. A good plumber, I tell these "blocked" writers, goes about his job whether he's inspired to lay the pipes of a new bathroom or not. He solders, joins or cuts pipe that day whether he feels like it or not. It's the same with a writer. Writers write because writing is what they have to do to get their work done.

Writing doesn't entail only composing new text—the material whose creation we often attribute to "inspiration." The task of writing also includes a whole array of support services: research, editing existing copy for content and technical problems, rereading copy to check the effectiveness of transitions, etc. As long as a writer thinks of writing as only putting new words down on paper, then there is bound to be a writer's block problem. When however a writer thinks of writing as the total production, then any number of tasks produce the satisfaction of "writing."

Remember that there are many stages to the writing process:

- ◆ writing.
- ◆ editing.
- ◆ rewriting.
- ◆ making public.

Some writers will persist in having problems with what they call writer's block. Here are some suggestions for dealing with the "problem."

1) **Think of the writer's block as a lack of discipline.** This will help to place it in perspective. After all, it's an excuse—sanctioned by the notion of "inspiration"—for not getting work done. Writing is a job that has a number of requirements and stages, and each in turn must be approached with discipline—a respect for the inner exigencies of the tasks. To approach writing otherwise is to be overwhelmed with all there is to do. Lack of discipline is often the source of writer's block. Indiscipline is an enemy of lifewriting lying in wait for you.

Some writers successfully use the notion of writer's block to convince friends and family that, while they're real writers, they just happen not to be producing—

but a person can do this only for a while. Remember: writer's block will not get your stories written!

Just as any craft person develops a series of approaches that lead to greater production, a lifewriter can do the same. If you create a worklike approach to your writing and do as the plumber, you will find yourself writing regularly and writing a lot. Blocks are not a problem to writers who recognize the many tasks necessary to their work and succeed at accomplishing them.

Even if you would very much like to sell your work, you must still write for yourself.

◆ **Combine art with métier. Inspiration with approach.** The moments when inspiration visits are usually not a problem! It is easy to write then. Inspiration is a gift, an exciting experience. It is a time when you are as a god, capable of all things, creating from your own center. But these moments are too few and far in between for you to depend on them to meet your writing goal. To succeed, you need to approach your writing as a métier, a trade, that has its own habits and practices to be respected if you are to succeed. With workmanlike habits, you will not be troubled by writer's block.

◆ **Write your lifestories for the love of it.** In a capitalistic and materialistic society, the accepted *raison d'être* for writing a book is often to make money. Of course, making money need not be discounted. It certainly is one of my goals in writing a book. But money is not the only gauge of an activity's success. Many activities in life worth doing have no monetary value attached to them and cannot be ascribed with one.

Sometimes the only meaning you can derive from a work is in the doing of it; sometimes the only meaning in writing is for the writer—you. Even if you would very much like to sell your work, you must still write for yourself. Isn't it important enough a reason to do something because it feeds your soul?

Neglecting your soul, you may find yourself really blocked.

2) **Look into the possible causes of this alleged writer's block.** Beyond indiscipline, there are a number of reasons that contribute to difficulty in writing. I don't want to use the term writer's block because it has been made to answer to too many problems.

◆ **Sometimes "writer's block" can be the result of dealing with uncomfortable material.** Perhaps you haven't admitted to yourself the import of your topic or you are not yet telling the truth about it. What are you evading? What is the worst thing that could happen to you if you write this story honestly?

◆ **Perhaps you are writing from someone else's point of view.** Writers who uphold someone else's version of a story rather than their own will find the unconscious balking. If you are blocked, ask yourself if you are actually

writing from your point of view. Sometimes coming to that awareness can be enough to help your writing to flow once again.

If you feel blocked, ask yourself if your current topic warrants the time you are putting into it.

◆ **Sometimes “writer’s block” is the way your unconscious has of telling you you’re not writing about something important enough.** Sometimes the writing flow is waiting for us to come upon a more substantive idea. If you feel blocked, ask yourself if your current topic warrants the time you are putting into it. Sticking to a topic of secondary importance is not conducive to good writing.

Though persistence has its place, honor your effort by choosing to write about the most important items on your MemoryList. Your writer’s block may be a sign of boredom or of avoiding the real story you could be writing life.

Copyright 2002 © Denis
Ledoux \ from the free
monthly e-newsletter
The Lifewriter's Digest

Please share with a friend,
distribute to a class or
reprint in your e-zine or
publication. Read this first::

REPRINT INFO