

Outwitting Writer's Block and Other Problems of the Pen

by Jenna Glatzer

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Overview

Writer's block. It's an insidious pest; a beady-eyed rodent hiding under the floorboards of even the hardest-working writers, waiting to rear its hideous head at the most inopportune times. What can a writer do when the inkwell runs dry?

They can turn to their bookshelves and thumb through their well-worn copies of *Outwitting Writer's Block and Other Problems of the Pen*.

Filled to the brim with exercises designed to jump-start creativity, encouraging tips from fellow writers and instructors, and tools for analyzing the causes and cures for the nefarious Blank Page syndrome, this book will be like Drain-O for clogged creative pipes.

Outwitting Writer's Block and Other Problems of the Pen will be a humorous, inspirational, practical guide for writers, college students, businesspeople, and those who would like to write as a means of therapy or "release."

Whether struggling through term papers or on the thirteenth shot of espresso while trying to meet a recurrent 9 a.m. deadline at the newspaper, readers will find motivation and assistance in these pages.

Of course, writer's block is most problematic for those who make a living from their words (or would like to). When the problem is chronic, it's like having a work-related injury without the benefit of disability benefits. I have yet to meet a writer who's successfully convinced an editor to compensate them for time off to recover from brain strain. Therefore, it's important to build up the tools to learn how to bounce back—quickly and effectively—from a paralyzed pen.

As both an editor and a writer, I've seen this problem on both sides of the desk. Just yesterday, a book reviewer wrote me this guilt-ridden missive:

“I am a louse. I truly wanted to review books for you, and I eagerly started to read the one you had forwarded to me... but... but... a thousand things (mostly boring) have interfered. My conscience is shouting at me that I need to return this book to you so someone who is not a louse can review it. It looks interesting, but I can't think of so much as a fragment to write about it. Sigh.”

I wanted to give her one of those teary-eyed hugs that teachers give their “difficult” students in television movies. She wasn't a louse. She was just afflicted with a terrible disease, and didn't know it. It was time for her to admit that she was suffering from writer's block, and go through the necessary steps to knock it down.

Now, this writer was lucky, because she had an understanding editor who allowed her to get out of the assignment without so much as a scolding. But even this understanding editor would never give that writer another assignment until I knew she has learned how to deal with her ailment, instead of throwing in the towel when the going gets tough.

Luckily, writers—especially blocked writers—are also enthusiastic readers. When the ideas aren't flowing as well as they should be, writers often turn to books for inspiration. This book will fill an important need in writers' lives, and will provide them with some much-needed entertainment and camaraderie as they learn that they're in good company when they find themselves stuck.

The true measure of the book's success will be how many readers never finish it. With any luck, no one will make it to the last page; they'll be too busy following their bursts of brain activity, setting the book aside as Christopher Robin did to Pooh when he was no longer needed....

Promotion

My work has a built-in audience on the Internet, as I run a major web portal for writers. I am the Editor-in-Chief of Absolute Write (<http://www.absolutewrite.com>) and Absolute Markets (<http://www.absolutewrite.com/marketplace.htm>). Both have weekly newsletters, with opt-in subscriber bases of 7,000 and more than 27,000, respectively.

In addition, I am a regular contributor to several other writing magazines and websites, including Writer's Digest (circulation: 200,000), Scr(i)pt (circulation: 47,000), Screentalk (800,000 impressions per month; new in print), Screenwriters Utopia (more than 150,000 page views per month), Writer's Weekly (60,000 subscribers), Eworkingwomen.com (where I am the "freelance writing expert"), etc., and am able to include my book's ordering information in my bios. I am well-known in the online writing community, and I am thrilled to do promotional work. I would be happy to work with a publisher to ensure that this book reaches the largest potential audience.

More than 500 colleges and universities in the United States offer majors in journalism and/or creative writing, and nearly all colleges offer writing courses.

This audience can be reached in a variety of ways. Writer's Market 2002 lists 25 trade magazines for "journalism and writing," including Writer's Digest (circulation: over 200,000), Poets & Writers (circulation: over 200,000), etc. There are also countless websites, e-mail discussion lists, unions, conferences, and local groups for writers. Among the most prominent: WritersWeekly.com (60,000 weekly subscribers), Write4Kids.com (35,000 monthly subscribers), Absolutewrite.com (my website), and the National Writers Union (I am a member).

I have extensive knowledge of and contacts within the writing community, and will have many avenues of free publicity open to my book. I have been interviewed for, featured by, or reviewed in nearly every significant website for writers on the Internet.

The subject matter lends itself easily to guest speaking engagements, as well.

Aside from bookstore sales, the book could also make an excellent candidate as a Writer's Digest Book Club title. It will also sell at major writers' conferences and seminars (such as the Maui Writers' Conference, Santa Barbara Writers' Conference, Southwest Writers' Conference, Moondance Screenwriting Conference, Nashville Screenwriters' Conference, etc.).

I have promotional experience, and have been a guest on radio shows, local talk shows, and television specials (Lifetime television's "Love Letters of a Lifetime"). *Woman's World* recently featured an article about me, and I am in the process of optioning my life rights to a television producer.

About the Author

Jenna Glatzer holds a bachelor's degree in communications from Boston University (cum laude). She has done post-graduate work in writing at Hofstra University.

Jenna served as the advertising editor for *Boston Publisher's Consortium* literary journals (*Partisan Review*, *Harvard Review*, and *Agni*) from 1996-7. She is the founder and editor of Absolute Write (www.absolutewrite.com) since 1998, served as the Director of Public Relations for the upcoming film CURSE OF THE BOG WOMEN, and was the Editor-in-Chief of Writer Online until it closed in December, 2001.

Jenna has written for hundreds of national, regional, and online publications, recently including: *Writer's Digest*, *Woman's World*, *Woman's Own*, *Salon*, *Link Magazine*, *College Bound Magazine*, *Writers Weekly*, *Boaters.com*, *Conversely*, *Screentalk*, *Fiction Writer*, *American Profile*, *Zooba.com*, *Scr(i)pt*, *KidsGrowth Professional*, and *Chickclick.com*.

She is the author of *Slaying The Anxiety Dragon* (Hunter House, fall, 2002), *Exploration of the Moon* (OTTN Publishing, spring, 2002), *Native American Festivals and Ceremonies* (OTTN Publishing, spring, 2002), *Taking Down Syndrome to School* (JayJo Books, spring, 2002), and *The More Than Any Human Being Needs To Know About Freelance Writing Workbook* (Booklocker.com, June, 2000).

Jenna's specialties include humor, disabilities, topics pertaining to film and writing, personal essays and columns, and human-interest stories.

She has interviewed hundreds of writers for her syndicated "Words From The Wordsmiths" column, including screenwriters, novelists, non-fiction writers, comic book writers, greeting card writers, etc.

Her work has appeared or is scheduled to appear in several anthologies, including *Love Letters of a Lifetime* (Hyperion/Lifetime TV), *The Moment of Truth: Women's Funniest Romantic Failures* (Seal Press), *A Cup of Comfort* (Adams Media), *Women Forged In Fire* (E. Danlyn), and *Friendship Springs* (PRG).

She is a produced playwright and optioned screenwriter. She has done copywriting for Destego boats, the Boys And Girls Club of America, the South Shore Marlin and Tuna Club, Fairness.com, and several local businesses. She has also written everything from greeting cards to slogans for buttons, t-shirts, magnets, bumper stickers, doormats and aprons for companies like High Cotton, Ephemera, Northern Cards, the James Lawrence Company, and Paradise Greetings.

She is a current nominee in the Preditors and Editors Readers Poll in two categories: Best Author and Best Nonfiction Magazine/E-zine Editor.

Jenna is a member of the National Writer's Union, The Net Wits (humor columnists), and The Screenplayers.

Praise for Jenna Glatzer's Books and Courses for Writers

Reviews of *The More Than Any Human Being Needs To Know About Freelance Writing*

Workbook:

“I must say I was very impressed... Ms. Glatzer uses humor to make the book a very enjoyable read. I highly recommend this ebook to anyone in need of information about the business of freelance writing.” -- Jennifer Gibson, co-moderator of ForAllWriters

“A fresh, innovative and direct-experience look at the world of freelancing... This book is a must-have.” -- Angela Barbeisch, humor columnist

“Wow! What a terrific book. Everything you need to know about freelancing, with up-to-date information and relevant examples--all in a warm, approachable style. I wish I had this five years ago; I'm glad I have it now.” -- Review by Betsy Morris, screenwriter

“If you are considering taking up freelancing as a career, I cannot recommend this book highly enough. Jenna's style is informal yet knowledgeable, her content is extensive and her advice is incredible. GET THIS BOOK! ” -- Review by Sandy Cummins, editor, Writers Exchange (www.writers-exchange.com)

“While out looking for some good books to pass on to my ‘business of writing’ class, I came across yours. Great stuff! It's tightly organized with excellent examples and exercises. I gotta say, I think you just made this week's class a lot easier.” -- Dee Van Dyk, Writing Instructor

“Her lesson plans are creative, accurate and very ‘usable.’ For new and old writers, this is the workbook of the year!” -- Danielle Naibert (www.thebookreviewersite.com)

“This book is exactly the kind of resource I wish had been around twenty years ago when I started writing. If you want to write, this book will shave several years off your dues-paying period.” -- Angela Booth (www.ibizwriters.com)

“Written in a warm, witty style, the author takes on the role of mentor. You can likely tell that I gave this book a rating of ‘excellent.’ I recommend it to anyone who wants to learn more about how to become a freelance writer, or for any freelancer who wants to renew enthusiasm for the freelancing way of life.” -- Judy Justice (Midwest Book Review)

Comments from students in the Query Letter Clinic course:

"You pass on invaluable information on where to find paying markets. You not only tell participants how to write a query; you also tell them how to get their article published! Basically, I think people get more than they bargained for when they take your class."

"I want to thank you again. Your feedback has been tremendously helpful. I had taken a live feature writing course last year, but didn't get much out of it and was actually uninspired by the end. This clinic, on the other hand, is just the ticket. The individual critiques are unbeatable."

"I really did get a lot of the class. It didn't even compare with [the other online class I took];

there was so much good basic knowledge. I've been to quite a few writers' conferences, but most of them are cheerleader schools where you get pumped up and go back home. Your class was great in that it gave us guidelines about how to do it... You do an outstanding job!"

Competition

Will this book have competition? Yes. There are several books that cover the issue of writer's block, and they sell beautifully. What will make *Outwitting Writer's Block and Other Problems of the Pen's* stand out? Three things: humor, exercises, and anecdotes.

Many "how-to" books get caught up in their own seriousness and fail to see the entertainment value of this subject; writer's block isn't deadly. It isn't even contagious. It's a subject to be treated with a light, enthusiastic, witty tone.

There are also books that discuss writer's block until the author (or the reader) is blue in the face, but fail to deliver any practical methods for breaking out of it... now! The "prompts" and exercises I provide are designed to be used immediately, not to be mulled over and digested. They are "quick fixes" to get brain synapses jumping with electric currents again.

Finally, I will tap my vast network of professional writers to garner lots of terrific anecdotes about overcoming writer's block, facing writing "demons," dealing with deadlines, getting past rejection, etc. Rather than simple cheerleading, these writers will offer smart, real, inspiring advice through the examples of their own experiences.

Competing titles include:

- *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing And Life* by Annie Lamott (Anchor, 1995)

Long a favorite among writers, this is a witty and gritty book about the life of a writer. It does contain a good deal of advice and commentary about overcoming writer's block, but it's not the overall focus of the book.

- *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within* by Natalie Goldberg (Shambhala Publications, 1986)

Another popular “writer’s self-help” book, this one is more Oprah-ish and full of warm fuzziness for poets and fiction writers. *Outwitting Writer’s Block and Other Problems of the Pen* will NOT focus on writing as therapy, writing “from the heart,” etc.—certainly these topics will be covered, but the book will have a stronger focus on writers who write professionally (which includes many nonfiction authors, journalists, etc.).

- *The Writer’s Block: 786 Ideas to Jump-Start Your Imagination* by Jason Rekulak (Running Press, 2001)

This is a “gimmick” book—it’s actually the shape of a square block. Writers are expected to turn to any page in the book for their daily writing prompt. (Another book with the same basic idea is *The Writer’s Idea Book* by Jack Heffron, Writer’s Digest Books, 2000). *Outwitting Writer’s Block and Other Problems of the Pen* will contain prompts and exercises, but it will also contain much more.

- *On Writer’s Block* by Victoria Nelson (Houghton Mifflin, 1993)

This is one of those “serious” books I warned you about. Get out your inner child and lie on the couch with Nelson’s book... or hand your inner child a whoopee cushion and read *Outwitting Writer’s Block and Other Problems of the Pen*.

- *Script Magic: Subconscious Techniques to Conquer Writer’s Block* by Marisa D’Vari (Michael Wiese Productions, 2000)

Marketed only to screenwriters.

Annotated Table of Contents

At the end of each chapter there will be a bulleted list of the chapter's key points.

Chapter 1: Know Thy Enemy

What is writer's block, and who gets it? Overview of some of the causes for writer's block and other writing problems.

Chapter 2: Myths from the Meanies

A run-down of all the "rules" that are crammed down writers' throats—such as "you must write every day," "you must isolate yourself," "you must outline before you write," etc. An examination of why these messages may cause anxiety and send so many mixed signals to a budding writer that he or she can't write a word without fretting about breaking a rule.

Chapter 3: Planning, Scheming, and Dreaming

Setting goals, examining motivations. Do you really want to write, or do you just want to have a finished product to show off? Are your primary interests driven by money, fame, creativity, therapy, desire to share a message? Making decisions about what the writer wishes to accomplish, and how s/he will take steps to get there. Discussion of how a writer's "real" goals may be in conflict with the goals they've imposed on themselves, and how this causes dissonance and creative blocks.

Chapter 4: Percolate

Oftentimes, writing isn't flowing because the idea isn't fully hatched, or the writer hasn't done enough preliminary research. Tips for laying the groundwork before setting pen to paper or fingers to keys, and places to look when the cartoon light bulbs have stopped appearing over your head.

Chapter 5: Self-Doubt and Other Stupid Garbage

The psychological component of writer's block. Why writers fear the blank page. How to get over the "what if it's no good and everyone thinks I'm a hack?" phase.

Chapter 6: Ohmmmm, Ohmmmm

Relaxation techniques to get a writer away from the stress of writer's block and toward the nirvana of writing "in flow."

Chapter 7: O Deadline, My Deadline

They can be the cause or the cure of the dreaded block. For those who freeze up when a deadline is looming, techniques for dealing with time constraints. For those who can't motivate themselves, recommendations for creating self-imposed deadlines, or taking on assignments that will force them to work right away.

Chapter 8: Dead Ends and Wrong Ways

How to know when you've really lost interest in an idea, when it's not going to work, or when it's not worth finishing, versus when it just needs a new twist, a little time to "breathe," or a new approach.

Chapter 9: The Opposite Game

For fiction writers: sometimes writers can break out of a block by changing their male lead character to a female, or moving the location from New York to Idaho, or changing someone's profession from doctor to waiter. For nonfiction writers: If you're stuck on a heavy-research article, exercise your brain by working on a dirty limerick. And so on.

Chapter 10: Mind Your Own Business

Why the best cure for writer's block is the timeless advice: "Apply seat of pants to chair." How to look at writing as a job like any other, with set hours and required levels of output.

Chapter 11: Your Writing Oasis

How to set up your writing space, office, desk, and even small things like computer screensaver and favorite mug for optimal performance. Small doses of Feng Shui, small doses of Stuart Smalley, and—forgive me—small doses of Martha Stewart. Bigger doses of "you can write in the middle of a subway in Manhattan if you're doing it right."

Chapter 12: Branching Out

Writers put restrictions on themselves by labeling themselves as "poets," "screenwriters," "romance authors," etc. Maybe your so-called novel is a screenplay dying to get out. Maybe your book is really an article. How to tell if you've chosen the wrong form, and how to tell if it's time to pick a new genre or media.

Chapter 13: It's Not You, It's Me

And maybe you're just in a funk. Happens to the best of us. Examining other causes—lifestyle changes, depression, stress, etc. that may need to be addressed before writing can flow.

Chapter 14: People Who Need People

Sometimes the block is too big to break alone. Advice about taking courses, attending conferences, finding writing partners, critique groups, writers' clubs and unions, etc.

Chapter 15: Kicking The Critic In The Head

Many writers get blocked because they get too wrapped up in trying to be perfect when what they really should be doing is writing schlock. First drafts are no place for the critic. How to knock the editor off your shoulder and free yourself up to write as terribly as possible so he'll still have a job to do later on.

Chapter 16: Please, Don't Let This Feeling End

Taking advantage of the times when writing is flowing freely. Never quitting writing at the end of a chapter, but instead, leaving off at a cliffhanger, so you'll have a compelling reason to return to the keys.

Chapter 17: Stocking Your Toolbox

Keeping your "tricks of the trade" stocked, even when the block has vanished. Tools to collect while writing is flowing, so the next incident of writer's block won't have a chance to make itself comfortable.

End matter: Recommended resources (books, websites, and organizations).