

Produce a masterpiece of literature

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What is writer's block?

Well, I just can't think of a single darn thing to say. Oh well, I'm out of here!

Sound familiar? No! Oh, get real! We've all experienced this phenomenon when we absolutely have to write something, particularly on deadline. I'm talking about. . . .uh, I can't think of what the word is . . . oh, yes, it's on the tip of my tongue . . . it's:

WRITER'S BLOCK!!!!

Whew! I feel better just getting that out of my head and onto the page!

Writer's block is the patron demon of the blank page. You may think you know EXACTLY what you're going to write, but as soon as that evil white screen appears before you, your mind suddenly goes completely blank. I'm not talking about Zen meditation stare-at-the-wall-until-enlightenment-hits kind of blank.

I'm talking about sweat trickling down the back of your neck, anguish and panic and suffering kind of blank. The tighter the deadline, the worse the anguish of writer's block gets.

Having said that let me say it again. "The tighter the deadline, the worse the anguish of writer's block gets." Now, can you figure out what might possibly be causing this horrible plunge into speechlessness?

The answer is obvious: FEAR! You are terrified of that blank page. You are terrified you have absolutely nothing of value to say. You are afraid of the fear of writer's block itself!

It doesn't necessarily matter if you've done a decade of research and all you have to do is string sentences you can repeat in your sleep together into coherent paragraphs. Writer's block can strike anyone at any time. Based in fear, it raises our doubts about our own self-worth, but it's sneaky. It's writer's block, after all, so it doesn't just come and let you know that. No, it makes you feel like an idiot who just had your frontal lobes removed through your sinuses. If you dared to put forth words into the greater world, they would surely come out as gibberish!

Let's try and be rational with this irrational demon. Let's make a list of what might possibly be beneath this terrible and terrifying condition.

1. Perfectionism. You must absolutely produce a masterpiece of literature straight off in the first draft. Otherwise, you

qualify as a complete failure.

2. Editing instead of composing. There's your monkey-mind sitting on your shoulder, yelling as soon as you type "I was born?" no, not that, that's wrong! That's stupid! Correct?

3. Self-consciousness. How can you think, let alone write, when all you can manage to do is pry the fingers of writer's block away from your throat enough so you can gasp in a few shallow breaths? You're not focusing on what you're trying to write, your focusing on those gnarly fingers around your windpipe.

4. Can't get started. It's always the first sentence that's the hardest. As writers, we all know how EXTREMELY important the first sentence is. It must be brilliant! It must be unique! It must hook your reader's from the start! There's no way we can get into writing the piece until we get past this

impossible first sentence.

5. Shattered concentration. Your cat is sick. You suspect your mate is cheating on you. Your electricity might be turned off any second. You have a crush on the local UPS deliveryman. You have a dinner party planned for your in-laws. You . . . Need I say more. How can you possibly concentrate with all this mental clutter?

6. Procrastination. It's your favorite hobby. It's your soul mate. It's the reason you've knitted 60 argyle sweaters or made 300 bookcases in your garage workshop. It's the reason you never run out of Brie.

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