16 Tips to Beat Writer's Block
by Jenna Avery
(for more articles by Jenna, visit ScriptMag.com and Jenna's website, jennaavery.com)

Although the debate rages on about whether or not writer’s block actually exists, as a writing habit and motivation coach who has worked with writers all over the world, I’m here to tell you that, yes, many writers feel blocked from time to time, and that feeling can last for days, weeks, months, or even years without the proper tools to help you resolve it.

Most writer's block takes the form of a feeling of being unable to write, whether that looks like being unable to come up with ideas, put words on the page, feel inspired to write, or be motivated to write.

Usually, writer's block is driven by some kind of fear or creative wound, like a fear of failure (or even success), or after a critique of some kind (sometimes even positive feedback can lead to writer's block). Although it can be useful to address the fear or wound for deeper long term productivity and fulfillment, the act of writing is often be healing on its own. But how can you write when you feel blocked?

Following you'll find two articles with some of the useful tips and tricks I’ve gleaned over the years that can help you get the words on the page when you're feeling blocked. Keep in mind, these are just a starting place. Sometimes you'll need further support to get your writing habit rebooted (but it IS possible!).

Article #1: What To Do When You Want to Write But You’re Not Writing: 6 Steps to Get Back on Track

When you want to write, but you’re not doing it — whether not at all or not as much as you’d like — there are some simple tricks that can help get you going.

First, here are some examples when you might see your not-writing pattern showing up:

- You want to write but you aren’t sure what to write about.
- You can’t find the time to write.
- You have time to write but you can’t seem to get yourself to do it — and you feel guilty and ashamed about it.
- You were writing regularly, but you just got back from a trip (or illness or other interruption) and you’re having trouble getting started again.
- You’re stuck on a particular part of your project and you don’t know how to move past it.

* Although most writer's block is driven by creative fears or wounds, some writer's block arises from challenging or major life circumstances, such a loss, divorce, grief, death, or even birth. These big life moments can be disruptive to one's writing habit and require a special combination of self-compassion and time to recover from.
• Just looking at a blank page is overwhelming.
• Thinking of the final product (the book, the screenplay, etc.) is overwhelming and you can’t imagine how you’ll ever get there.
• You’ve had a success with your writing and you’re feeling intimidated about topping it (second novel syndrome is an example of this).
• You’re bored with the project you’re working on and you can’t think of anything else to work on that sounds remotely interesting.
• You've lost confidence in your writing or your ability to write.
• You just plain old feel blocked.

First things first.

ALL of these scenarios have one thing in common: Resistance. (I know. Bear with me.)

Resistance is that little devil we affectionately know by many names — perfectionism, procrastination, fear, doubt, apathy, etc. It takes many forms, but it comes down to a feeling of being repelled from your writing, one way or another.

Resistance often looks like telling yourself you don’t have enough time to write. But you do. Really. You only need a few minutes every day to get back on the writing train. And it’s a lot less difficult than you think it is. I promise.

Resistance will tell you that you don’t care, don’t have ideas, or don’t want to write. Bull. I know you’re a writer and I know you want to write.

Let me help you.

6 steps to get back on track with your writing

Step #1: Don’t fall for the resistance.

Resistance LIES to you. It is the enemy. Resistance is not your friend. It is not the truth. It is like an energetic force you press up against when you start moving closer to your project, like you’re wading through chest-high sludge. It pushes you back. IT resists YOU.

DO NOT fall for it. Do not believe it, do not entertain it, do not listen to it. It is simply the voice of fear and doubt. It’s not worth listening to.

Step #2: Start with a super small baby step.

Identify the smallest baby step of writing you can muster.

Decide on the very smallest increment of writing that feels totally, completely, 100% attainable. Even if it means something that your inner visionary will scoff at as being not enough. Don’t worry about that for now. You will get there.
My recommendation? Somewhere between 5 to 15 minutes per day. Or even just commit to opening your document and looking at what you last wrote. Or commit to writing one sentence, even if it is, “I hate writing.”

**Step #3: Use a timer.**

Get out your paper, your file, whatever you want to work on. Set your timer for the time you agreed upon with yourself. Write for that entire length of time. It's okay if it's only for one minute. Really. But don’t stop until the timer dings.

If you’re fresh out of ideas, write morning pages, use writing prompts, or answer questions from Julia Cameron’s *The Artist’s Way* or *The Vein of Gold*. Or brainstorm concepts for your next novel or script. I don’t care what you’re writing, as long as you’re putting words on the page.

**Step #4: Celebrate!**

Seriously. I’m not kidding. You just overcame the massive forces of resistance. This is no small feat. It’s like destroying the Death Star every single day.

Now give yourself a treat — surf on YouTube for a couple of minutes, stretch in the sunshine, or chat up your buddies on Facebook. It doesn't have to be a big deal, just give yourself a little something to acknowledge what you just accomplished.

**Step #5: Mark time on your calendar for writing tomorrow and be clear about what you’re going to write.**

Get out your calendar and schedule the time for your next writing session.

While you’re at it, decide what you’ll work on during your session. Write it down so you don't forget. :)

**Step #6: Rinse and repeat.**

Keep doing this same pattern of writing, incrementally, for at least five to seven days over the next week (and beyond!). You’ll be surprised to notice that it’s much easier to get started again when you stay current with writing, whether you're working on a specific project or not. Experiment with how much time is “safe” for you to take off.

For instance, I've found that writing for less than five days a week becomes difficult to sustain. In other words, if I try to write for three or even four days per week I find it increasingly difficult to keep coming back to it. Writing for seven days a week, on the other day, feels exhausting. I find I do best with having at least one to two days off per week and write for five to six days per week (and I’m always clear *in advance* about which days each of those are going to be).
Article #2
10 Tips to Get Unstuck and Write More Now

Writing regularly can be easier than it looks, particularly if you're feeling stuck, whether about a specific project, part of a project, or just about writing in general. Although most people tend to think that writing discipline is the be-all-end-all answer, it's actually more effective to develop strategies to make NOT writing harder than actually just doing the writing.

Here are 10 tips for getting unstuck and making writing regularly part of your life:

**Tip #1: Brainstorm.**

If you’re good and truly stuck on a specific part of your project, first try brainstorming. It’ll help your mind relax and give you a chance to “try on” ideas rather than feeling like you have to come up with the “right” one.

Try mind-mapping, free-writing, and journaling as brainstorming tools.

**Tip #2: Be in community.**

Writing can be a dismally lonely business at times. Sure, when you’re on fire and things are rolling, you’re fine. But what about when you hit the skids and you feel that desperate sense of isolation or feel like you’re the only one facing the fear and self-doubt? Every single writer in my [Writer’s Circle](mailto:writer@circle.com) tackles the same kinds of challenges and issues. It’s heartening to know you are not alone. Find a community of writers to give you support and help you keep going when you lose heart.

**Tip #3: Never look at a blank page.**

If a blank page feels overwhelming to you, don’t use one. Start with questions, a structure, an outline, anything.

When I start a script I first outline the major story beats by numbering and listing the names of the beats (e.g. opening, first turning point, etc.) m on the page, then I start filling them in and breaking them down into smaller beats. By the time I paste that into my screenwriting software, I’ve got a pretty good idea of where I’m headed. And because those beats are there, I never stare at an empty page wondering what to put onto it. It's my fill-in-the-blank approach that never lets me down.

**Tip #4: Keep the “parts” on the table for as long as possible.**

Perfectionists that we are, writers are often too quick to make creative decisions and rule ideas out — often before we’ve really explored them. Give your ideas their due, and “keep the parts on the table,” as *Accidental Genius* author Todd Henry says, “for as long as possible.” This means that you don’t throw ANYTHING out too soon. This helps keep the
creative possibilities open and the ideas keep on flowing.

**Tip #5: Give yourself permission to write crap.**

Ernest Hemingway said, “The first draft of anything is shit.” Why would you EVER hold yourself to a higher standard than him?

I’ve seen a guy practicing his clarinet in a car in the parking lot lately. Although he clearly has a long way to go, I love that he is doing whatever he has to do to give himself permission to be bad at something while he finds his footing.

You deserve that too. Don't worry about perfection. Just get the first words down. Then you can see what you've got and refine it.

**Tip #6: Ratchet back the over-achieving.**

Yes, I know it'll take a long time to write a book in 15 minute increments (see Article #1), but it CAN be done — I wrote an entire script that way and many of my Writer's Circle members finish their novels and books that way too.

I know you think you need to write for at least (1 hour, 4 hours, 8 hours) a day. Trust me when I tell you that when you’re getting back on the writing horse, that’s the surest way to shoot yourself in the foot. **You can write more once you’ve got the habit firmly in place.** Do NOT try for big blocks of time as you’re focusing on getting unstuck and building a regular habit.

Start small, and start now.

**Tip #7: Keep your head down.**

Stop thinking of the bigger project. Keep your head down and just take it one step at a time. As you repeat these steps, you can work up to more writing as it feels appropriate. When I started writing my last script, all I could do was 15 minutes per day. Now I’m writing more. You’ll work up to it. Just take it one word at a time for now.

**Tip #8: Deal with the fear.**

Underneath resistance to writing is fear. It’s okay. Of course it’s scary. Fear is common when we face things like failure, success, the unknown, and putting our abilities to the test. You can get help with it or work with it on your own, but at the end of the day, your biggest job is getting out of your own way.

**Tip #9: Avoid burnout.**

It’s much more important that you write regularly and consistently in small, short bursts than it is to write in long blocks of time. Give yourself a break and pace yourself. Being a serious
writer means being in it for the long haul. Don't let yourself get burned out writing in big long stretches or late nights.

**Tip #10: Write early in the morning.**

All those writers who have been getting up at the crack of dawn have got it wired. Writing early, before your rational brain fully kicks in and wants to do all those “important things” that keep you from writing, is so much easier than trying to wrangle it into your day later on. I’m not even a morning person and I love it. Give early morning writing a try and see how it feels to put your most important work first.

**How to Get Started Right Now**

Remember, feeling stuck or blocked can be a normal part of the writing process. You’re not alone in feeling this way. The trick is to not worry about it too much, and to find the simplest possible way to jump start yourself again.

If you'd like to get started right now, try this:

As you read through these two articles, which of these ideas felt the easiest to experiment with? Pick one and put it into action right now, and see what happens. If it's not a good fit, try another one. There's no one right way to do the writing – the key is finding what works best for you, for now, and putting it into action. You'll be glad you did.

Thanks for reading, and happy writing!
About Jenna Avery

Jenna Avery is a screenwriter, ScriptMag columnist, and blogger who redesigned her life to support her passion for writing. Her most recently completed project is a sci-fi action script called Starchild. She is also a writing motivation coach and the founder of The Writer's Circle, an online coaching program designed to help writers get the support, accountability, and inspiration they need to finish all their writing projects and get their work into the world.

Jenna blogs about writing at JennaAvery.com and offers a free writing tips series, which you can sign up to receive here: http://jennaavery.com/free-writing-tips

Jenna loves connecting with other writers online on Twitter and Facebook.

Get Jenna Avery’s On Demand Webinar
10 Practical Tips for More Consistent, Productive Writing

Download Now!