



Module 10 : Advice on Improving Confidence and Sense of Purpose

- The problems that a writer will face
- How to improve self-esteem and banish your critical inner voice
- How to achieve your writing goals
- How to overcome writer's block

In this chapter we will cover the following topics in more detail:

- The problems that a writer will face
- How to improve self-esteem and banish your critical inner voice
- How to achieve your writing goals
- How to overcome writer's block
- How to improve your motivation to write
- Some thoughts on writing from published authors

10.1 Introduction



Most writers suffer from self-doubt, uncertainty, lack of motivation, or 'writer's block' at some point in the course of their work.

For many of us these anxieties can be pretty debilitating, causing us to go for long periods without writing anything, or giving up altogether. If you are one of these people then hope is not lost.

Read on for some tips on how to improve your confidence and sense of purpose in your writing.

10.2 What Writers Are Up Against



It is an unfortunate truth that some people do not view writing as a 'proper' job.

This is maybe because it is an intellectual activity that at times is pretty intangible for the observer; as writers we can spend days tapping away at the computer with nothing very physical to show for it. If you are an unpaid writer this opinion seems to grow in magnitude, with naysayers seeing writing as a hobby when it is really a career that has not yet come to fruition.

For most writers, our work is self-regulated. It is great that we can get up and make a cup of tea when we feel like it, fix our working hours to fit around whatever else is going on in life, and take holidays when we desire. But this also has its drawbacks; more often than not there is no boss giving us deadlines, or peering over our shoulder to see if we are doing a good job. No one will pull us up on it if we spend the morning absorbed in listless apathy, still in pyjamas and watching daytime TV, or wasting time on YouTube.

Added to this is the difficulty of getting published and the numerous rejection letters that are the inevitable reward for hundreds of hours of toil.

When you finally receive your acceptance letter, or see the finished product of your self-published work, these worries will melt away like they never existed. Until then, keep your morale up by following this advice.

10.3 Banishing the Critical Voice

Every writer has this inner demon, tormenting them with assertions that their work is not up to scratch, that they should give up and their writing will never amount to anything.

Sound familiar? Banish the paralysis that this insidious critical voice can bring on:

Remember how far you have come

When you feel like you are not getting anywhere, look back and remind yourself of your accomplishments so far. What have you had to overcome to get to this point? If you have already begun your book, tell yourself how much of an achievement that is by itself. If you are just starting out writing, think back five years to when your aspiration to be a writer was hidden under layers of self-doubt, and how well you have done to take this proactive first step to move towards your dream.

Accept responsibility

On face value this one seems a bit harsh, but you will find that once you sit and give yourself a firm talking to, you will feel quite liberated. Low self-esteem and your critical voice are a part of you, after all, and you do have a measure of control over what you allow your mind to tell you. Choose not to entertain those thoughts, and though they will still try and slip in, if you do not give them the time of day they will decrease in frequency and strength.

Plough on with the first draft

If you are ready to start writing tell yourself that you will switch off criticism for the amount of time that it takes you to write the first draft. Do not keep stopping and going back, rereading and giving yourself a chance to get paralysed by your critical voice. Get into the swing of writing and forge through to the end, at which point your sense of achievement will counteract any negativity you may be feeling while you go through and rewrite.

Share your work

Fear of what people will think and say often stops writers from sharing their creations. Start by showing something you like to someone you trust and whose opinion you value. Tell them if you are anxious about doing this and why. Once you have done this a few times, submit some short stories or

similar to literary publications; you never know, you might get something published. If not, there is an opportunity for some helpful feedback.

Rethink rejection

When you are waiting for months for a reply to your submission and a brusque rejection letter arrives, it can be a blow to your self-esteem. Try and remember that there are hundreds of publishers out there and what you have got in your hand is just the opinion of one. Take their feedback on board if they give you any, but do not take the rejection as a judgement that your work is not good enough, just that you have not found the right editor yet.

Meditate

I know a lot of you might scoff in derision at this one, but if you can, give it a try. It does not have to be a deep spiritual experience, just some time in a calming environment to allow your mind to become quiet. There are many different types of meditation which have been shown to have hugely beneficial effects on self-esteem and general wellbeing.

10.4 Getting the Work Done

With the best intentions in the world there are days when we just cannot seem to get nose to grindstone and bash out a good few pages.

Here are some tips to help you get the work done.

Set goals

Many writers find that they can start projects, but don't finish them. This is often due to the critical voice we discussed above and it can be overcome by setting goals. Use the S.M.A.R.T. acronym here to make them specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-based. Write your goals down somewhere prominent and hold yourself accountable to them, not forgetting to reward yourself when you complete one, however small.

Have a schedule

If you wait for the mood to take you, you won't find yourself getting much work done. Set aside time every single day to write, even if on busy days it is only 10 minutes, and scheduled in advance. Again, write this down so you cannot squirm out of it.

Write

You may find yourself surfing the Internet, looking for tips on writing, or reading book after book on how to write. Neither of these are negative, but be honest with yourself; are you avoiding getting down to the actual writing? When you finish this chapter, set yourself a goal to do some writing, it does not matter what. Get the creative juices flowing and you will feel really satisfied afterwards.

Remove distractions

The environment in which you write is very important. Not all of us have the space for a separate office, but you can get a folding screen and place it around a tidy, clear desk with plenty of light and a pleasant atmosphere. Writing should be something you look forward to and which deserves its own space. Hunched on the sofa while watching TV out of the corner of your eye will not promote a good working attitude.

10.5 Overcoming Writer's Block

The dreaded writer's block will assail most of us at some point in our writing career. It can be very disheartening to stare at a blank screen, for what seems like hours, with your mind blank.

There is no one way to overcome this, but here are some techniques to refresh and invigorate your productivity.

- Go for a walk - A good long walk can often break through the lethargy.
- Do some exercise - Getting your blood pumping and returning to your desk filled with post-exercise endorphins can work a charm.
- Spend time with someone that makes you feel good - Choose someone who is supportive, interesting and boosts your self-confidence.
- Change your environment - Why not write at the local café, in the park, or in the library.

- Read a book - Choose a book that inspires you with its brilliance, or holds good memories.
- Brainstorm - Write down any and every idea that comes into your head; chances are, that without the pressure of having to craft your ideas as they arise, you will stumble upon something that makes you want to put pen to paper
- Free write - This is where you write down anything that comes into your head, without worrying about how it comes out. It does not have to be good and you can always throw it in the bin, but just breaking the paralysis can cause your writer's block to disappear.
- Do some writing exercises - Sometimes you need to take a break from working on your book. Spend a couple of sessions doing some writing exercises. There are plenty of ideas for this in a later chapter.

10.6 Get Motivated

Sometimes it can be difficult to give yourself that final push to sit down and write. When you get to your desk you feel listless and without purpose.

Here are some ideas to reinvigorate your writing.

Reassess your purpose

Think back to how you felt when you decided you wanted to write a book. Make a list of reasons why you love writing and what you hoped to achieve by doing it.

Get together

Sometimes the solitary nature of writing can make it difficult to stay motivated. Join a virtual office space or download a writing program on to your computer that keeps your writing window uncluttered and your mind focused. You can also take part in 'bookmarking' which is co-motivation through tracking your progress and announcing whether you have reached your goals. You can do this online via email or a site like twitter, or even just by texting or phoning a friend to tell them whether you have reached your goal.

Envisage your goal

Spend five minutes fully visualising the scene where you receive the letter accepting your manuscript for publication, or the point at which you hold the first copy of your book in your hands; you might find it does wonders for your motivation.

Keep learning

If you find yourself getting stagnant, take some time to hone your craft, whether through a writing workshop, a reputable online course, or a series of writing exercises.

10.7 Some Food for Thought

'The secret of it all is to write in the gush, the throb, the flood of the moment - to put things down without deliberation - without worrying about their style - without waiting for a fit time or place. I always worked that way. I took the first scrap of paper, the first doorstep, the first desk, and wrote-wrote, wrote...By writing at the instant, the very heartbeat of life is caught.'

- Walt Whitman

'I went for years not finishing anything. Because, of course, when you finish something you can be judged.'

- Erica Jong

'And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.'

- William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream

'Any man who keeps working is not a failure. He may not be a great writer, but if he applies the old-fashioned virtues of hard, constant labor, he'll eventually make some kind of career for himself as writer.'

Ray Bradbury

'Fairy tales are more than true; not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.'

- G.K. Chesterton

'It is the writer who might catch the imagination of young people, and plant a seed that will flower and come to fruition.'

- Isaac Asimov

'Creativity takes courage.'

- Henri Matisse

'You can fix anything but a blank page.'

- Nora Roberts

'It's none of their business that you have to learn to write. Let them think you were born that way.'

- Ernest Hemingway

'Don't try to figure out what other people want to hear from you; figure out what you have to say. It's the one and only thing you have to offer.'

- Barbara Kingsolver

'The scariest moment is always just before you start.'

- Stephen King

In Summary

Although writing is a great occupation, it has its challenges. It can be difficult to stay confident and motivated when there is only you to incentivise yourself.

If you have a critical inner voice expressing your low self-esteem, look back at your achievements, take responsibility for your own thoughts, share your work with someone you trust, and maybe try meditation.

If you have trouble staying motivated, suffer from writer's block, or cannot seem to get the work done, set yourself specific targets in a realistic schedule, have a pleasant working space, refresh your mind with a change of setting or format every now and then, and use communication with others to hold yourself accountable for your work.

If you are struggling, use the words of some other authors to get you through the rough patch.

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