

no more fear.

10 foolproof secrets
for beating writer's block



By Becky Blanton,

Thanks to **Tom “Bent Guy” Bentley** for his brilliant editing, and to **Rabbi Ginzberg** and to the rest of Seth Godin’s “Bacon Brigade” for their feedback and insights.
May all your lizards and spiders be small.



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Writer's block and **fear**. The terms are practically synonymous. Chances are if you're a writer and you're reading this you're on intimate terms with both. You may have even considered buying a ring and proposing to anxiety and stress. Since you all spend so much time together you might as well all be formally married.

If you're like most writers with writer's block fear has taken up residence in your life and gifted you with the inability to produce, write or perform. Fear doesn't hesitate to waltz right through the door, even if you have company. It doesn't mind pulling up a chair to talk - often at the most inopportune times, like whenever you sit down to write. It will interrupt your boss, your spouse, your roommates, your children or even a quiet afternoon when you're trying to read or watch television. It has no boundaries.

Fear does not respect you and you know it. That's exactly why you're here. You want to learn how to deal with it so it longer causes you anguish. If you want to tie it up or dress it up in leather and feathers and scream at it, you're on your own. But if you want to learn how to identify it in all its many incarnations (procrastination, resistance, writer's block, anger, depression or frustration) and either banish or befriend it, you've come to the right place.

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writer's block.



Anna Quindlen said it best, “People have writer’s block not because they can’t write, but because they despair of writing eloquently.”

I never had writer’s block until I was 50 and my father died. After 40 years of writing, my pen suddenly stopped moving. It was though the man who abused and tortured me had dragged my muse into the grave with him. He had birthed my writing skills with a bloody belt, now he was taking them away.

I was 10 years old. He had come into my room tugging his belt out of his belt loops, demanding I strip naked and prepare to be spanked. His spankings were closer to beatings— as they always drew blood and left bruises. For who knows what reason I had decided I was getting a little old for this.

My body had been the only victim, but now my mind, my emotions, my very soul quivered in fear. Some part of me managed to convince him that he should let me write an essay about why I should not be stripped naked and beaten bloody. I pleaded my case for reason: he saw an opportunity to develop a necessary skill—typing, perhaps writing—and so he agreed. I wrote the paper. He read it, asked me to clarify a few points, grunted, and then put his belt back on.

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Writer's block is a condition, associated with writing as a profession in which an author loses the ability to produce new work. The condition varies widely in intensity. It can be trivial, a temporary difficulty in dealing with the task in hand. At the other extreme, some "blocked" writers have been unable to work for years on end, and some have even abandoned their careers. It can manifest as the affected writer viewing their work as inferior or unsuitable, when in fact it could be the opposite.

- Wikipedia

I was not only spared that day, I was never beaten again. I wrote a lot of papers, but he never took a hand or belt to me in anger again. Eventually even having to defend myself against him passed, but I continued to write as he shifted his rage to my younger brother, now a teenager.

I like to think it was my persuasive writing skills that defeated the bloody belt; but I don't doubt now it began as a means to force me to learn secretarial skills he assumed I would need in the future. Looking back I can see I began literally "writing for my life," since as I got older and he became more stressed the beatings got harder—culminating in that fateful day.

When he died I finally developed writer's block for the first time. Up until then I'd never missed a deadline or failed to come up with a lead no matter what my schedule or the demands. I skirted dangerously close, and sometimes offered a pedestrian and clichéd opening, but I was never shut-down and brain dead when I sat in front of a page, or later, a computer screen.

So after almost a half-a-century of a pipeline to the muse of muses I hit the wall. Writer's block became very real to me. I could still write letters. I could email. I could play with words and I could render the occasionally brilliant piece. But my writing was no longer dependable.

I never knew when I would stall or when my writing would falter.

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“Don’t turn away. Keep looking at the bandaged place. That is where light enters you.”

Rumi

I never knew if I would walk away from a computer screen or pad of paper without being able to write a word.

That consciousness in itself became stressful and made the block worse.

Now, four-plus years later, having cried and thrashed and worried over a writing block that had lasted almost half a decade, I finally understood what writer’s blocks were, how they manifest, why they are necessary and how to work with them when they strike.

To understand my proffered solutions you have to understand I am among those who believe that genius, creativity and enlightenment are part of a narrow, but functional strata on the bell curve of mental illness and insanity. I believe writer’s block is a condition induced by mental health, not mental harm. The anecdotal evidence of “madness and genius,” is anecdotal for a reason. Don’t just listen to me; there’s plenty of evidence.

Neurologist Alice Flaherty, author of **“The Midnight Disease: The Drive to Write, Writer’s Block, and the Creative Brain,”** believes the same thing.

Flaherty teaches neurology at Harvard Medical School. She too thinks that mood disorders may jump-start the literary imagination.

Flaherty, like many brilliant people, suffers from a mood disorder: she is bipolar.

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She attributes her own writing career to her manic phases. She doesn't just stop with claiming there's a connection between mental health and creativity.

She examines the link between the frontal lobe and the limbic system. The limbic system is the source of emotion and drive, and the frontal lobe the residual area of the brain for language and cognitive functions related to linguistic and philosophical meaning.

In plain English, she too believes the brain blocks our conscious access to the frontal lobe. Experts refer to this part of our brain as “the lizard brain.” She sees the lizard not as a metaphor for a twisted unhappy muse, but for what it truly is—a organ that, when triggered, releases the chemicals responsible for what we call “fear.” It is a process that can be understood, explained and thus controlled to some degree.

If you take the concept of writer's block beyond the surface issue of “I can't write,” and look at the underlying physical, psychological, emotional, mental and metaphysical issues, you'll begin to see that writer's block is a gift—an offering of the psyche to a doorway deeper into your soul, deeper into your gifts and closer to unleashing the full power of your talent.

Whenever you see anything as an obstacle rather than a gift you cut yourself off from the resources the situation or thing offers as well as the headaches it seems to bring. That's the lizard brain speaking. But it speaks for a very good reason.

lizard brain.



“Fear is only an indication that something worthwhile is at stake.”

Peter Block

The science of fear

Fear is a chemical reaction. Sorry, but the bottom line is we scare ourselves with our thoughts. It’s a complex reaction and the “How Stuff Works” site does a much more thorough job of explaining it [HERE.](#)

(How Fear Works. <http://health.howstuffworks.com/human-nature/emotions/other/fear.htm>)

However, the basic process is that fear is the result of a chain reaction in the brain culminating in the release of chemicals that cause our heart to race, our oxygen levels to increase and our body to prepare to fight or flee. The stimulus can be *real* or imagined. The body doesn’t distinguish between them.

We respond to “triggers” we associate with danger, like how the backfiring of a car may trigger a past reaction to gunfire in a war vet. The sound of a rescue helicopter may trigger fear in a Vietnam vet, but not one who fought in Desert Storm.

Our conscious thoughts can trigger the chemical release, but thanks to the lizard brain—our amygdala—we respond with an autonomic response (unconscious) as well.

There are dozens of areas of the brain at least peripherally involved in fear. But research has discovered that certain parts of the brain play central roles in the process.

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*"Rule of thumb:
The more important a call or
action is to our soul's evolution,
the more Resistance we will feel
toward pursuing it."*

*Steven Pressfield
The War of Art*

The **Sensory cortex**, the **Thalamus**, the **Amygdala**, the **Hippocampus**, and the **Hypothalamus** make up the prehistoric lump at the base of our brain stem that is responsible for great deal of our fear.

These are the prehistoric organs referred to as our “lizard brain.” The **Sensory cortex** - interprets sensory data. The **Thalamus** - decides where to send incoming sensory data (from eyes, ears, mouth, skin).

It is the **Amygdala** that decodes emotions; determines possible threat; and stores our fear memories. (The Amygdala is one of five parts of the brain that process the information and chemicals that result in our feeling fear, but it gets the bad rap since it has a deliciously dubbed nickname: “The lizard brain.”) The **Hippocampus** - stores and retrieves conscious memories, and processes sets of stimuli to establish context for the action we take. And finally, the **Hypothalamus** actually activates the system and triggers the chemical bath resulting in our “feeling fear.”

The fear response and the release of chemicals can occur in anticipation of a threat—such as a plane crash—as well as to an actual or perceived threat.

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"Many of us are afraid to dream.
We fear being disappointed.
We fear looking foolish.
We fear, period.

Allowing ourselves to imagine a fulfilled dream is often the very first step toward actually fulfilling it.

Julia Cameron
The Artist's Way

A snake in a glass box can't harm us, although the mere sight of it can send our hearts racing if we perceive it to be a potential threat.

So, if you have been panned by critics, criticized by family or friends, or had your work rejected by an editor or someone else, your brain remembers all that. From the *trigger* of a letter from a publisher or the process of writing a query, to the storing of the feelings associated with the critique or reality the brain is remembering all those things to protect you from future events of the same kind.

Depending on how deeply you were disappointed or how you reacted to such criticism before, your brain will respond in like force to keep you from being hurt again. Reframing the event by thinking about it differently can slow or even shut down the process, but it has to be a conscious effort on your part to do so.

As Julia Cameron points out in ***The Artist's Way***, "Allowing ourselves to imagine a fulfilled dream is often the very first step toward actually fulfilling it."

Besides reframing (a Cognitive Behavioral Therapy skill taught by many therapists), there are other 10 other things you can do to cope with fear, and ultimately with the writer's block that accompanies it.



The 10 Secrets

Don't bother skimming this book for a quick fix to your writer's block. It's not in here. There's no easy way around it—that's for a reason. Your block is NOT your enemy. Your block is your subconscious mind's gift to you. It's telling you something, usually something important.

If you woke up one morning and found a wooden crate with a bright red bow on it on your front porch, or blocking your apartment door you wouldn't swear at it and try to push it out of the way. would you? Chances are you'd want to know what the hell was inside and who sent it to you. And you'd sure as hell try to open it.

Big crate like that? Blocking your entrance and exit, too big to move by yourself, no obvious end to open. Yeah. You'd spend some time with it. It's a gift right?

Writer's blocks contain secrets to your fears, to your past, to your present, to your psyche. They're a complex function of chemical baths from our mind brought on by our past and current thoughts. I won't go all metaphysical on you here, but the reality is, your thoughts, feelings and entire existence has contributed to where you are now—blocked and pissed about it.

If you're a professional, you're not making money because you can't do what you do for a living. right? If you're a new or struggling writer you're stumped. You can't advance if you can't write, right? Wrong.

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*"If we had to say what writing is,
we would have to define it
essentially as an act of courage."*

Cythnia Ozick
The Din in the Head

Consider writer's block as the textbook for who you can become as a writer. It contains all the secrets you need to produce your best work, to get in touch with yourself, and to grow as a writer—IF you'll work with it and not fight it.

For the majority of writers, writer's block comes from one thing: **FEAR**. Many writers claim fear, once managed, helps them produce their best work. I don't think so. If fear drives you into the arms of courage, and courage into the arms of inspiration, then fear has done its job. But I've never known anyone to cower in fear and produce good writing, good art, or good anything, really. I think fear can be the spark, the impetus that drives us to find the courage and fortitude within, but as a motivator? It's no good for the long haul.

How does fear operate? Simple: It makes us afraid. We are afraid no one will like what we've written. We're afraid of being rejected, criticized, abused, laughed at, tossed away, humiliated or worse. That's what fear does.

You have to treat the fear of writing like any other fear. Immersion or progression. I'm an immersion person. After being mauled and almost killed by a Rottweiler, my solution to overcoming the resulting fear of dogs was to get a Rottweiler. Immerse myself in my fear—live with it. It worked. Others do better by taking a slow, progressive approach - looking at pictures of dogs. Going to a dog movie. Petting a puppy. Walking a friend's dog—building up to the actual act of confronting the big fear.

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Whatever works for you to quell your fear of dogs, spiders, crowds or clowns will work to quell your fears of writing—immersion or a step-by-step approach.

If you can't cope with fear in other areas of your life, you're not likely to be able to deal with the fear of writing either.

Writing, perhaps more than any other thing we will do in our lives, exposes us to ridicule, to humiliation, abandonment and misunderstanding.

People bring to our writing who they are, not who we are. It's hard enough to be understood when we face each other and can hear the tone of voice, watch the body language and respond to looks of confusion or anger.

But the written word does not provide us that luxury. Our words can be twisted, our intentions skewed or presumed upon. We can trample toes and offend cultures without even knowing what we've done. And worse—once the word is out there, it can be forwarded, copied, quoted and posted online forever. The potential to be misunderstood, judged and humiliated is immense! No wonder we don't want to write!

It takes an immense amount of courage—or at least thick skin and a healthy self-esteem to write for publication. Judging by the number of blogs on the Internet, I'm surprised writer's block is not more common. But if you're suffering, here's the solution:

*"The only thing we have to fear is
fear itself - nameless,
unreasoning, unjustified, terror
which paralyzes needed efforts to
convert retreat into advance."*

Franklin D. Roosevelt
1933 First Inaugural Address

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Secret One: Get your neurotransmitters balanced.

Don't you wish there was a pill for writer's block? Well, there is, sort of. Science has identified certain neurotransmitters (norepinephrine, serotonin, acetylcholine, dopamine and others) with increased and decreased levels of creativity and brain function. Neurotransmitters are the chemicals that allow the transmission of signals from one nerve synapse to another. Neurotransmitters relay, modulate and amplify signals, which we experience as mood, emotion, thought and feelings. Briefly, it's how our brain cells communicate with each other.

Acetylcholine

One of the most critical levels for creatives is the neurotransmitter Acetylcholine. Acetylcholine was the first neurotransmitter to be discovered, in 1921. A fascinating neurotransmitter, it could be called the writer's block solution, or part of it. It is the neurotransmitter released when we masturbate or have sex—and may be responsible for the increased surge in creativity many artists and writers report after being aroused or having sex or making love.

Excessive masturbation (several times a day, every day) can actually deplete this neurotransmitter and result in an overall chemical change in the body that can lead to depression, slowing in

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mental acuity and memory, and the hallmarks of what we refer to as “being blocked.”

Experts say masturbation is healthy—to a point. Overdoing it can cause changes in brain function, hair loss (no, it doesn’t shift to growing on your palms) and other pains and problems. Lower back pain, chronic fatigue, concentration, memory problems, absentmindedness, thinning hair, weak erections, pain (in the testicles, groin, or pelvis), and eye floaters (or “fussy” vision—possibly why some say you can “go blind” from masturbating), are just some of the symptoms you may experience. If you think you’re spending too much time along with dirty magazines or the porn channel, talk to your doctor.

Too much alcohol can do the same thing to acetylcholine levels. Remember Hemingway? He along with dozens of famous writers quite possibly drank their creativity and lives away.

The combination of being creative (and often being depressed), combined with the chemical issues and natural mental-health problems of *being* creative can cause writers to drink and drug. As Edgar Allen Poe once wondered, did the drink drive him mad or did the insanity drive him to drink?

The drinking and drugging trigger receptors that make you feel good, although you may not be able to create, since you’re also in a state not as receptive to creativity as it may feel.

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But many writers, in an attempt to retain their creative bent, destroy it. It's a vicious cycle we can blame in part on our neurotransmitters, but also on our decisions to stimulate them in the first place.

Acetylcholine is responsible for muscle stimulation, including the muscles of the gastrointestinal system as well as the genitals.

Acetylcholine operates in many regions of the brain, but using different types of receptors. It is also found in sensory neurons and in the autonomic nervous system, and has a part in scheduling REM (dream) sleep. It can relieve symptoms of anxiety, depression and stress and aids in memory retention and ability.

Speaking of memory retention: there is also a link between acetylcholine and Alzheimer's disease. Scientists have discovered about a 90% loss of acetylcholine in the brains of people suffering from Alzheimer's. Acetylcholine, serotonin and dopamine are a creative's best friend, since together they create the signals that we call creativity and bliss.

Norepinephrine

Norepinephrine is often referred to as "natural speed" because it is strongly associated with bringing our nervous systems into "high alert." As a matter of fact, amphetamines (man-made stimulants) actually work by causing the release of the body's natural speed along with other neurotransmitters called dopamine (the "feel good" transmitter) and serotonin (the mood transmitter).

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Norepinephrine is released into the blood stream along with epinephrine (a.k.a. adrenalin) by our adrenal glands. It's found primarily in the sympathetic nervous system. It increases our heart rate and our blood pressure. It's related to our ability to form memories.

Stress tends to deplete our store of adrenalin, while exercise tends to increase it. So if you're hammering away on deadline, doing too much with not enough rest, chances are very good your norepinephrine levels are down. Popping pills or bathing your organs in caffeine may tweak a little more out of the system, but you're essentially depleting your reserves. Better to bite the bullet and climb on the treadmill or bike, walk, swim or exercise to build these levels back up.

Dopamine

Dopamine is related to and often released along with norepinephrine. It is an **inhibitory** neurotransmitter. When dopamine goes to a receptor site, it blocks the tendency of that neuron to fire.

Dopamine is the party/feel good neurotransmitter. It is strongly associated with the reward/pleasure mechanisms in the brain. Drugs like cocaine, opium, heroin and alcohol increase the levels of dopamine, as does nicotine.

No wonder people do drugs and smoke even though it's bad for them.

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It feels good! If it feels good, dopamine neurons are probably involved! Low dopamine levels can be determined by a simple urine test, but there are other ways to tell if your dopamine levels are low as well:

- ✓ Do you often feel depressed, flat, bored, and apathetic?
- ✓ Are you low on physical or mental energy? Do you often feel tired?
- ✓ Do you have to push yourself to exercise?
- ✓ Is your drive, enthusiasm, and motivation on the low side?
- ✓ Do you have difficulty focusing or concentrating?
- ✓ Are you easily chilled? Do you have cold hands or feet?
- ✓ Do you tend to put on weight too easily?
- ✓ Do you feel the need to increase alertness and get more motivated by consuming a lot of coffee or other "uppers" like sugar, diet soda, ephedra, or cocaine?

If so, ask your doctor to test your dopamine levels. Or, cut out the caffeine; increase your intake of dopamine-rich foods like:

Almonds, avocados, bananas, dairy products, lima beans, pumpkin seeds, and sesame seeds.

Foods that are rich in antioxidants such as fruits and vegetables may help protect dopamine-using neurons from free-radical damage. Many healthcare professionals recommend supplementing with vitamin C, vitamin E, and other antioxidants.

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Foods such as sugar, saturated fats, foods high in cholesterol, and refined foods interfere with proper brain function and can cause low dopamine. Cut out saturated fats and cholesterol. Cut out caffeine, especially if your writer's block is turning into writer's funk and depression. Caffeine is a stimulant, which initially speeds up neurotransmission, raises the amount of serotonin, and temporarily elevates mood. But then you crash and burn. Sound familiar? Now you know why.

Schizophrenia, an often severe mental illness, has been shown to involve excessive amounts of dopamine in the frontal lobes, and drugs that block dopamine are used to help schizophrenics.

Low dopamine has recently been connected to social anxiety and the unsociability of schizophrenics.

GABA

GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid), is usually an inhibitory neurotransmitter, acting like a brake to the excitatory neurotransmitters that lead to anxiety.

People with too little GABA tend to suffer from anxiety disorders. Drugs like Valium work by enhancing the effects of GABA. Lots of other drugs influence GABA receptors, including alcohol and barbiturates. Drugs are one way to boost GABA levels, but meditation has been shown to be more effective. People who meditate regularly have considerably increased levels of GABA. The failure or inability to produce adequate levels of GABA has been linked to anxiety, tension,

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insomnia, and epilepsy. A study at Yale with people who had panic disorders were found to have 22% less GABA than those without adequate levels.

Guess what? The fun stuff addicts like to do—including alcohol, drugs, tobacco, caffeine, food, gambling, and even shopping, all have one thing in common: not enough GABA.

Meditation also boosts hormone levels of DHEA, and Melatonin, and ups your serotonin transmission as well. If you're having writer's block this might be a good time to start meditating.

Glutamate

Glutamate is an excitatory relative of GABA. It is the most common neurotransmitter in the central nervous system - as much as half of all neurons in the brain - and is especially important in regards to memory.

Serotonin

Serotonin is an inhibitory neurotransmitter. It has been found to be intimately involved in emotion and mood as well as appetite, sleep, memory and learning, and body temperature. It's been connected with migraine headaches, fibromyalgia and irritable bowel syndrome. Too little serotonin has been shown to lead to depression, problems with anger control, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and suicide.

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Too little also leads to an increased appetite for carbohydrates (starchy foods) and trouble sleeping, which are also associated with depression and other emotional disorders.

Drugs like Prozac help people with depression by preventing the neurons from "vacuuming" up excess serotonin, so that there is more left floating around in the synapses. If you can't afford Prozac and a psychiatrist, warm milk at bedtime has been shown to increase serotonin levels as well. Serotonin is a derivative of tryptophan, which is found in milk. So yes, it does help you sleep as well.

Serotonin does more than soothe us at bedtime. It also plays a role in our perception. Prozac and serotonin re-uptake inhibitors aren't the only things that affect receptor sites.

"Hallucinogens such as LSD, mescaline, psilocybin, and ecstasy work by attaching to serotonin receptor sites and thereby blocking transmissions in perceptual pathways." (Dr. C. George Boeree)

Endorphin

Endorphin is short for "endogenous morphine." It is structurally very similar to the opioids (opium, morphine, heroin, etc.) and has similar functions.

Endorphins then are the body's natural pain and stress inhibitors. They reduce pain and increase pleasure. Opioid drugs do the same by attaching to endorphin's receptor sites.

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Capsaicin, (the active chemical in red chili peppers) has also been shown to stimulate endorphin release. Topical capsaicin has been used as a treatment for certain types of chronic pain.

Increasing and balancing neurotransmitter levels

Steven Mills of <http://theratracetrapp.com> has some excellent advice on nutrition and the brain - particularly Acetylcholine and the foods and supplements you need to boost those levels.

Mills says:

How to Increase Your Acetylcholine Levels

The best foods for acetylcholine are fatty. Avoid fatty red meats if you can, but knock yourself out as much as you can without blowing your diet or healthy eating practices.

Some of the best sources for acetylcholine:

- Egg yolk
- Beef liver
- Chicken liver
- Whole Egg
- Turkey liver
- Wheat germ

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- Pork
- Lean ground beef
- Cod, salmon, or tilapia
- Shrimp
- Soy protein
- Peanut butter
- Oat bran
- Pine nuts
- Almonds
- Hazelnuts
- Macadamia nuts
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Cucumber, zucchini, lettuce
- Skim milk
- Trimmed ham
- Low-fat cheese
- Low-fat yogurt

Supplements

Frankly the best way to increase your acetylcholine is through supplements. Take these 30 minutes before eating.

GPC choline – This is the best-absorbed and most impressive form of choline to take.

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It is more expensive than phosphatidylcholine, but you absorb so much more of it and it is already in the form that exists in your cell membranes so it is well worth it.

Take 500 mg to 2,000 mg daily broken up into 2 doses; one before breakfast and one before lunch.

Phosphatidylcholine – 500 mg to 2,000 mg daily in three doses.

Phosphatidylserine – This has a long history of research to back it up. Take 500 mg to 2,000 mg daily broken up into three doses.

The following supplements help preserve acetylcholine in your brain and body:

Acetyl-L-Carnitine – You are out of your mind IMHO if you don't take this amino acid supplement. It is extremely safe and has such fantastic potential that you should take it if there is any chance in hell that even a small fraction of its potential benefits work.

Take 1,000 mg to 3,000 mg daily divided into three doses. Combine it with **R-Lipoic Acid** for powerful synergistic effects. Take 100 mg to 300 mg daily divided into three doses.

Manganese – This is a mineral that preserves acetylcholine. Take 1 mg to 5 mg daily.

Huperizine-A – Take 200 mcg daily in three divided doses.

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This is an herbal extract and is a proven acetylcholinesterase inhibitor. This means it prevents the breakdown of acetylcholine.

Okay, if you got this far you're obviously as fascinated as I am with how neurotransmitters can body slam our creativity into a rut, or bring us out of it. I've found through trial and error and personal practice that a healthy diet, good food, plenty of rest, sleep and the following nine tips can break ANY writer's block.

And don't forget to drink 8, 8-oz glasses of water (not soda or tea or juice, but water) a day. Water lubricates the brain and makes all the other stuff you do (exercise, meditation etc) work better.

Secret Two: Exercise. A lot.

Next to eating healthy, exercise has been shown to be the most effective way to stimulate the release of hormones and neurotransmitters you need to break your block.

Sex is exercise. So is walking, riding a bike, swimming, rowing, hiking and cleaning the house. You don't have to become Arnold Schwarzenegger to get the benefits of exercise. And, you don't need to become a gym rat either.

A mere 30 minutes a day five-to-six days a week has been shown to increase serotonin and endorphin levels in most people no matter what their fitness level or weight.

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Within two weeks of a consistent exercise practice that elevate the heart rate for 20 minutes - you will notice a difference in mood, sleep patterns and creativity and sex drive.

If you feel like doing more - do it! Combine activities - like walking and cleaning house, or calisthenics and dumbbell or kettle bell exercises. Get a treadmill and watch the news while you walk and drink your morning (decaffeinated) tea or coffee. If you can do more - do it. Up to two hours a day has tremendous benefits for you if you have your doctor's approval.

Secret Three: Play. Rest. Have Fun.

Just because you're a writer, painter, artist, sculptor or "creative" and people THINK all you do all day is "play," you and I know better. Being creative, let alone brilliant, is hard damn work. So find another outlet for play.

Play might be going rafting, fishing, camping or bar hopping. It may mean dancing or painting if you're a writer, or writing if you're a painter. Getting on the floor with your kids to play, or learning to play a video game with your tweens or teens is play. If you're single, and feel lonely and pathetic like I frequently do, Bingo games at your local Elks

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or Moose Club, or the local volunteer fire department or rescue squad also count as play.

Consider coaching a local rec team, or at least volunteering to help out at soccer games. Being around people who are playing is often a great first step for finding your own inner frustrated child. The idea of play is to have fun, not to win games or collect trophies. So try playing horseshoes, feeding the geese at a local pond, going to the zoo, visiting a museum, checking out movies you might not typically attend. If you're really daring go to a toy store and buy a toy you always wanted as a child. Me? I recently bought an ant farm - best \$25 I ever spent.

Secret Four: Find and utilize a good therapist.

There's a direct correlation between mental health, mental illness and creativity. You may not have serious, debilitating mental health issues that disrupt your life, but on the other hand - if you're creative - really creative - people have probably already thought you were at least eccentric if not mentally ill. No offense intended. Consider it a badge of honor. Almost all the great writers, thinkers, inventors and artists had a mental illness of some kind. It's gift. It can be a curse too, but consider it a gift.

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A good therapist can do wonders:

They can teach you the tools you need to do self-analysis (CBT or Cognitive Behavioral Therapy). (2) They can lay to rest all those questions and concerns you have about “Is this normal?” (3) If they’re good, they offer unconditional support and encouragement - something many creatives haven’t received.

There are tons of websites that will tell you how to find and interview a good therapist. Even if you end up at the county health department, or with a local pastor, or a good friend who can keep your secrets and not be judgmental, you’re still better off than trying to get through the misery of writer’s block, fear and anxiety alone.

Secret Five: Get a hobby.

That’s right. A hobby. You don’t have to collect things, but that’s an option. What is a hobby? A hobby is an activity or interest that is undertaken for pleasure or relaxation, typically done in one's leisure time.

I quilt, fish, collect pins from various events I attend, and do woodworking and crafts. Hobbies can be anything. For an exhaustive list see: <http://www.about.com/hobbies/>

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“Hobbies” includes kite flying, knitting, woodworking, video games, stamps, coins, the usual collectible things and so on.

Starting an aquarium, an outdoor koi pond, a garden, or learning to play the guitar, ride a motorcycle - all kinds of things can become hobbies. The point is that whatever it is is relaxing and done for pleasure.

Going to the junkyard or to the flea market to find things to utilize in your art, writing or creative craft can be more stressful than relaxing for instance - as can attending plays or movies if you're a screenwriter. So, get a hobby that isn't related to what you do and where you have your block.

Secret Six: Change creative disciplines for a while anyway.

This is a no brainer. If you write, start painting. If you paint, start writing. Do left-brain stuff like math without a calculator.

The idea is to get your brain to kick in from other hemispheres and in other areas - from visual to auditory and so on.

no fear.

If you don't normally do anything more with your hands than turn on your computer, pound the keyboard and crack open a beer, try changing the tire on your bike, or raking leaves, or building a bird house.

Spiritual practices from other cultures include practitioners doing life backwards - walking backwards, reversing their daily activities, meals and other practices, sleeping standing or sitting up, or on the floor rather than a bed - all to shock the brain or system out of its rut. Can't hurt to try it.

If you write, draw and paint already, take a welding class. Buy a power tool. You get the idea. Do something that requires a different part of your brain, something that forces you to learn a new tool, a new way of thinking and considering how to do something. The point is to learn, not to switch to something else you may already do well.

no fear.

Secret Seven: Find God. Or at least a spiritual practice.

I'm not asking you to accept Jesus, although that's certainly an option and one I chose. I am asking you to pursue a "spiritual practice" of some kind. In Alcoholics Anonymous the concept is "a higher power."

If you're reluctant to consider a power outside yourself, then consider nature, life, fate, destiny or serendipity - anything that forces you to contemplate meaning, purpose and insight.

Read the Bible. Read the Torah. Read Siddhartha. Heck, read The Celestine Prophecy, or my all time favorites: Jonathan Livingston Seagull or Illusions.

A spiritual practice includes prayer, meditation, worship, contemplation - all things science has shown increase the positive neurotransmitters that affect our mood and creativity.

no fear.

Secret Eight: Set boundaries. Learn to say no.

If you're like most creative people you have issues around boundaries. You don't know what they are, how to determine what yours are, or how to enforce them appropriately.

You may let clients, editors and the general public violate your boundaries on a regular basis - and wonder why, since you're such a nice person, people treat you like they do. Resentment, anger and frustration are the building blocks to writer's block. If you're doing things, writing things or taking on tasks you don't want to do you're not going to be feeling or experiencing the general full-blown bliss of creative genius.

If you don't know what a boundary is, or how to set one or even harder, how to enforce it, check out anything written by Dr. Henry Cloud on boundaries. He's the guru and genius of all things boundary related to work, home, family, marriage and even dating.

Learn to set boundaries and learn to say no without guilt. It takes some practice but it will change your life and free you from so many kinds of writer's blocks and encounters with clients from hell that it will be so worth the effort you make to learn this critical skill set.

no fear.

*"Courage is not the lack of fear
but the ability to face it."*

- **Lt. John B. Putnam Jr.**
(1921-1944)

Secret Nine: Travel. Go somewhere new.

Are you sensing the theme here yet? Five words: **Get out of your ruts.** From hobbies to a spiritual practice - you're expanding your brain, pushing it beyond its comfort zone and teaching those bored cells, the ones you haven't killed with beer and pizza or junk food, how to contribute more than a jealous snipe at the latest book you've read and wish you'd written.

Travel can be anywhere. Go around the world. Go over the state line. Go across town or to the mountains or beach. If you live across from a cow pasture like I do, go into town.

The idea is to switch gears and get your brain panicking a bit - thinking, "Hey! Wait a minute! What's happening here?" It's akin to exercising after being a couch potato for ten years. Your body will protest initially, but then once all the cells and the chemistry adjust you'll suddenly say, "Oh.... sweet! This is nice!"

The point of travel is to experience new things. Don't just go to the hotel where you where you spent your honeymoon or your annual vacation. Go someplace new, different.

no fear.

Secret Ten: Quit whining. Write anyway.

"I have accepted fear as a part of life, specifically the fear of change, the fear of the unknown. I have gone ahead despite the pounding in the heart that says: Turn back, turn back; you'll die if you venture too far."

– Erica Jong

We are fearful creatures - some of us more so than others. But we all have our secret and not-so-secret fears. And most of us survive in spite of them.

Fear begins with a thought, not an emotion. It progresses from a thought, or series or cycle of thought to emotion. If you have ever watched children talk themselves into a hysterical terror over a thought about a monster in the closet you know what I mean.

Control your thoughts and you control your emotions. Quit telling yourself you're in danger and your body will quit releasing adrenaline and sending you into a chemical bath you'll need an hour on the treadmill or a couple of valium to quiet down.

The advice most authors give to "feel the fear and write anyway," is good advice. Once you begin to write and to train your brain to realize you CAN write you will be able to move past your block. However you must do it, find the courage, create a routine, and force yourself to write. Don't worry about it being good, or being what you intended to write, just write. The rest will come. What you resist, persists. Quit whining about your block. Face it.

Acknowledge it's there and write anyway. It's what real writers do.



resources.

Cameron, Julia. **The Artist's Way**

Cloud, Dr. Henry. **When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life; The One Life Solution; 9 Things You Simply Must Do to Succeed in Life and Love; Boundaries with Kids** (and dozens of others)

How Fear Works. <http://health.howstuffworks.com/human-nature/emotions/other/fear.htm>

Keyes, Ralph. **The Courage to Write: How Writers Transcend Fear**

Flaherty, Alice W.. **The Drive to Write, Writer's Block, and the Creative Brain**

Pressfield, Steven. **The War of Art**

Rekulak, Jason. **The Writer's Block: 786 Ideas to Jumpstart Your Imagination**

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Finally, use your head. You're a creative person, for gosh sakes. You may have mental issues, but don't do anything stupid. Nothing in this Guide is intended to replace common sense, legal, medical or other professional advice, and is meant solely to inform and entertain the reader.

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