

FREE CHEAT SHEET

# FICTION WRITER'S CREATIVITY KIT

YOUR MUST-HAVE CHECKLIST FOR THE TOOLS YOU NEED TO SUCCEED

4 SURE-FIRE WAYS TO BREAK  
OUT OF WRITER'S BLOCK



Gottabeewriting  
Cheat Sheet



# WHAT'S WRITER'S BLOCK?

A sudden chasm opens up between you and your next good idea.

You stand beside the yawning abyss staring at the other side, knowing the idea for a best-selling novel, or a salable short story, or an article pitch is waiting if you could just get over there somehow.

But the bridge is down, the winds are high, and you don't have a plane. So you put away your writing tools and head to the grocery store or the hardware store or even the back yard where, by God, at least you'll accomplish something today.

What's important is that what you do when you find yourself in this position is not nearly as important as what you're not doing. If you're not writing, you're not practicing your craft and, ergo, you're not getting better at it.

Don't let an imagined dearth of ideas serve as an excuse to "do something else." Hit back at writer's block by trying one of the simple fixes in this cheat sheet.

Writer's block afflicts all writers at some point. Maybe you've been taking on too much and you're stressed. Perhaps you've been immersed in the same project for so long you've lost perspective. Heck, sometimes you're just plain stumped.

No one knows the real reason an idea or motivation finally occurs, but we all know it's tough to deal with.

Luckily, there are some creative exercises for your writing toolbox to kick you out of the doldrums and get your ink flowing again. I've given you methods that each focus on one of four major aspects of writer's block:

Idea Generation

Perspective/Attitude

Perfectionism

Boredom

**METHOD #1****The Writing Jar** Idea Generation

I have a writing jar I keep on a bookshelf in my office. It's not fancy—just a mason jar I picked up at the grocery store. In it, the seeds of new stories are incubating, waiting for me to choose one and give it life.

Whenever I'm struggling with writer's block, I head over to the jar, pick out a slip of paper at random, and start writing. These little slips of inspiration have never failed to jumpstart my lagging idea factory.

Before you can create your own jar, you need to find some ideas to harvest and save. Here's how:

**Step One:** Move

I walk almost every morning and listen to an audiobook. Sometimes it's about writing or language, but sometimes it's about self-improvement topics or just plain escapist literature—whatever is floating my boat that day. Maybe you'll run, or dust, or do laundry. But move and pay attention to something—it gets the creative juices flowing and helps remove idea stuckages (yes, I just made that up) that contribute to writer's block.

**Step Two:** Record

I carry my phone everywhere because it has a handy-dandy notes app I use to jot down ideas that come into my head on the spur of the moment. Most of us have TONS of good ideas and we say “Oh, I'll remember that,” and then we Don't. Ever. Find. It. Again.

Write it down or speak it into a voice memo app. Sometimes you don't have writer's block—you've just managed to forget your best ideas!

## Step Three: Collect

I am amazed at the kinds of things that spark an idea. Sometimes it's a phrase:

**“inter-cranial jewelry making”**

from Elizabeth Gilbert's *Big Magic* comes to mind. I wrote it down after hearing it on her audiobook, placed it in my jar and, in due time, it metamorphosed into a short story.

Sometimes it's a scene: One morning I was walking in a literal fog and it was wreaking havoc with my hairstyle. This sentence popped into my head:

**“Bits of cloud stuck to her hair, reducing it to sopping tangles.”**

Or how about this partial sentence pulled from the scent of the neighborhood bakery early one morning:

**“...the sweet, sugary weight of doughnuts in the air...”**

Or, when I was walking around the lake on a calm, windless morning:

**“The placid water spurled toward the shore, the ripples erasing themselves on the sand in quiet desperation.”**

I don't usually know what I am going to do with these bright and shinies when they first come to me. But I know I'll need them later, and I know they're going to grow into something beautiful. When I get home from my walk, I transcribe each onto a colorful piece of paper and place it in my jar. When I'm feeling empty and uninspired, I reach in, grab one, and let my imagination fly. Something fascinating always emerges.

Go find a jar, a box, an envelope—anything that feels right to you—and start filling it with those pieces of inspiration you find in your daily life. Before you know it, you'll have a whole collection of ideas from which to choose the next time you're feeling uninspired. I write on colored bits of paper, but you can use anything you have handy.

At the end of this PDF, you'll find a page of pre-designed idea slips you're welcome to print out and use. Make a habit of writing down your inspirations on the fly or snapping photos of pictures or phrases that inspire. At the end of the day, write them down on the idea slips and tuck them away in your writing jar.

**METHOD #2****Down to Business** Perspective/Attitude

The page is blank and so is your mind. You fidget, pace, rearrange your desk, and plod diligently through all the trite (no typo) and true “tips” for jarring yourself out of the doldrums and back into creative mode and yet, a writer’s block cure remains elusive.

I’ve read and tried all of the well-meaning suggestions out there: change your environment, go for a walk, talk to a friend, distract yourself and — here’s the one that bugs me the most — “write through it.”

Ah yes, that old chestnut. In my book, it’s right up there with the premise that if you don’t write every minute of every day for the sheer joy of it, you aren’t a ‘real’ writer. Please don’t let anyone ever tell you that --and if they do, please don’t believe it.

I’m a real writer. I love to write. But I don’t write every single minute of every single day. Some days I don’t even want to write at all! Does that make me less of a writer? No. It makes me *real*.

So what do you do when the writing fairy just won’t bless you with any creative pixie dust? You must be true to yourself. Don’t be constrained by some other writer’s exhortation to “write something—anything” just to get through a slow patch. A writer’s block cure must be specific to the writer!

Consider this: the slow patch may be your personal writing fairy’s way of telling you that your ideas are not yet ready for prime time.

**Orson Scott Card once said:** “Writer’s block is never solved by forcing oneself to “write through it,” because you haven’t solved the problem that caused your unconscious mind to rebel against the story, so it still won’t work – for you or for the reader.”

Of course, if you're writing for a client and under deadline, you may not have the luxury of taking some time out to let your creative ideas marinate. Then what? When I'm under deadline I rely on one tidbit of knowledge that has the ability to jar me out of a blockage pronto, and it's this:

*Writing, like anything you do, is a job.*

Teachers don't get "teacher's block". Your friendly neighborhood police officer doesn't get "officer's block." And as with any job, sometimes you just don't feel like doing it. The first step in overcoming "block" is embracing this fact:

*Some days you just don't feel like writing.*

That's okay. If you aren't under deadline, put the writing aside. Review what you've done so far and see if it makes sense. Something you've already written may be the key to jolting you out of complacency and into a new groove. But if that doesn't happen, that's okay too. Take a break.

If you're under deadline though—whether it's your weekly blog post or an article you owe to an editor—you have a job to do. Pull up your big girl (or boy) panties and get going. Don't whine about lack of ideas — get online and start searching. There are millions, maybe billions, of great ideas whirling around the internet waiting to be written about.

**Considering your writing a job instead of an art is essential** for getting your writing gears moving and producing again. If thinking about it as a job doesn't work for you, try this:

When you were in high school or college and you had a writing assignment due, did you ever NOT turn it in because you didn't feel inspired? Probably not. You may have felt sluggish, stymied, stupefied or slothful but you had to get it done—so you did. Perhaps your first draft was lackluster, but that's why you have a first draft. After you read through what you've written as Orson Scott Card recommends, you'll find you have a new perspective on your words and more ability to be creative with them. Why? Because editing is always easier than writing when you're in an unproductive mood.

So don't let that blank page stare you down. Get back to work and end your writer's block now!

**METHOD #3****The Write Fast Method** Perfectionism

Sometimes, I write fast. Other times, not so much.

In fact, some days the tick of the clock in my office seems as horrible as Chinese water torture with its insistent reminder of the words I'm not writing. Tick. (*I've got laundry to do.*) Tock. (*Better answer this email.*) Tick. (*The dog needs some exercise.*) Tock. (*I'm stuck on this chapter.*) Tick. (*What's that scratching in the wall?*) Old Edgar Allen Poe's got nothing on my overactive imagination.

While my imagination might be rampant, it can get spooled in my head, a hard ball of ideas that doesn't want to roll out through my pen or my keyboard. Sometimes, instead of the traditional writer's block, a sort of idea 'desert', I have the kind of block that consists of a big, fat, wad of thoughts that won't disengage from each other enough to make one sensible story.

So, I write fast.

I find that writing speedily without caring if my ideas make sense is a great way to write myself out of a corner. Even if my prose seems nonsensical at first, it often resolves itself into a strong, sensible pattern within fifteen or twenty minutes of writing. Turns out that even all the babble at the beginning is often usable; in fact, it's been the source of some of my more twisted pieces of fiction.

I know it seems odd to tell you to write fast when you're having trouble writing at all, but believe me, it works. Some call this 'stream of consciousness' writing, but I don't agree. It's not quite random thoughts, like true stream-of-consciousness. In fact, I almost always have a topic or goal in mind when I write fast, it's just the ideas that are unprocessed as they fall onto the page in word form.

The best part of this exercise is the freedom you feel when there's no need to worry about your grammar, diction, point-of-view errors or punctuation. It's writing as an art in it's most elemental form. It's soul-lifting, idea-birthing deep work for writers. So, give yourself the gift of free-range writing. Just do it. Put all those thoughts and ideas out there.

You can worry about editing later. In fact, there's plenty of writers who feel writing is made better by having less restriction during the creative phase. The editing phase is for, well, editing. Do it then and your writing will be better for it.

*As writer Peter de Vries said: "Sometimes I write drunk and revise sober, and sometimes I write sober and revise drunk. But you have to have both elements in creation—the Apollonian and the Dionysian, or spontaneity and restraint, emotion and discipline."*

So, be spontaneous — go write fast!

**METHOD #4****Popcorn Writing** Boredom

Here a pop, there a pop—everywhere a pop-pop. Learning to write several articles or stories simultaneously might seem like a tall order, but it's a great way to increase your productivity and keep writer's block at bay. I find when I have more than one project in the hopper I don't suffer as much from writing burnout. I get stalled by frustration a whole lot less and my articles and stories seem to have some extra polish to them.

So what's the secret? Variety! Often referred to as the 'spice of life', a little variety in writing projects can lend some spice to your finished work. There are lots of reasons why writing several things at once helps develop your writing skills and career, but I've listed a few of the most important below:

**Lack of Boredom**

When you get tired of writing that article on industrial laser diodes you can always jump back to your short story about invading cephalopods from outer space. Or vice versa. There's never a dull moment when you have several different projects upon which to work.

**Change of Style**

Nothing keeps a writer on his or her toes like having to switch styles from hard-and-fast reporting to chatty blogging to stylized novel writing. This kind of back-and-forth between projects provides experience developing different voices and keeps you from getting stuck in a language rut.

## High Achievement

Juggling several pieces and keeping them all going simultaneously definitely boosts confidence with a feeling of accomplishment. Sometimes sitting down to the same old pages each day can make you feel like a drudge. Keeping several writing pieces going at once gives your writing a more purposeful feel—and that often translates into more aggressive word counts and more bylines.

## More Chances to Get Noticed

You may think your short stories really rock, but your article writing on gardening has suddenly become in demand and you're beginning to get multiple assignments that pay well. If you hadn't decided to branch out from your story writing, you'd never have known this! Choosing to explore writing in several areas broadens your horizons in more than one way. First, you get a chance to try out different kinds of writing—who knows, you may find that fiction becomes a passion while your article writing ends up just a hobby. Second, you may happen across a niche that really lights your fire like content creation, informational writing, ghostwriting, flash fiction, non-fiction book writing. And finally, you gain lots of writing cred from being diversely published and that can never hurt should you be looking for an agent, a publisher, a client, or querying a magazine.

Consider learning to write several things at once and experience all the glorious variety a writing career can offer!

# Printable Idea Slips for Your Writing Jar



*The Next Big Idea*

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*The Next Big Idea*

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