

Las Vegas Quill Keepers Lesson 7: Writer's Blockhead**By Cathe Jones, (cathejones.com)**

Okay, there you are. You're at the keyboard. You are looking at pictures of your great-grandmother's favorite cat. On the desk is a very funny shaped lint ball. Your coffee somehow is getting colder, no matter how many refills you have. And, on top of it all, it's 3 a. m. My friend, you are walking around your friendly neighborhood writer's block.

We've all had days where fidgeting seems far more productive than finding a perfect adjective to describe a woman's hair. There are days when watching a 15-hour infomercial about winter socks seems more interesting than finishing that one last paragraph. Writer's block is a state where we are unable or are unwilling to put words to paper. The assumption is that a writer is unable to find a word, and therefore won't try. The fact is, the writer knows exactly what needs to be done, and maybe even how to do it, but she's afraid it's not going to be good enough, or worse, too good.

There are dozens of books listed on Amazon on methods for breaking through those walls of "I can't", "I don't understand", and "Why am I doing this?". But, there are simple, inexpensive ways to get back on track when writing that Great American Novel, (or automotive manual, or cookbook, or kid's math guide). The first step is knowing why you're stumped, or delaying the writing in the first place.

Psychologists have used the ask and ask again method to determine a person's issues. The mode works in the same way oil drilling rigs work. Each layer gets broken through bit by bit until the Texas Tea is found. By practicing the art of self-inquisition, you cannot only discover what

bricks are in your wall, but you may also find a new channel of communication at your disposal.

Let's suppose I'm working on a book about Rats. (I am working on a book about rats, so of course, I can "suppose" this easily.) In the chapter that teaches the reader about Eduard Muybridge's films and the roles of animals, I'm stumped on how to restate a well-known story without making it sound like plagiarized material. Leonard Maltin uses all the best verbs. Bill Moritz uses all the best scene descriptions. But the real frustration is, I hadn't plan to use the story in the first place. It was impressed upon me, by the editor, that it makes a clear the progression of the time line.

I begin asking myself, "How can I write this differently, quoting where necessary, but not sounding so derivative it doesn't sound like my voice?" The first question should be a summary of the goals you wish to attain.

I know the answer is to relay the tale as only I could tell it. The second question begins with the reply of the first. "What is my voice?" Boy! Does that sound like a major cinder block in the wall of Writer's Block? Of course it is! This is one of the most challenging questions of any writer! Instead of asking myself the daunting, overwhelming meaning of life, my question should be "What part of the derivation can be restated?"

I am now assuming a more palatable request exists. When writing nonfiction, facts must be used, and variations create fiction. Dates, names, locations, and even minutia of trivia exist, and may freely flow. I begin jotting down all of the points that I remember. THEN I go back and verify sources. This brings me to question three. "What facts can be

attributed, and verified?" I am now off and running where, before, I had been stymied.

If you are writing fiction, and words just don't come to mind, there are other simple tricks to keep in mind. You can become any character in your story. You can pretend you are IN any location. How a character describes his home may be entirely different than the way you would. Picture a person in your family describing something. Fiction allows for the mind to play, even in the most serious of tales.

Another trick is to look down at your desk, and pretend you are describing any object to a reporter overseas, via cell phone. The reporter has sent you to find a magic aspirin bottle, for instance. Star at the bottle as if it were a child, a dog, a shoe—anything OTHER than a bottle – and see if new words, or expressions don't just surface where none existed.

Pretending a celebrity is interviewing you adds passion in working dialogue. If Albert Einstein were alive, and wondered about the color traits of aspirin bottles, you would explain it entirely differently than if you were being interviewed by Danny Bonaduce of the Partridge Family. Reversing this, pretend you are soliciting an account from a hero, or child, or even a stranger. I would let a small child know that Aspirin was big girl medicine for "when mommy has heard too many little girls". The portrait is yours to paint.

There are days when writing just doesn't seem to spark any fires, nor does it illicit enthusiasm. In other words, you're bored, and probably spent. But, if you have deadlines, or only certain hours a day you can devote to the craft, then procrastination is dangerous to your paycheck

and deference. Compliance earns veneration, and remuneration. The seriousness of that situation can thwart all engagement in your work.

Rather than looking at your project as WORK, look at it as if you were a schoolchild, and this was Recess. I find myself walking into the office at times, carrying a box of Imitrex or Tampax, and a bowl of warm cereal, and I know it will be a difficult morning. I sit down at my desk, close my eyes for a second, and breathe a long, deep, sigh. My imagination tells me that writing is forbidden during recess. Forbidden usually means compelling. Or, I may have written six pages on Tuesday, so my Wednesday self decides I have to beat this, and win the prize. (In my case, the prize is to walk into the pets' area, where I get lots of fuzzy attention.) Playtime isn't reserved for children. Writing allows me to use some amusing toys.

What if the work you are putting before you is just draining your emotions, and causing you to feel down about yourself, or the world around you? This form of writer's block is not only formidable, but may last for months or even years. This is the time to step as far away from your words as possible, at least for one day, and remind yourself of all the things you enjoy.

Take a walk around your neighborhood. Go have ice cream at the local shop, (or sorbet if you're dieting as much as I do). Whatever you choose to do, ensure that it's as different from your topic as possible.

Detachment is one of the only remedies available to you. Since I work in nonfiction, I try to step away by walking into the fantasy of television, or even in reading children's books. Sesame Street has saved many a writer from implosion.

When all else fails, remember that words are used in games. Dabble in cryptograms, crosswords, and why not “hangman”? All of these, and many more, can kick start a new paradigm of phraseology. The real challenge is enjoyment of language, words, and terminology. I’m very visual, so I spend time playing with Fonts. Sometimes seeing a word in a new motif can inspire incomparable literature. Breaking rules can break down those walls. {Walls... hmmm, I wonder what I can write about walls...}

This week’s recommendation is for fun distractions, which are word related.

Free Word Games Online and Downloads:

<http://word-games.recruiter.ca/>

TimeWasters! All Free Games

<http://www.allfreegames.com/timewasters.html>

An Article Regarding Word Games for Writers

<http://news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u=/ucjk/hotonthetrailoftheyword>