

Type 1 Writer's Block

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<http://greatstorybook.com/type-1-writers-block/>

This entry is part 1 of 4 in the series [Writer's Block](#)

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What is Type 1 Writer's Block?

I bet you've experienced writer's block (maybe you're experiencing it right now), but do you know *what kind* of writer's block? There are 3 basic types and for each of those, certain specific things you can do to overcome those blocks.

If you want to know what kind of block you're dealing with and what to do about it, this is for you (the first in a series). Right now, I want to talk about Type 1 Writer's Block.

A Little History of Writer's Block

There has been a fair amount of research done on Writer's Block, which was first recognized as a condition in 1947 by the highly respected psychoanalyst Edmund Bergler, who was himself a writer of 25 books and nearly 300 articles. After Bergler, several others also decided to address the problem.

The focus has historically been on the individual rather than the function of writing, but because of their research, we have some tricks we can use to help deal with it.

The traditional tactics are tasks like mind mapping, stream of consciousness exercises, brain storming and list making. These all help in clarifying your thoughts. The problem with these exercises is that they don't always work as a method of overcoming writer's block. They are fun, and I like to play with these

a lot, but they don't really help me bring a story to completion.

The 3 Types of Writer's Block

Over the years, I've come to realize that there are 3 basic types of writer's block:

- **Type 1:** when you're blocked at the beginning (or even before starting)
- **Type 2:** when you're blocked in the midst of the writing process, or
- **Type 3:** when you're blocked towards the end, not finishing the project.

Any of these Blocks can stem from *emotional reasons* or from more *technical reasons*. Writing is a soulful act, and so the process can be a very emotional one.

But it's **also a matter of craft**, and that means there are technical aspects of writing - where if you know to do them it makes writing much, much easier.

I want to first address the technical aspects of the Type 1 type of block, because the fixes for them are immediately actionable. If you are able to identify what technical aspects of writing you haven't yet been doing, **then you can simply start doing that and your writing will jump forward to the next level.**

Read through it all, because sooner or later you might be hit by another subtype of your Type 1 Writer's Block.

So: let's get started. **Right now, we'll identify the 3 technical issues that create Type 1 Blocks**, and then what to do about these problems.

3 technical problems from type 1 writer's block

If you find that the biggest hurdle in writing is actually getting started, then a few technical things are most likely happening:

problem #1

1. You have no idea what you should write about because you're concerned about whether or not your writing could go anywhere on the market. Sometimes, not knowing how to research the market can hamper even the first inkling of a story idea.

problem #2

2. You've no idea where to begin with creating a story and so you don't even really start; it's just so overwhelming. Maybe you haven't been able to move past the stage of jotting down some basic notes.

problem #3

3. You are just tapped-out, unable to think of new ideas at the moment. If this is a more recent development, then it can be particularly painful. That's why *I'll address this reason for Writer's Block first.*

more about problem #3

Believe it or not, this isn't a problem of discipline. There's this huge cloud, this thought that we need to be a responsible adult *right now* and that if only we are disciplined enough, we can simply write like a professional writer would – but this is actually contrary to our real-life experience of writing a story.

There's nothing particularly adult about making things up and writing it down into a story. If anything, it's an extension of our childlike imagination. Anything is possible; anything you decide to be true in your story is true.

Starting a writing project has nothing to do with discipline, but in recognizing what's happening with you and the state of your creativity when you cannot or are not writing. You know you want to be a writer, so why aren't you writing?

What's happening is that something is blocking you, stopping you from writing before you've even really gotten started. When a simple question of what to write becomes debilitating, that means it's time to stop a moment and step back.

That's right – *stop* writing, but stop writing on purpose, not because you are avoiding it and procrastinating and, “oh my life is so hectic, and I need to clean the kitchen right now” - instead of write.

dealing with problem #3... 3 actions to try

1. Get out of the house. Take a walk, go to the movies, sit at the bus stop and eavesdrop a while. Do something that will help you get out of your head and away from your worries. Go to a place where you cannot see your computer.

When we write, we need to be able to give and give. If you're unable to write, it may well be because you've been running on empty. If you are, it's nearly impossible to start on a project of any kind.

If you're stressed and tired all the time, then you've got to gas yourself up, and because writing is an exercise of the mind, it is your mind that primarily needs to be filled.

Whatever it is you love doing (when you're not writing), do that. If you can get away by doing something physical, that is often best. But it has to be outside of your home, whatever you do to fill up.

2. Find your writing time zone. Some people can get up before dawn and they even find that this is when they do their best writing. I am not one of them. Some people are night owls and can churn out their best story material after 10pm. I'm not that type either. This means I need to write when the sun is up, and I need to fit it around whatever other responsibilities I have.

Think about when it is your mind is *really* at its peak, and find ways to squeeze some valuable writing time into those zones. Doing this means your writing will be more focused because your mind will be more focused – and that translates into fewer problems with writer's block.

3. Use distractions as a source of inspiration. There is no lack of possible distractions when it comes to writing and Writer's Block. A bird tweets. Your brother tweets online. The wind blows and it pushes a single strand of hair right onto your nose.

Don't let these things stop you from writing. Instead, write *about* them. Sometimes, the general noise of life all around us can clog our imagination, and we can't filter certain thoughts out enough to enable anything really creative.

If that's the case, go with that. Write down whatever it is that is in your head. You're upset about something? Write about that. You're unable to sleep at night? Write about that and then write about what you were thinking about so that you couldn't sleep. Whatever it is that is in your head, get it on the paper.

Do this for at least 20 minutes. I promise you will feel lighter afterward and you will be ready to write about something else, something fictional: a story or a scene for a story. Something you actually want to write about.

Life can be creatively interfering. The mistake is to try pushing that away. First deal with it, as a writer would, and write about that stuff. That way, you'll free yourself up to really write.

We've covered the third reason for getting blocked from the onset, when you're just out of gas and bogged down by all sorts of distractions. Let's go back up to the first reason:

dealing with problem #1... 3 actions to try

You have no idea what to write about because you're not sure what the market really is.

Nobody wants to spend their efforts on a story that won't go anywhere on the market. At the same time, you also don't want to feel like you're selling your soul in order to write something marketable. There is a fix for this.

You don't need to sell your soul. In fact, the best way to find your niche in the market is to really consider what it is that you love. What do you love? Then do that. But that of course isn't quite enough. You need to be aware of the market and test your ideas before you start penning them down.

Here's what you can to do:

1. Go into a bookshop and browse around. You can also do this in a library or the Internet. The purpose of your browse right now is to think about the type of books you love. This isn't just about story genre or character type, it's also about the physical reality of the book. What does it look like and how does it feel?

Does the book have pictures? If so, what are they like? Is it a paperback, trade novel, hardback, coffee table book? Even if it's a cookbook – it doesn't matter. What matters is that you need to list down what it is you love about the book. Why do you like it?

Those things that you write down on your list are the attributes you should aim for in your own book. You shouldn't think of your book as a story, but as a product.

The great thing about thinking about books in this way, is that it can help trigger all sorts of ideas about what you might actually want to bring to the market. What kind of story *from you* do you want people to hold in their hands and experience?

2. Find the section of the bookstore that stores the genre you want to write. Look at the titles there, read the copy on the backs of the books. What do these books have in common and how are they different? You need to know about this, because this is your current market.

3. Now it's time to think about what you want to do more specifically. What are you thinking of having in your story? For example, let's say you want to write a YA adventure novel. What is the sub-genre or the main aspect of your possible story? It should be something that is exciting to you.

That means it can be anything you choose, so long as you are excited. Let's say Paris. You want to write a story set in Paris. It's an adventure with a trained falcon in Paris. The main protagonist has a falcon.

Look on the Internet for websites on falconry. You should also see if there are any YA adventures set in Paris. The reason is this: if you want to be on the market, you need to know your market. More than that, you want to see if there is any demand or interest in these initial ideas for a story you might have.

If there is some interest, that is really good for you. Competition on the market means there is an existing market for your general idea.

The thing to look out for: you also don't want too much competition. Let's back up a little and suggest that instead of a YA novel you want to write a cookbook about Parisian food. This is a large market. To make your book stand out amongst the flood of French cuisine books, you would need to make it quite different in some way. The Mexi-Parisian Fusion Cuisine, or maybe the ultimate guide on preparing snail.

Take these three steps and you'll sit down to write down more than just ideas, you'll be ready to start creating a profile for your protagonist. That brings me to the solution for the second reason you might have a technical block.

about problem #2

If you haven't been able to really start, it might be because you aren't sure where to start.

The reason we love stories isn't really because of what happens, but because of the characters we love. These things happen to them, not just anyone. **So that's where you should start: with your main character.**

Creating a character that feels real is perhaps the most challenging thing a writer can do, because it means putting a great deal of thought into details about the character that *might never be used in the telling* of the actual story. What I mean by this is that if the character is to feel realistic, feel as though it has many layers and perhaps even a sense of intrigue, then we need to establish more about the character than is on the page.

We as the writer should know everything about that character – which means we need to know much more about the character than the readers do.

You cannot fake this. Readers figure it out if you try to hint or allude to something about a character that doesn't actually exist (meaning you never decided what that thing is) and then of course you never follow-up on it, let it sort of disappear into the margins. It isn't fair to cheat your readers like that, and doing a thorough job of establishing character before you get into the story writing isn't difficult – if you know how.

You can use my [Complete Character Creation](#) worksheets, if you wish. This is the best way, I find, to keep track of story details. You can download and print that method any time you want, for any kind of character in any kind of story.

What to keep in mind as you create a character is that there are two key things you'll need to do with those files:

1. Don't throw out any notes or scraps of anything with notes on them. The reason for this is because the physical note – the scrap, the napkin or coupon – whatever it was you used, will by a tangible reminder of where you were and what you were doing when you first had the idea. This helps give your Idea Notes greater meaning to you, and you can use that in your writing.

2. Organize your character files so that all the details of a specific character are kept together.

Keep the order of information types consistent from project to project. For example, you'll devise the eye color for every important character. That information should be located in the same place for every character file.

You don't ever want character details just thrown in as you decide upon them. You want to be able to determine the detail at will and then place the detail in the right order. If you can establish this kind of consistency in your process, then your writing will be more focused and deliberate.

Coming Next: Type 2 Writer's Block and what you can do about it.

Keep creating, no matter what.

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