



# Banish The Blank Page of Doom

# -FAST

WHY WRITER'S BLOCK IS A MYTH,  
AND OTHER STORIES

**Vicky Fraser**

# Banish the Blank Page of Doom – FAST

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*Why Writer's Block is a Myth, and  
Other Stories*

Vicky Quinn Fraser



Banish the Blank Page of Doom—Fast: Why Writer’s Block  
is a Myth, and Other Stories

First Edition (2020)

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*This little book is for everyone who has ever spent hours  
with their forehead on a desk, whimpering.*

*Specifically, it's for my Team Moxie writers who  
accomplish such amazing feats of writing and storytelling  
in our Power Hours. You're incredible and you inspire me  
to write more every single day.*



“Every day, writing. No matter how bad.  
Something will come.”

— **Sylvia Plath**



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## The Dirty Truth About “Writer’s Block”

Or, how a bunch of stoned poets  
created an excuse for not doing the  
work...

There’s toothpaste still in there.

I know it. You know it. The bloody  
toothpaste knows it.

We hate waste, so we refuse to consign the  
almost-barren toothpaste tube to the bin.

We squeeze and we mangle and we torture...  
and still that last tiny ooze of minty goodness  
stays put. Stubborn. Now there’s not enough  
toothpaste on the brush, and my fingers ache.

Like the last toothpaste in the tube, words  
can be stubborn.

We squeeze and we mangle and we torture...  
and still those words refuse to come. Refuse to  
coalesce from the shiny, beautiful ideas in our  
heads. Those words cling to the insides of our  
skulls for dear life and rot there.

And now we have brain-ache.

We get angrier. More frustrated. Close the  
laptop or notebook in disgust, and declare that  
we cannot do it. We cannot possibly write under

## *The Dirty Truth About “Writer’s Block”*

these conditions (or any conditions). It’s no use. We have...

### **WRITER’S BLOCK.**

And we’ll never be able to write again.

Well, I beg to differ. You can write. You just need a little gentle encouragement and a gear shift in your brain.

First, though—come closer. I have a little secret to tell you. Are you ready?

Writer’s block is a myth.

No, wait! It is!

Writer’s Block is a lie we tell ourselves to get out of doing the work. An enabling crutch. I’ve used it as an excuse countless times.

‘Oh, I have writer’s block, so I’ll go and watch ten hours of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* under a blanket and wait for inspiration to strike.’

Funnily enough, inspiration never did strike when I was procrastinating magnificently.

You may be reading this and cursing me, declaring that I’m a snarky bitch who knows not of what she speaks, but stick with me. I’m not claiming creative blocks aren’t real; they are. I know they are because I trip over them all the damn time. Creative blocks and resistance are absolutely real.

What I’m battling against is this idea of “writer’s block” being a peculiar affliction that’s somehow special to writers and which nobody can fix and which will legitimately stop us from writing our books.

I’m hoping that by the end of this little book

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you’ll be persuaded you don’t suffer from “writer’s block”.

You’ll realise you are, in fact, a creative genius who can write any time you like—and you’ll have all you need to overcome any big hairy writing challenges.

### **Giving Away Our Power**

The thing about writer’s block is it allows us to believe we’re powerless against it and becomes something we can point the blamethrower at and absolve ourselves of responsibility.

And the problem with *that* is, when we wash our hands of responsibility for our own writing and creativity, we give away our power to some nebulous, phantom enemy we can’t fight.

When the problem is external, our ability to solve it is weakened. We make ourselves the victim, and that’s a weak, frightening position to be in.

The truth is, our inability to write—our blockage—comes from within, and the only person who can fix it is ourselves.

I read a fascinating article in *The New Yorker*<sup>1</sup> about writer’s block. In it, I learned that Samuel Taylor Coleridge, writer of *The Rime Of The Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan* and many other classic poems, suffered from the first recorded mention of writer’s block. He experienced a total shutdown and all-but stopped writing in his late 20s.

After that, ambitious writing projects inspired what he called “an indefinite indescribable

## *The Dirty Truth About “Writer’s Block”*

Terror” (I know what that feels like, ay) and he wasted most of the rest of his life in an opium haze (I side-stepped the opium).

It sounds melodramatic, but it’s not. We might not self-medicate with opium or alcohol, but we self-medicate with other things: social media, endless news loops, Netflix, and the safety of a regular pay check doing something else, even if that something doesn’t inspire us.

Let’s stay awake and write Big Ideas instead.

### Is it a Modern Affliction?

I reckon writers have probably struggled to prise words from their heads since the beginning of writing, but “writer’s block” only became a Thing during the early 19th century. When the early Romantic writers were lounging around and bending their brains.

Around that time, the idea of writing as an art form changed. In earlier times, according to that *New Yorker* article, writers thought of writing as “a rational, purposeful activity” which they controlled; but the early Romantics saw writing as external, and somehow magically bestowed.

(Which is what can happen when you spend most of your time using mind-altering substances.)

In fact, Shelley once wrote: “A man cannot say, ‘I will compose poetry.’” In his mind, poetry came from “some invisible influence, like an inconstant window”, which kind of blew the words and ideas into the poet.

## *The Dirty Truth About “Writer’s Block”*

They just had to sit and wait for it to happen. The poets were mere conduits for art.

Those flaky Romantics and their opium-fuelled ideas...

I agree with the earlier writers: writing comes from inside me. My ideas and inspirations come from everywhere—I can’t claim credit for those—but the act of writing and thinking and composition is my responsibility. If I sit and wait for the words to blow in through the “inconstant window”, I’ll die of old age first.

### Layers of Fear

Writer’s block isn’t a condition to be cured or something that happens to us from outside. It’s layers of fear, anxiety, and dread because we are all terrified of looking stupid, terrified of failing and, sometimes, terrified of succeeding.

We’re afraid to “ship it”, as Seth Godin would say.

Writer’s block is an excuse that keeps us stuck, which is born out of a belief that writing should somehow be easy. After all, we’re all taught to write words on paper from our earliest childhood. Anyone can do it. So it should be easy, right?

The truth is, writing is often hard. Anyone who claims it’s always easy is lying or not an actual human.

Creating anything is hard, whether it’s a painting, a sculpture, a poem, an article, a book, solving an engineering problem, or winning an argument in a courtroom.

## *The Dirty Truth About “Writer’s Block”*

The act of creation requires effort, and it requires a little tiny piece (and sometimes a giant chunk) of yourself in sacrifice.

When the going gets tough, and we can’t seem to think of anything, though, we blame a lack of inspiration.

We blame writer’s block.

We blame anything rather than sit down and do the damn work.

But a funny thing happens when we sit down and make words appear on paper anyway: inspiration strikes. Ideas start to flow. Motivation rises.

Because action doesn’t come from motivation; motivation comes from action.

Inspiration doesn’t appear from nowhere and create beautiful writing; inspiration comes from thinking, scribbling, observing, reading, listening, and learning.

Professionals don’t sit around and wait for inspiration to strike. They roll up their sleeves and get on with it, even when it’s the hardest thing in the world.

Writers write. And so can you.

## **Are You Ready to Learn the Secret Way of the Writer?**

Excellent. Let’s meet the two main voices inside your head because you need to understand how they stand in your way—or help you along.

First, though, I want you to do something for me. Every time you find yourself thinking, ‘Ugh, I have to write this thing...’ I want you to stop

*The Dirty Truth About “Writer’s Block”*

and reframe it. Because if you think something’s going to be awful, chances are it will be.

Say, instead, ‘Yay! I get to write now!’ It’s a simple shift that makes a huge difference. Try it.

Then keep reading...





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### *Your Inner Superhero vs Your Inner Dickhead*

What's it like inside your skull? Is it quiet, or loud? Goldfish, or chickens?

Silence. Sudden silence. The kind of velvet silence that soaks up every whisper. The only sound in your head is the bass-beat of your panicked heart... and all eyes are on you.

What's the worst thing that can happen during your competition pole dance performance? Wardrobe malfunction? Nope. It's pole dancing, everybody'll cheer.

You fall over? Nope. You can make that look like it's part of the routine, and carry on regardless.

Your music stopping halfway through your dance? And they can't get it started again?

Yep, that'll do it...

I tell you, nothing's bloody simple, is it? I was smashing out a fantastic performance as a robot sex-doll until the music just... stopped. Time was, I'd have gone to pieces. Rushed off the stage. Cried in a corner. My Inner Dickhead would never have allowed me to remain on that stage and dance.

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How humiliating, right?

Well, not this damn time. Not after all that hard work.

As I stared, wide-eyed and frozen in panic, someone broke the silence and yelled, ‘You carry on, girl!’ and I thought ‘Screw it. I will!’

The audience cheered, then someone started clapping a rhythm—and everyone joined in. I finished my routine. It wasn’t perfect—how could it be? I had no music—but I put my entire soul into it. The judges asked if I wanted to do it again... but I said no, thank you. I didn’t think I could do a better job than that, in that place, on that night, and they were happy to score me on the dance I did.

Let me tell you something, dear reader. There is nothing—*nothing*—like the feeling of a roomful of people who’ve got your back. Who are willing you to do your best and carry on in spite of a technological failosaurus.

Total strangers who come up and give you a hug and tell you how freaking amazing you are because you stuck two fingers up to technology and carried on anyway.

I have tears running down my face right now because of the love in that room. Does that sound cheesy? Yeah. Do I care? Hell NO. Because it’s true.

Everyone competing in that room was putting themselves out there, doing their best, and having a whale of a time. And everyone watching was loving it. What. A. Night.

Oh, what’s that? You want to know who won? I’ll tell you later.

Now, though I want to ask you a question:

## **How Many Voices Do You Have?**

Inside my head, it's sometimes like a Saturday morning market: obligations and desires and my ceaseless inner monologue pull at me from all directions, and the clamour can be deafening.

Other times, it's quiet... but never silent.

For me, there are two main voices. One wants me to do well and have adventures; the other wants me to stay in bed, to stay "safe". They're my Inner Superhero and my Inner Dickhead.

How about you? Which voices do you have? And, more importantly, which do you listen to?

Our Inner Dickhead—the part of our brain that tells us to sit down and shut up, be small and compliant, to commit no nuisance and not to make a ruckus—the part that tells us we're not good enough, that we can't do this—hasn't always been a dickhead.

Once, our Inner Dickhead kept us alive.

That voice, which always focuses on the negative, was our early warning system. It would notice the face-eating sabre-toothed badger waiting to pounce from the shadows. It kept an eye out for enemies who might hurt us. And it reined in our reckless streak, so we'd be more likely to survive to pass on our genes.

Back when all we had to worry about was being eaten or beaten or starving to death, our Inner Dickheads served us well.

Now, though, that voice keeps us stuck.

Most of us, if we live in the affluent west, don't have to worry about physical danger or starvation—thankfully. So that Inner Dickhead—the one that says “don't do that, you'll look stupid” or “you're not good enough” or “there's no point even trying, don't bother”—isn't protecting us. It's holding us back.

But you do have another voice. A quieter one.

The voice of your Inner Superhero. The voice that tells you that you can do this, you are good enough, and you may as well give it a go.

You started a business, so you've listened to your Inner Superhero at least once. You're reading this book, so you must want to write and put yourself out there. You've done the scary thing, rejected what most people do, and struck out on your own path.

Keep listening to that quiet voice because the more you listen, the louder and more confident it'll become.

Your Inner Dickhead won't ever go away completely; but you can drown it out with your Inner Superhero.

Here's how I do it.

Every time my Inner Dickhead pipes up to tell me I'm an idiot, or I shouldn't bother, or everyone hates me, or I don't know what I'm doing, I write it down.

I write down exactly what it says, and consider: would I say that to anyone else? Even if I didn't care for them? The answer is almost invariably, “Of course not!” I'm in the habit of

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speaking to myself in a way that I'd never speak to anyone else.

Negative self-talk is an awful habit, and I bet you have it, too, at least some of the time.

Let's change the nature of the conversations we have with ourselves. Let's be kinder and more honest because our Inner Dickhead's job is to find the negative. It helps to understand why that's the case.

We put far more weight on negatives than positives. In 2001, Professor Baumeister, professor of social psychology at Florida State University, wrote an article for *The Review of General Psychology*<sup>1</sup> called "Bad is Stronger Than Good", and noted that it takes five positive experiences to make up for one negative one.

Go out of your way to find the positive. Every time you get a negative review or someone says something mean or your Inner Dickhead pipes up to undermine your confidence, go in search of a positive.

When my Inner Dickhead tells me I'm a terrible writer and I should just give up and get a job stacking shelves, I make a note—then I go and dig out a bunch of positive reviews and testimonials. I read something I'm proud of. I turn around and look up at all the cards from clients that are lining the top of my bookshelves.

I remind myself that although sometimes I write absolute crap, that doesn't make me a terrible writer.

Your Inner Dickhead does not want you to write a book.

Mine didn't want me to write books.

Your Inner Dickhead doesn't want to risk people criticising you. It doesn't want you to look foolish and it doesn't want to fail. All totally understandable... and all unfounded.

Your Inner Superhero, though, *does* want you to stick your neck out and give it a try. Because your Inner Superhero understands that although bad things *might* happen, they probably won't—and good things will only happen if you're brave enough to give it a go.

Don't let your Inner Dickhead stop you from writing the book that's inside you. It could change everything—for you, and for your readers.

And when you actually do start writing, be warned: your Inner Dickhead will try to censor you:

- “Don't write that, you'll sound stupid.”
- “People will laugh if you share that with them.”
- “You don't know enough to make that claim.”

Do not censor yourself during your first draft. Be yourself, in bright technicolour and surround sound. If you want to know how to do this with gusto, I highly recommend watching *RuPaul's Drag Race*. These queens have dealt with other people's crap, and their own crap, for their entire lives; they are done with censoring themselves.

Your first draft is you bleeding all over the

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keyboard. Get those ideas out and down on paper then worry about tidying it up later.

Don't show it to anyone yet. Do not give your Inner Dickhead a chance to second-guess you. Do your outline. Then write.

This is your writing process (cribbed from Stephen King)<sup>2</sup> in simplest terms:

1. Say it. (Splurt your words out with the door closed, for your eyes only.)
2. Say what you mean. (Revise it for your readers with the door open, then give it to someone to read.)
3. Say it well. Polish it. This may be your final draft.

(There may be more drafts in between. That's fine too.)

This process helps you get past the Blank Page of Doom, and it helps you sidestep your nasty Inner Dickhead.

### A Note on the Nature of Humanity

You may be reading this and thinking something along the lines of, 'Well, that's all very well, Vicky, but what if people actually *are* laughing at me?' Fair enough. I worry about this all the time. So I'll share a few little diamond ideas with you—and in Chapter 19 of *How The Hell Do You Write A Book*<sup>3</sup>, you'll find a lot more about dealing with criticism.

Brené Brown gives us a fantastic tool to cope



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with criticism in her wonderful book, *Daring Greatly*<sup>4</sup>. Here's what we do:

1. Take a small piece of paper. A sticky note is good.
2. Write down the names of people whose opinions of our writing truly matter to us. People we love and admire. There isn't much room on this piece of paper, but that's a good thing: most of us only have a small number of people who fall into this category.
3. Stick your small piece of paper somewhere in your workspace.

Next time someone says something that upsets you, check your sticky note: is their name on there? If not, why are you upset? Why does it matter to you? Move on.

If their name is on the paper, perhaps they had a point—in which case, reframe what they said as a learning experience, and talk to them about it. Fix the problem. Improve your writing.

I have two pieces of paper: one for personal stuff and one for business stuff. There are only around six names on each.

It's a funny thing, the human brain. We spend an inordinate amount of time and energy worrying about what others think of us when mostly others aren't thinking about us at all. They're fretting about the same stuff we are. Isn't that daft? Almost nobody has the time or

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mental space to waste mocking you and your efforts. Remember that.

If you struggle to remember that fact, consider your own experience. How much time do you spend thinking about other people in your head? How much time do you spend raising an eyebrow at what others are doing? Very little. We're each the centre of our own universe, but we're not the centre of everyone else's.

And if all else fails, embrace the five-minute tantrum. If I get upset about something someone's said or done, I allow myself five minutes to cry and wail and rant and generally have a private tantrum. I know that I'm not going to just zen my way out of it. And I refuse to fit myself into the "polite society" box of not having any emotions. Screw the stiff upper lip: mine's wobbling.

I'm upset, dammit, and I'm not going to squash those feelings down so they stress me out and come back to bite me (or someone I love). So I indulge myself for five minutes. Get those feelings out of my head and make room for considered thought instead.

Then, I can look at the criticism or comment or whatever it was more objectively. Can I learn from it? Was it justified? Or am I entirely justified in ignoring it and moving on?

Most people want us to succeed. People will have our back. When my music stopped, and I was all alone on stage, face on fire and teetering on the edge of shame, nobody laughed at me. Everyone cheered me on. I wasn't kidding about

the love in that room. There's love in your writing room, too. Be open to it.

## Try Again, Fail Better

So, who won that pole competition I took part in? That would be me. I won my category. I was through to the finals.

Do you think I'd have won if I'd stopped? Walked off? Tried it again later when I'd sorted the music out? Maybe. Maybe not. I don't think so. I think I'd have been too tired and too nervous and the fear would have defeated me. Sometimes you only get one shot that matters. Take it.

Next time you feel like something might be a little too scary, please remember my story. Next time you look at your manuscript, and your inner voice tells you this is too hard, you're not good enough, and you can't do this, remember my tech fail. Picture the horrified look on my face as the music stops and fails to start again. Then picture me being fierce and doing it anyway.

Because if I can, you bloody well can, too. And you'll have all your clothes on and you won't be dancing in front of a roomful of people.

It's not an easy thing to let go of your fears and doubts and do the scary thing you want to do. If something is scary, it's often a sign you ought to do it anyway. You don't have to be fearless in life to succeed; I don't believe anyone is truly fearless. The secret is to feel the fear and do it anyway—despite your Inner Dickhead's attempts to sabotage you.

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Focus on your goal: writing your book. Focus on making it as good as it can be, so your inner critic fades into the background.

Accept that on the way to success, we will fail a few times—and that’s okay. The important thing is, we get back up and try again. Fail better.

And remember, when you’re comparing yourself to others, that it’s not a level playing field. We don’t know what’s really going on in their lives. We can’t see underneath their surface. All we can do is compare today’s me to yesterday’s me—and try to be a little better.

Being afraid is natural. I’m afraid all the time. Just don’t live a half-life, perpetually terrified of what others think, allowing your fear to hold you back.

Instead, embrace the idea that before we create something great, first we have to do something a little bit shitty.

So read on, and I’ll introduce you to the Shitty First Draft. You’re going to get well acquainted, and this concept will change everything for you.



## Chapter 2

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### *The Joys of the Shitty First Draft*

Or, relearning how to make mistakes  
and love them

There's a thing called the Shitty First Draft (which I first heard about when I read the wonderful *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott). The Shitty First Draft (SFD) isn't limited to writing; it happens in all creative endeavours in the arts, in science, in engineering—everywhere.

The SFD is beautiful and inevitable.

And it's vital if you want to write a good book. There are no good books in the entire universe that didn't pass through the Shitty First Draft stage; that, I promise you.

So get comfortable right now with the idea that your first draft is going to be crappy—and because of that, your finished book will be magnificent. Remember: in the history of all awesome things, there was a time when those awesome things were total crap.

Like the first aeroplanes which couldn't get off the ground. Or the first drawings toddlers make. Or the first steps we take when we fall flat on our faces.

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We have to fail in order to get better but in our screwed-up western worldview, failure has somehow become unacceptable. Falling down is a sign of weakness. Getting the answer wrong is a problem. It starts in school, when we're expected to get the right answer when we put our hand up.

If we get the wrong answer, we learn that we have somehow done wrong because, unless we were very lucky with our teacher, we see the frown on the teacher's face (no matter how small and fleeting that frown may be).

We learn that if we don't know the answer, we should keep quiet.

This carries over into our adult lives. We don't allow ourselves to be wrong, ever. We expect that we must and should get everything right first time. Which is both arrogant and unhelpful.

We're harder on ourselves than anyone else ever is. We don't allow ourselves to make mistakes and learn from them (and then we wonder why we don't improve). We hold ourselves to impossibly high standards. And we don't understand how creativity works.

If you want to beat the Blank Page of Doom and start writing your book (or anything else) you must give yourself permission to screw this up. But you probably won't allow yourself to, so I'm giving you permission to screw it up instead. I hereby bestow upon you permission to do a bunch of things when you write<sup>1</sup>:

- Make mistakes. As many as you like.

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- Be indecisive about what to include.
- Rip up your outline and start all over again.
- Have a little cry if you feel like it. Or shout. Or dance or sing or scream.
- Be honest. Really, brutally, painfully honest—even if it might upset someone. (You can always delete it later. This is the SFD, remember.)
- Change your mind. Then do it again.
- Ask for help. It might be the bravest thing you ever do.
- Write run-on sentences, ignore the rules of grammar, and let your spelling go out the window. Nobody has to see this draft.
- Be imperfect, because none of us can be anything else.
- Be vulnerable because vulnerability is attractive.
- Be confident, because confidence is attractive (and confidence is not the same as arrogance).
- Be selfish. For a few hours a week, while you're writing, give yourself time to write and guard it jealously. That time is yours. You deserve it.
- Be wrong from time to time.
- Allow yourself to say what you're scared to say.
- Have a strong opinion—and own it.

All these behaviours are good for your brain, and they'll help you write a fabulous book via



your beautiful, imperfect, and wholly necessary Shitty First Draft.

Before you start on your actual book, though, I want you to get used to the idea of writing and letting go of some of your inhibitions and facing some of your fears. That's what this chapter is all about. It's playtime.

## Welcome to Playtime

When did we stop playing for the sake of playing? When did we smother our inner child with the weight of boring adulthood?

I'm not sure. But I know when I started playing again—it was a little while after I started my business—after I started recovering from the mental health issues that had plagued me for years. I was done with work that meant nothing to me. I was done with ridiculous and unreasonable expectations—mostly from myself but from others, too. It was time to be silly.

Time to dance.

Time to get uncomfortable in the best possible way.

Because to write well, we need to voyage out of our comfort zone. Waaaaay out. The reason is simple: our comfort zone is wonderfully comfortable, but it's a barren desert. Nothing grows there.

Later on, I'll share some of my favourite writing exercises with you because although I want to help you sort your head out, I also want to give you practical stuff to help you beat the Blank Page of Doom.

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Before you get to them, though, here's a short story about how creativity works: I am not a natural dancer. Yes, I am a trapeze artist and a pole dancer, but that's different. I am strong, and I love hanging around upside down from my feet. Put me on the floor and ask me to dance, though, and I sweat and shake and hyperventilate.

Why?

Because what if people see what a terrible dancer I am and laugh at me?

This reaction is ridiculous and it's peculiar to our stifled and stilted culture. In *This is Your Brain on Music* by Daniel Levitin<sup>2</sup>, I discovered that if you travel to, say, Nigeria, almost *everyone* dances and sings. There's no self-consciousness or expectation of excellence. Singing and dancing isn't reserved for the stage, for specially trained people to perform for the rest of us.

Singing and dancing is part of everyday life and it's by and for everyone.

Rhythm is built into us. Just watch kids (from any walk of life) and you'll see the truth of this.

Then, at some point, a little tragedy occurs: we're taught to be self-conscious about moving and singing. We're taught that if we're not at performance standard, we should sit down and shut up because people might laugh at us.

What epic bullshit is this?

If I sound cross, that's because I *am* cross. How dare we teach children that dancing and singing is something to be ashamed of if we don't do it perfectly?

Right?

My own fear reaction to boogying a few years ago drove me to learn to dance because if something scares me, I must master it. (Also I wanted to be a good dancer.) So I found a dance class. At my dance class, the first thing the teacher told us to do was find a space and close our eyes. She put on some music and asked us to move. Eyes closed. No looking at anyone else. Then she gave us cues: Be angry. Be sad. Be joyful. Be a cat. Be a jellyfish. Be a toilet roll (I know, that baffled me, too).

We moved hesitantly at first, eyes slitted, pretending we weren't looking.

I felt like a total muppet... but so did everyone else. None of them *looked* like muppets, though... so perhaps I didn't, either. I kept going. The more I moved, the less of a tit I felt. Then something weird happened: I didn't care anymore if I looked like a muppet because I loved dancing. Loved moving. Our bodies are made to move and dance.

I knew the only way to improve was to keep going.

This is a book about writing, not dancing—but for me, writing is a form of music and dance. It has rhythm, beauty, feeling, and it feels *good*.

Here's a suggestion: do something that makes you feel daft every day. Just on your own to start with. Get used to feeling uncomfortable. Get used to feeling like a bit of a muppet. Pay attention to how, the more you do it, the less of a muppet you feel. Dance on your own, like nobody's watching, because they're not.

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Then remember your feelings when you sit down to write.

You don't look daft. Soon, you won't feel daft when you release the words, either.

And anyway, looking daft doesn't matter right now, because nobody will ever see the first things you write... they're for your eyes only.

So let's get on with it. Unfiltered and unfettered.

### Thou Shalt Not Edit as You Write

The way of the Shitty First Draft is to just vomit words out of your brain and onto paper. Without stopping, editing, or second-guessing yourself.

Just. Write.

Do. Not. Edit.

If you edit as you go along, you will become an angry person who throws newspapers at flies and yells at technology. Editing as you go is the most frustrating way to write. Instead of getting into a flow, all you'll see is typos, spelling mistakes, and words you could beat into better words. Editing as you write kills your creativity, your motivation, and your energy and feeds your toxic perfectionism—and ultimately you'll hate the whole process.

Confession: I find it monstrously tough to write without editing, so I feel ya. I really do. It takes practice to write freely. If you struggle with writing freely, try draping something over your screen so you can't see what you're doing. If you can touch-type, this will be relatively easy once

you convince your brain the world won't explode.

If you can't touch-type—learn! I first learned to touch-type in college using Mavis Beacon software. I was astonished to find out Mavis Beacon still exists.<sup>3</sup> Other touch-typing lessons are available.

If you're not into typing, you could dictate your book. Nuance Dragon<sup>4</sup> is very good, or you could use a service like rev.com, which charges around \$1 a minute for transcription and has a lightning-fast turnaround.

My point is: write first, edit later.

Stopping to correct a typo, or sort out the layout, or “fix” that paragraph you don't like, will harsh your buzz. It'll dam your flow, and you'll lose the essence of your message. Typos don't matter. Spelling mistakes don't matter. Awkward wording does. not. matter. Not at this stage.

What matters is the message you want to share, and the flow you want to get into. If you're able to manoeuvre yourself into a zen writing zone, you'll experience something akin to euphoria. Even if you're “not a writer” (and you are, because writers write, dammit), you can experience this for yourself.

Getting into a state where your words tumble out of your head and onto the page, where your voice rings out loud and clear like a holy trumpet, is magnificent. But you won't get there if you permit yourself the indulgence of editing as you go along. (And make no mistake, it is an indulgence.)

How do you do avoid editing as you go

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along? It takes practice and self-awareness. I still struggle with editing as I go along. I literally just went up and changed the subheading at the start of this zen flow chunk. It's okay, though, because my little transgression jolted me back to reality and reminded me editing as you go is a fool's game.

Practice. Editing as you go along becomes an unconscious habit but we can change it. Be aware of what you're doing at all times, check yourself, steer yourself back to the task of writing—and you'll begin to change the habit.



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### *Your Pencils Could Always Be Sharper*

“Shame loves perfectionists. It’s so easy to keep us quiet. Perfectionism is armour.” ~ Brené Brown

**H**ave you ever heard *that* answer in job interviews? The one that makes you feel faintly like defenestrating the guilty party, only you can’t quite put your finger on why?

It comes after the dreaded question: ‘What’s your biggest flaw?’ I mean, nobody wants to say, ‘Well, actually, I’d rather gnaw off my own toenails than work as part of a team.’

So, instead, you often hear something along the lines of, ‘Hahaha, my biggest flaw is that I’m a perfectionist!’

People say it in a self-deprecating, gently mocking way, so you *know* they really have no flaws they want to share (and who can blame them). The one they trot out—perfectionism—is often counted as a virtue.

Well, it’s not a virtue.

It’s one of our worst traits.

Perfectionism keeps us all stuck, and it may well drive us into an early grave.

Dr Brené Brown calls perfectionism “the 20-



ton shield”. She says “we carry it around thinking it’s going to protect us from being hurt. But it protects us from being seen... It’s a way of thinking that says, ‘If I look perfect, live perfect, work perfect—I can avoid or minimise criticism, blame, and ridicule.’”

Think about that for a moment.

Perfectionism doesn’t protect us from pain. It keeps us invisible—and that’s disastrous for humans in general, but especially when you’re running a business.

## But Aren’t High Standards Good?

Good enough isn’t good enough, for me.

Great is good enough. I hold myself—and others—to high standards, and there’s nothing wrong with that. I want to be the best I can possibly be at what I do, all the time.

That doesn’t mean I need to be perfect (there’s no such thing) or the best in the world (if you can’t measure it objectively—like the fastest 100m sprinter—the “best” is subjective). But it does mean I always want to do my best.

Sometimes I fall short, and I need to work on being at peace with that.

Some people call this perfectionism, but it’s not. It’s just high standards. You have high standards, too, and that’s great. The world would be a better place if everyone raised their bar a little.

Actual perfectionism, though, is paralyzing. It’s not about having high standards and trying

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to do better. It's about setting ourselves up to fail. It's self-sabotage, disguised as a virtue.

We beat ourselves up if we don't reach our impossibly high goals, and we expect more of ourselves than we ever do of anyone else.

### What is Perfectionism, Really?

If you've fallen into the trap of believing perfectionism is somehow a positive trait, as I have in the past, let's fix that.

Perfectionism is not striving for excellence and it's certainly not about healthy achievement and growth. It's a defensive mechanism that allows us to hide.

Perfectionism is not self-improvement, it's about trying to earn approval. It's not about getting better, it's about being *seen* to be better—and the difference is crucial.

Perfectionism is a debilitating belief that we are what we accomplish, and that our worth is tied to how well we do a thing. It leads us to believe that we *are* our mistakes, not that we're humans who make mistakes.

Perfectionism strangles achievement. It's correlated with depression, addiction, anxiety, paralysis, and missed opportunities. It keeps us on the fringes of life, where everything is safe and familiar, instead of in the trenches where the action happens.

Perfectionism is a function of shame. It tricks us into thinking we won't feel shame if only we're perfect; but the truth is, perfectionism

comes out *because* we feel shame about falling short.

And not only that, it has negative health consequences, too.

## Fretting Ourselves into an Early Grave

Professor Andrew Hill at York St. John University conducted a meta-analysis (combining data from multiple studies to identify common findings or effects) of 43 previous studies on perfectionism.<sup>1</sup>

He found a link between perfectionism and burnout, which isn't terribly surprising... but he found something else, too.

He discovered that setting ourselves up for continual failure by having standards so high no actual human could reach them can lead to constant worry about making mistakes, letting people down, or not being good enough.

Hill found this “can contribute to serious health problems, including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, fatigue and even early mortality.”

In other words, we can worry ourselves into an early grave. Which, I think you'll agree, isn't ideal.

And if that doesn't get your attention, try this: on a more immediate timeline, perfectionism and the problems it causes can destroy our love and enthusiasm for what we do. I've been there, and it's awful.

There's a difference between doing our best and knowing we're doing our best and being

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okay with not quite meeting our goals every single time—and setting ourselves such lofty goals we always fail and always feel like crap because of it.

### Live in Glorious Technicolour

I don't want you to feel like crap—and I don't want you to stay stuck. I want you to live a full life in glorious technicolour, giving no fucks about what strangers may think of you. Strangers don't matter.

Friends, family, clients—they matter.

So here's what I'd like you to do, starting now: be willing to do something you can't do yet. Take a risk. Learn that language. Learn to play an instrument. Take a pole dancing class. Even if you can't do it perfectly right away. I'm always pushing myself to learn new tricks and combinations on the trapeze, and the process is delightful and frustrating in equal measure. The frustration is part of the delight, though—because when I finally do crack the exercise I'm working on, it feels soooooooo good. Perfectionism stops us from trying new things in case we look stupid. (So what if we do?)

Remember, the end product isn't the most important part of this. Creating a super routine on the trapeze and performing it beautifully is brilliant, but it's not the most vital piece. The journey—learning—is where the real pleasure lies. Perfectionism stops us from being present in the moment and savouring the process.

**Finish things**, polish them once, then ship

them. Perfectionism stops us finishing, because nothing is ever good enough. Our pencils can always be sharper... but perhaps they're sharp enough for now.

**Start things.** Perfectionism causes us to procrastinate, to wait until we're "ready" or we're "sure".

Well, come closer because I have a secret to tell you: we're never ready. We're never sure. Start now and see where it takes you.

**Work faster** and ship your writing now. Perfectionism makes us take far too long, and that means we miss our moment. We miss opportunities. We try to go far beyond excellent enough and strive for perfect... but perfect doesn't exist. Instead, do your thing. Do it well, then ship it. Then improve it as you go along.

**Practise mudita.** Mudita is a Sanskrit word without a direct translation, but it basically means taking joy in other people's good fortune. So be happy about other people's successes. Perfectionism stops us from taking joy in others' achievements and makes us focus on our own perceived shortcomings. It makes us small and envious. Be generous and delighted.

**Play.** Play games, have fun, be silly. Perfectionism stops us from doing those things because people might think we're idiots or not as good as we should be. Let me ask you this: why do you care? Watch children play, and try to remember how to do it. Kids don't care what others think (until adults teach them to care); nor should you. Not when it comes to having fun.

## What are You Waiting for?

Perfectionism destroys our sense of self-worth and makes us believe we're not doing anything worthwhile. It makes us believe we're not really making a difference in the world. Humans need to feel like we're making a difference; making money alone isn't enough for us.

You are making a difference, I promise you that. Even if you can't see the impact you're having right now, it's there. I want to share a story I first read in one of James Clear's emails.<sup>2</sup> It's a *Star Trek* story, which makes me happy (yes, I'm a Trekkie).

In 1967, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement in California, Lieutenant Uhura of the Starship Enterprise met Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. Uhura was played by Nichelle Nichols—and despite her role on one of the biggest TV series ever made, Nichols was about to quit *Star Trek*.

Nichols' character, Lieutenant Uhura, was the Chief Communications officer on the Starship Enterprise and she was the first black woman on TV who wasn't cast in a role as a maid or servant. But her role had dwindled during the first season, and Nichols had decided to give Broadway a try instead. She had her resignation letter all ready—but she never sent it.<sup>3</sup>

Dr King loved *Star Trek* and told Nichols he was her greatest fan. She thanked him and started to tell him about her resignation—but King stopped her. 'You cannot,' Dr King said.

‘You cannot leave. Do you understand? You have changed the face of television forever. Because this is not a Black role. It is not a female role. Anyone can fill that role. It can be filled by a woman of any color, a man of any color. This is a unique role and a unique point in time that breathes the life of what we are marching for: equality. You have no idea the esteem we hold for you. You have no idea the power of television.’ He continued, ‘This is why we are marching. We never thought we’d see this on TV.’

Nichols truly did have no idea the esteem she was held in. She thought of herself as an actor with little impact, not a role model for Black people. Until then, she’d had no idea of the importance of her role on the show.

Nichols went back to work on *Star Trek* of course and continued to play Lieutenant Uhura in every episode and movie for the next forty years. She made waves all through her career as she had the first interracial kiss on national television and acted in many roles that redefined Black women in the eyes of society.

Without Nichelle Nichols as Lieutenant Uhura, the Civil Rights Movement may have played out differently. And without her, we may never have seen Whoopi Goldberg on our screens. When Nichols and Whoopi Goldberg met, Goldberg said, ‘When *Star Trek* came on, I was nine years old. And I saw this show and there you were and I ran through the house saying, “Hey! Come everybody! Quick! Quick! Look! There’s a Black lady on television and she

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ain't no maid!" I knew from that moment that I could become anything I wanted to be.'

You never know the impact you have on those around you. Do not underestimate the difference you make in the world now—and what a difference you could make if you write down your message in a book of your own.

So stop waiting. Start doing that thing you've been putting off, and start it now. There is no better time.

If the thing you've been putting off is writing your book, ask yourself why. Is it because you're afraid you're not a good enough writer? (We can fix that. You can get better.)

Is it because you don't think you have anything to say that people will want to hear? (You do. We can pull stories out of you that will hold people spellbound.)

Or is it because you're afraid people will hate your book, and ridicule you?

Some people might hate your book, it's true. But most won't, and you almost certainly won't be ridiculed. I want you to focus on the people who love you and your book. The ones you can help. They're the only ones who matter.

Stop waiting. Start writing.

Put your work out there. There are many people who will be grateful that you did.





## Chapter 4

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### *Scaling the Great Wall of Pain*

“There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed.” ~ Ernest Hemingway

**Y**ou will want to cry. In fact, you probably will cry. You will want to break things. You will want to just stop. And you will want to fling your book—or your article or whatever you’re writing—into the great trash compactor of the universe, never to look at it again. Please don’t. This, too, shall pass.

This chapter is all about the Great Wall of Pain—and if you’ve ever written a book before, you’ll know full-well to what I’m referring. There will be pain. You will hit the wall. And you will, for at least a little while, feel despair so deep it seems eternal. Which is why, in this chapter, I shall prepare you to accept the Great Wall of Pain, then take the sledgehammer of your will to it, smash it into trifling fragments, and keep going.

If you haven’t written a book before, and this is your first bash at it, let me find an example you may be able to relate to.

Are you a runner, perchance? Or a rower, or

a cyclist, or a climber—or in fact anyone with an active hobby? I'm a pole dancer and a trapeze artist, and I am exceptionally well-acquainted with the Great Wall of Pain. It's that moment, perhaps two-thirds into your run (or your row or your climb or your trapeze training session) when your body—or, more accurately, your mind—betrays you. It sits down, folds its arms, hunches its shoulders, sticks its bottom lip out, and refuses to budge.

'We can't!' it says. 'We're done. If you make us do any more, we will surely die.' Your legs are suddenly carrying sacks of potatoes, there's a bear squeezing your lungs, your last meal is waving at you, and someone seems to have filled the air before you with fog.

This is The Wall. It's enormous. So big, you can't see the top of it. You can't see around it, because it stretches forever. And you can't turn back, because it's encircling you like an oubliette.<sup>1</sup>

There's only one thing for it: we're going to take a sledgehammer to the bastard.

## Arm Yourself

Let's start by arming you, and recognising the false walls that may stall you needlessly. They're called resistance, and I'd like to send you to Steven Pressfield for a little masterclass in how to overcome them. Read *The War of Art*. Keep it on your desk and pick it up every time you feel like flaking out.

Learn to recognise the signs and put coping

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mechanisms in place. Here are a few of my coping mechanisms:

- My mobile phone lives in another room, on silent. If it's in the room I'm writing in, it saps my willpower.<sup>2</sup>
- Freedom app runs on my laptop, so I can't access social media during my working hours. Similar productivity apps are available, which stop you from mindlessly surfing when you should be writing.
- I plan my day the evening before, so I don't spend half an hour faffing around—because a half-hour turns into one hour, then two. When I sit down to work, I know precisely what I'll work on, where I'll start, and where I want to be when I'm done.
- My desk and tools are all set up and waiting for the same reason I plan my days: I can just sit down and write.
- Pay attention to your person, too: take good care of yourself physically and mentally. When I say don't allow resistance to stop you working, I don't mean torture yourself. When you can't feel your butt anymore, don't push on through: stand up, move around, and get the blood flowing.
- Drink plenty of water because your brain works more efficiently and more creatively when it's not gasping like a stranded fish.

## Vicky Quinn Fraser

- Eat well. I don't know about you, but whenever I get into any kind of workflow zone, I forget there's such a thing as food... and by the time I remember, I'm so hungry I will cut anyone who gets between me and the first thing I can cram into my face.

Obviously, I will recommend fruit and vegetables, but here's the sordid truth about my writing habits: at least one chapter of *How The Hell Do You Write A Book* was powered by three-Euro fizzy blue wine (yes blue) and Oreo cookies. And an enormous bag of pretzels. You'll probably do similar at some point (although I strongly recommend avoiding fizzy blue wine) and the odd blowout is fine—but don't live on crap food. Your writing will suffer. (Not to mention your health.)

Now the obvious is out of the way, let's get down to business.

### Brain Tornados

When the fizzy blue wine incident occurred, I was writing in an Airbnb in a little town called Haría, on the beautiful island of Lanzarote. There was a black pumice garden outside filled with tiny lizards and fruit trees, and I could see palm trees in the distance. And there were three other writers, whom I love dearly, and without whom I would not have finished my book. They kept me writing when I didn't want to. And I helped them, too.

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When, for example, a brain tornado struck.

We've all had a brain tornado<sup>3</sup> at some point. They're swirling thought vortexes that snatch up everything in their path, spinning faster and faster, sweeping away your day.

I think Kenda's three-hour paragraph is my favourite example. Head in hands, she wailed, 'I've been at it for three hours, and I've written one fucking paragraph! *I can't do this!*'

This is the perfect example of a brain tornado mixing with Imposter Syndrome (oh yes, we all suffer from that, too) and smashing her into the Great Wall of Pain.

You, like Kenda, may feel you've wasted hours trying to write the first paragraph of a chapter. Or, like me, you may squander hours failing to write the final paragraphs of a chapter.

Or perhaps this will sound more familiar: 'Oh god. I think this section would go better in the introduction chapter. But then it'll be a big chapter, and the preface and foreword aren't the same things. But they're all part of the introduction to the book. But actually, I think they could all have a chapter to themselves. But then there'll be 481 chapters, and that's silly. So maybe I should...'

And so the merry-go-round spins until the blue, fizzy, three-Euro wine creeps up behind us and smacks us on the head. (Yes, I'm judging myself for that choice of drink, so you don't have to.)

You'll walk miles pacing backwards and forwards. You'll chew your fingers, tear out your hair, and shred a million paper napkins in your

frustration. You'll suddenly discover critical jobs that need doing right now or the world will explode. And you'll wish you'd never heard of the computer game Lemmings.

Then you'll throw your manuscript into a drawer in disgust, and walk away.

## What Next?

DO NOT ABANDON YOUR MANUSCRIPT.

I cannot emphasise enough how tempting it will be to abandon your book and start another big project. Here's how I know: more than a year before I wrote *How The Hell Do You Write A Book*, I started writing another one with a friend of mine. I got one chapter into it, and it languishes on my hard drive, waiting for me to pick it up again. I wondered at this because I'd written and published a book once; surely, I could do it again. What was going on here?

A year after that, I took myself off to Fethiye on the sparkling Turkish coast, on my own, to write another book. I'd had this great idea that I thought would make people laugh. I still think it'll make people laugh. That book isn't written yet, either. I wrote, and I wrote, and I wrote, and I thought I'd written about half of it. In fact, I wrote 2,809 words, then went to the beach. I haven't looked at it since. It's barely an article. Shame overload.

A few months later, I started yet another book—at home this time—and managed 53,802

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words. Not bad at all... but I haven't picked it up again since.

So how did I manage to write *How The Hell Do You Write A Book*, when my three previous books had failed so spectacularly?

This time, things were different.

For one thing, I had a Big Idea. I knew exactly how this book would fit into my bigger picture and how it slots into my business. I knew exactly whom I was writing it for, and why. And I knew what I wanted to do with it afterwards.

I made a plan, set my goals, and stuck to them. In fact, I did all the things you've been reading about in these pages.

And, crucially, I decided not to go it alone. I gathered three friends and dragged them to Lanzarote. Together, we solemnly pledged to Get Shit Done. And we did. Never, ever underestimate the power of a group of motivated people to move mountains, my friend. You don't have to do this alone. This reason is why I created the Moxie Writers Power Hour<sup>4</sup> for writers like you.

Please find some writing buddies. If you can join a local group—fantastic. If you can find an online group like my Power Hour—splendid. And if you can go away with a handful of people for a week, somewhere lovely and quiet and away from your everyday drudge—even better (I run regular writing retreats, and they work like a charm).

They're not magic: I was still tempted to do Other Things. But writing with a group helps to keep you on track because when it comes time to



report back on your progress, you feel a right muppet explaining that actually you spent three hours playing Lemmings instead of writing Chapters 3 and 4.

Expect the Great Wall of Pain, my beautiful writer—then it won't take you by surprise when you run into it. You'll be ready for it. You'll understand its nature, and you'll be wary of its teeth. You have the tools to smash through the Great Wall of Pain and keep writing anyway. I know you can do it. I'm proud of you already.

## Resistance is Futile

One of the best books I've read on how to beat resistance and procrastination is, as I've already mentioned, *The War Of Art* by Steven Pressfield.

He's a fiction author (he wrote *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, among many other books)... and he's also become known as an expert in busting through resistance and improving creativity. He's done this partly through the books he's written on the subject, demonstrating beautifully that if you want to be seen as an expert in something, writing a book will help you along.

*The War of Art* is an easy read and it's structured in such a way that you can read it all in one go or dip in and out.

He starts with a list of activities that “most commonly elicit resistance”. Here are a few of my favourites:

- Writing, painting, music, film, dance, or anything creative at all.

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- Launching an entrepreneurial venture or business project.
- Any health programme.
- All kinds of education and learning.
- Any act of courage, whether it's political, ethical, or moral. Like challenging racism, homophobia, and sexism, for example.
- Making a decision to change our own thoughts and behaviour for the better—then actually doing it.
- Taking any principled stand in the face of adversity.

Anything, in other words, that's difficult and important to us. If you've ever made a decision to change in some way, you'll understand. No matter how much you want it, somehow it's bloody difficult.

It's easy to say, 'I want to do this thing' or 'become this person'. It's much more difficult to actually do the things we need to do to get there.

*The War Of Art* is filled with wisdom and advice from someone who battles resistance every day—and usually wins. His success is a testament to that.

Here are a few things I've learned from reading *The War Of Art*.

### Resistance is Like the Terminator

Pressfield treats resistance as a monster, a thing outside of himself, like the Alien or the Terminator. It has one objective: to prevent us

from doing the work that matters to us. It cannot be reasoned with; it is single-minded in its pursuit of sabotage.

I understand that. Sometimes it does feel like I'm fighting the inside of my own head. Like there are two voices in there, one quietly trying to do the right thing—and the other banging pots and pans and screeching like an attention-starved toddler.

Sometimes I manage to create a vast, quiet ocean between us; other times, the toddler (my Inner Dickhead) hops on a jetski (because he's *that* kind of dickhead) and gets in my face.

If you've never thought of your resistance as an outside being before, give it a go. It becomes less like beating yourself up, which is never helpful, and more like fighting the good fight against a common enemy.

## Do the Work

The most important thing about art—any art, including writing, painting, engineering, garden design, computer programming—is to work. Nothing else matters except sitting down and trying.

Even if you only write 100 words today, and those 100 words are gibberish—you're winning. You're beating your Inner Dickhead because your Inner Dickhead doesn't want you to write any words at all.

Sit down and try. That's all you can do.

## Professionals Create Order

As creative people, it can be tempting to believe we thrive in chaos. That we can't be constrained, maaaaaaan. That we should be allowed to float free and create when the muse imbues us.

Well, as a creative professional, I call bullshit on that.

I'm at my most creative when I'm in a calm, orderly place at a time scheduled for creativity—and so are all the successful non-starving artists I know.

My desk might become messy as the session goes on (all things tend to entropy, after all) but I start with a calm, clear desk and a calm, clear mind. Or I achieve nothing.

That creative faffery is just another face of our Inner Dickhead. It's just another way to stop us doing the work. If we float around and wait for inspiration to strike, we'll die of old age before you do anything worthwhile.

Want to write a book or compose a symphony or solve a tricky problem? Carve out time, schedule it in, clear your workspace and your headspace—and do the work. Do not wait to feel like doing it, because you will never get started. Remember, inspiration and motivation come from doing the work, not the other way around.

## Decide to be a Pro Every Day

Pressfield says, “Turning pro is like kicking a drug habit or stopping drinking. It’s a decision to which we must recommit every day.”

This is about who we are, not what we’re doing. I am a writer, and writers write. Every day. Every day, I wake up and remind myself who I am. Then it becomes easier to do what I need to do.

I’m a writer, and writers write, therefore I must write today.

Decide who you want to be, then commit to it—today and every day. Even if writing isn’t your main profession, if you want to write a book (or anything else of substance) you are a writer. That’s part of your identity. Own it.

## Don’t Betray Yourself

I don’t believe we’re all put on this planet for one thing and one thing only. I think we get a choice, and sometimes we get to do more than one thing.

But I do believe that if we think deeply and do work that matters, we wake up one day and realise what we’re meant to do. What we *want* to do, more than anything else. I know I did. I know I’m here to help people write books. I’m here to help people find the confidence to tell their story, loud and proud, so they can make the world a better place in a small (or big) way.

One of my favourite quotes comes from Mark Twain. I have it stuck on my office wall:

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“The two most important days of your life are the day you’re born and the day you find out why.”

Why do you believe you’re here? What work do you need and want to do? Is it important to you?

If it is, then to allow your resistance, your Inner Dickhead, to sabotage that work is a tragedy. We only get one life, so live it to the full and do work that matters to you.

That’s the theory.

Now it’s time to put all this mental strength into practice. In the next chapter, I’m sharing some writing exercises to help you beat the Blank Page of Doom.

Read on!



## Chapter 5

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### *How to Beat “Writer’s Block”: 4 Fun Games to Get You Writing*

Don’t fear the Blank Page Of Doom—  
choose your weapons and wrestle  
your resistance into compliance

**T**he Blank Page Of Doom looms in front of you, cursor blinking menacingly. The longer you stare at it, the less it seems like a simple blank page.

It’s morphed into a swirly purple-red monster with horns and teeth and tentacles.

And it’s *huge*.

When I get blank page paralysis, I often feel a little like Frodo approaching Mount Doom: the climb is so big and scary and intimidating, I can’t see any way up.

You know what I mean, don’t you? All writers face this sometimes. It’s popularly called “writer’s block”, but writer’s block is an enabling crutch, as I explained in the introduction. Whatever you want to call it, though, you’re stuck.

Even with a detailed outline, even with our books substantively written and planned out, we still have to face the dreaded blank page when we sit down to actually write.



You'll face the blank page a lot. Seriously. *A lot*. Even writers who write for a living sometimes feel like the words won't come. I do; some days are a real struggle. You'll face those struggles too.

But I have good news: you know how to deal with it already because the Blank Page of Doom isn't limited to writing. The Blank Page of Doom is a creative block, and it crops up all over the place. I'm sure you're familiar with it outside of writing your book. Maybe you've been unable to decide what colour to paint your kitchen. Or you've given up deciding what to cook for tea and ordered pizza instead.

Take trapeze, for example—which is pretty much my favourite thing to do, after writing. I might be working on a new trick combination and feel like I'm getting nowhere. I'm stalled.

Instead of sitting on the floor and stewing over it, I go back to basics. I do some exercises I know I can do, which are the foundations of the advanced moves I want to master. The key is action.

Take action—*any* action related to your goal—and progress will happen.

What I mean is: just flippin' WRITE.

But that's not terribly useful advice on its own, is it? Here's something practical to help you just flippin' write: four cool writing games to help you get out of your own way. They'll help you beat your perfectionism and your Inner Dickhead's perverted desire to produce a perfect first paragraph right away—so you get started fast.

Plus, they're fun.

## Chapter 5

Think of these writing games as your warm-up. I wouldn't get on a trapeze without warming up. You wouldn't start a workout in the gym without warming up. Don't start writing without warming up. You can do one of these exercises at the start of every writing session if you like.

### 1. The Modernist Poetry Game

Let's start with a little creative writing game that'll have you penning some bonkers modernist poetry. Stick with me; it'll be fun, I promise.

Open a blank page—either on paper or on your computer. Write the first word that comes into your head. It could be anything. Easy, right?

Now write another word. This is harder because it must be a random word, disconnected from the previous one. Your perfectionist Inner Dickhead won't like it, but your Inner Dickhead is a douchecanoe so ignore him and write the random word anyway.

Then write a third word. Then a fourth. And carry on.

Play with your words! Listen to the sounds they make, rather than their meaning. Think *Jabberwocky* by Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear's nonsense rhymes. Make up new words. Come up with the most random nouns you can think of. Turn nouns into verbs and vice versa. Break all the rules of grammar you ever heard. Don't use punctuation—unless you make it fun.

Don't be embarrassed, it's meant to sound absurd. And you don't have to show it to anyone (although I'd love to see it if you want to share).

## Vicky Quinn Fraser

How's this for a silly poem:

Socks on trivet  
Glowstick hides in Earl Grey tea  
Halo the spatula and bromate the  
    Sally  
Petrichor on the palanquin

See?

Daft. But fun. You'll come up with words you never knew you knew.

This is a good game for flexing your creative muscles and letting go of your need to get things right. It's a good activity for loosening you up. Have a play, because playing is what this exercise is all about.

The next one is good for practising writing without editing. Are you ready?

## 2. The Writers Write Game

I learned this exercise from one of my mentors, Jon McCulloch—and he tells me he got it from a chap called Steve Manning. It's a splendid activity. Have a go.

1. Get a timer and set it for five minutes.
2. Get a piece of paper and a pen. Write down these three words: rain, mushroom, slippers.
3. Pick one of those three words as the first word you write. It must be the first word of the first sentence you write.

## Chapter 5

4. Start your timer and begin writing. Write as fast as you can and don't stop to edit. Write anything that comes into your head.
5. The other two words must appear at least once in your first paragraph.
6. Write for the whole five minutes. Don't stop to think. Don't stop to edit. Don't stop, full stop!

When the timer stops, look at what you've written. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised at how high quality it is.

If you're stuck on a chapter of your book or an article and can't get started, try this game with keywords from your chapter. You will almost certainly need to throw away the first paragraph or two, but you betcha boots you'll end up with something useful. Fix the typos later; they don't matter.

### 3. The Mundane Story Game

A great way to start writing is to find a story and link it to your topic. This is why I collect stories.

Let's take an article I once wrote about one of the things that's wrong with most business homepages. I could have droned on about how they're confusing and boring, but that's dull.

Here's what came out:

Dammit where is that egg timer? I know I've seen it somewhere.

In the kitchen. I last saw it in the kitchen.

## Vicky Quinn Fraser

Oh, no...

I think it might have been in...

\*cue B-movie dramatic horror music, thunder, and dimming of the lights\*

*The Kitchen Drawer of Doom*

That place where everything from pliers to birthday candles to napkins to old batteries to random spoons lurk forgotten and abandoned.

I don protective clothing and take a swig of gin. I'm going in. Wish me luck.

Five minutes later, and I'm buying the thing I need from Amazon instead.

Funnily enough, this is also how I feel when I land on most websites. I have no idea what to do or where to go next, or even if I'm in the right place—so I leave.

Instead of agonising over the best boring way to start that article, the Kitchen Drawer of Doom popped into my head and reminded me what a lot of homepages are like: cluttered and confusing. So I told that slightly exaggerated but hopefully amusing tale about losing stuff in the kitchen. Then I flipped it into the topic I wanted to talk about.

By telling a story we can all relate to (because we all have a kitchen drawer like that) I was able to get and keep my reader's attention, and maybe make them smile and nod in recognition. Then I connected it to cluttered homepages—a connection my readers might not make by themselves.

## 4. The Memory Game

One of my Team Moxie Writers—Carin—is an absolute writing machine in our Power Hours. She regularly bangs out 2,000+ words of Shitty First Draft in our hour-long sessions. I'm somewhat in awe of her, actually. We got talking about it in one of our post-writing group discussions and she told us about her process.

Carin writes her memories. Sometimes memories from her childhood, sometimes her memories of trips taken. For example, as I write this in a 7 am Power Hour, Carin is writing about her weekend hiking on the Gower Peninsula.

Writing your memories is a wonderful thing to do not only because you'll have a record of the places you go and the people you meet and the adventures you have, but also because it gets you started. It beats the Blank Page of Doom.

Pick a memory. Write about it. See where it takes you.

### Bonus Action

If none of that stuff works, do this instead: draw a smiley face on your blank page (or paste an emoji on it if you're working electronically)

Just a smiley face.

Make a mark on the paper and imagine that paper is smiling at you encouragingly. Now it's not blank anymore.

## Close Your Eyes and Type

Look: the Blank Page of Doom won't ever disappear for good. But it doesn't have to be insurmountable. All you have to do is start.

In this chapter, I've given you four ways to get words on paper, which is the most important thing of all.

If these games don't work for you, close your eyes and mash the keyboard until your fingers feel compelled to start producing actual words. Then see what tumbles out of your brain and onto your page.

When you do start writing, keep going—without editing as you write.

You can beat the Blank Page Of Doom, I promise. The more you do it, the easier it gets.

Remember the difference between amateurs and professionals: amateurs let their fears and excuses paralyse them. Professionals suck it up and get to work.

You're a pro and you have the skills. Use them.

Now let's look at a few of the tools in the writer's toolbox to help you along.

## Chapter 6

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### *My Top 12 Tools to Help You Beat “Writer’s Block”*

Sometimes you need a pointy stick to get the job done

**A**s I am writing this, I’m struggling with champion-level procrastination and distraction.

Sometimes it’s not creativity that’s the problem, so writing exercises and brain-prodding activities don’t always work.

Sometimes it’s a purely mechanical issue. Something physical stopping you from writing, or getting in your way.

Which means sometimes, willpower, creativity, and good intentions aren’t enough to get you started. Instead, you need a pointy stick.

So here are my Top 12 Pointy Sticks to help you get unstuck and start writing.

#### **1. A Timer**

One of my favourite ways to get started is to set myself a tiny task: set a timer and write for five minutes. Just five minutes. Everyone can do that—and by the time the five minutes is up, you’ll



probably find your urge to not write has dissipated.

When you've overcome your not-writing urge, set your timer for 25 minutes (or 30, or 45) and write. Make a note of what you'll reward yourself with when you're finished: a cup of tea? A biscuit? A piece of fruit? A wander around the garden to get head-butted by your TinySheeps?

You can go all fancy and get a tomato-shaped cooking timer to stay on-brand with the Pomodoro Technique... or you can simply type "timer" into Google and tell it how long to wait before it bingles at you.

The problem with the Google timer is it puts you online, and if you're struggling with distraction, that's not ideal.

I use Alexa, because she's not a distraction.

You could put your phone in another room and use the timer on that—then when the timer goes off, you have to get up and stretch your legs. (Giving this technique a double bonus.)

When we can see an end in sight with a reward waiting, getting started and writing to our goal becomes so much easier.

## 2. Scrivener

Scrivener is a piece of software created especially for authors... I'm writing this book using Scrivener. But Scrivener is useful for so much more than writing a book.

I create email sequences in Scrivener.

I write blog posts in Scrivener.

I use Scrivener to plan my podcasts.

## Chapter 6

It's fantastic for organising our thoughts. But that's not why I'm including it in this chapter.

Scrivener is also brilliant because it has a “no distractions” mode. You can have your screen display nothing except your piece of paper—and a little notes window so you can look at your outline while you write.

If you struggle with distracting shiny objects that catch your eye as you write on-screen, Scrivener can help.

It's ridiculously inexpensive on a Mac, and not too pricey on a PC.

The downside of Scrivener: it's extremely over-engineered and it can be overwhelming. There's a big learning curve if you want to use it for anything other than distraction-free writing. So here's a much simpler alternative: Ulysses. There's absolutely minimal formatting and it's brilliant for organising your writing. It's a very pared-down version of Scrivener.

But if you're after a no-budget solution with an extra perk, try this...

### 3. A Piece of Paper

Perhaps you struggle because, like me, you can't resist editing as you write. No matter how much you promise yourself you'll ignore typos and clumsy sentences until you've finished the Shitty First Draft, you still find yourself going back and changing things.

Annoying, isn't it?

And it's one of the most common reasons for getting stuck—or not getting started at all.

So here's my top tip for both preventing on-screen distractions *and* making it less likely you'll edit as you write: stick a blank piece of paper over your computer screen so you can't see what you're typing.

Or drape a piece of fabric over it if your paper is see-through.

Low-tech it may be, but it's effective.

Try it.

You'll get used to not being able to see your typos, I promise...

#### 4. Ommwriter

Usually, I only include tools I've used myself—but I'm making an exception for Ommwriter.

It's another piece of software, online this time, aimed at helping writers avoid distraction. The reason I've included it here is because you can decide how much to pay for it.

So if you're on a tight budget and you want something a little higher-tech than a piece of fabric draped over your screen, try this.

It doesn't hide your words, but it does hide all your distractions. You use it in full-screen mode with a calming background, and the program uses sounds, music, and atmospheric devices to help you focus.

If you want to hide your words, I believe you can change the colour of your typeface so they become invisible—thus eliminating the pressing need to edit as you write.

## 5. Go For a Walk

I know this sounds like a creativity boost rather than a tool, but I think it's both.

Sometimes we do just need to have a word with ourselves and get on with it—but occasionally we are stucker than a sticker book, spinning in a frenzy of unproductiveness and we just need to get some fresh air and get the blood moving.

Go for a walk and see what happens.

For me, nine times out of ten, I get unstuck.

It's free, low-tech, and it's good for you.

## 6. Write at an Odd Time

Normally sit down to write at 9 am? If you're struggling, switch your routine up. Spend the morning reading or exercising or doing client work—then start writing at 3 pm instead.

Or try last thing at night: sometimes I get the best ideas at 10 pm. Try a late-night writing session and get up later the next day. Or have a nap in the afternoon to catch up on sleep.

Or—\*shudder\*—try getting up at 4 am to write.

I'm not suggesting you become nocturnal or one of Those People who can bounce out of bed at 4 am every day<sup>1</sup>; I'm simply suggesting you try writing at a different time, and see if it helps.

## 7. Go Somewhere Else

Where do you normally write? Have you tried writing somewhere else?

In 2019, I built a brand new office in my garden and I love spending time in it—it's my happy place and I write well in here. But I also change my writing environment every now and then.

Once every few weeks, I spend a day in a café or a library or at Joe's offices. In a café, I get to people-watch, which sparks new ideas.

I regularly take a long train journey just for the purposes of writing something specific—which has the added bonus that I get to explore somewhere new, like Edinburgh<sup>2</sup>.

Writing in public encourages me to work rather than faff, because even though those other people don't know what I'm doing, I feel like a bit of a muppet if I'm messing around on social media instead of writing. It's gentle social pressure to do the right thing.

And in a library, I feel a similar social pressure, as well as a different type of quiet. I get the quiet without the solitude, which is sometimes delightful.

In good weather, I go to Hampton Court Castle Gardens (no, not that one), which is just down the road from where I live. I get to smell flowers, hear bees and birds, and the murmur of people laughing and talking.

Change your environment if you're stuck—you'll be amazed at how effective it is.

## 8. Try Freewriting

If you're struggling to write what you think you ought to be writing, write something else instead.

Write about anything—or nothing at all. Pour a stream of consciousness out of your brain and into your laptop. Do some journalling: have a rant, write about your upcoming holiday plans, detail what you did yesterday and how it made you feel, get down on paper what's worrying you or what you feel grateful for.

Just write. You'll be surprised at what may come out of it.

## 9. Write About Not Being Able to Write

“Writing about a writer's block is better than not writing at all.” ~ Charles Bukowski

True, dat.

I sometimes find my best writing explodes out of a frustrated rant about not being able to write. You'll probably have to delete the first few paragraphs if you want to use it, but I reckon you'll be surprised at what you manage to splat down on the page.

## 10. Use Prompts

You'll find a veritable smorgasbord of apps and software on the internet containing writing prompts. Some are paid-for; some are free.

Have a google around and find them.

Or, you can make your own prompts.

I use Evernote to collect stories, and I tag each story with keywords that relate to the story. So if I wanted to write about writer's block, for example, I'd search in Evernote using keywords like "writer's block", "procrastination", "writing", "distractions".

The stories I find often prompt me to get started or spark an idea I can't ignore.

I also use my Bullet Journal to record my thoughts and ideas and categorise them. If I'm stuck for a topic, I'll have a root through my notes and see what catches my eye.

## II. Build a Habit

Perhaps the most powerful tool of all, though, is the writing habit you create. Writers write, it's as simple as that.

Writers don't give up when they feel stuck; they roll their sleeves up and get on with it, even when it's hard.

Start small: with six-word memoirs, 100-word rants, and daily gratitude notes.

You don't have to write thousands of words a day—or not at first, anyway.

Set small goals and hit them every day. Try ten words a day. Then twenty. Then fifty. Build on that.

The important thing is to make writing a habit, so it feels worse to not write than it does to write.

## 12. The Team Moxie Writers Power Hour

The one thing I've found that works consistently when it comes to writing regularly is accountability. Find a group of people who get together at the same time every day to write, and join them. We are lifted up and pushed along by the people we associate with—so if you can find a group of people who are dedicated to writing every day, join them.

That social pressure to keep up will have you writing, and you'll make new friends as an added bonus.

I created Team Moxie for this precise purpose and it is an incredible resource, for me as well as for my writers. I get as much out of it as everyone else does because when we're done writing, we have a short discussion or lesson.

You come along, share your goals with the group, write for an hour, share your results, and then we have a chat. I'll answer questions, or deliver a short writing or self-publishing lesson, and we'll all join in. It's incredibly valuable to get other people's viewpoints and bounce ideas off people who want you to succeed.

Join us here: [www.moxiebooks.co.uk/powerhour](http://www.moxiebooks.co.uk/powerhour) .

### Your Ideas

What are your go-to tools or techniques for beating creative blocks and procrastination? Drop me an email at [vicky@vickyfraser.com](mailto:vicky@vickyfraser.com) and



## Vicky Quinn Fraser

share them—I'm always looking for new ways to get moving.

Finally—whatever you decide to use to get you unstuck, please try something. Work your way through this list and write. You have a story worth telling and a message that matters; don't let it stay stuck inside your head. Take control of your brain and write.

## Chapter 7

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### *What's Next?*

You've read this little book—what's next in your writing journey?

The Blank Page of Doom can feel insurmountable. The mythical “writers block” can feel very real. But you don't have to let it beat you. In this book, you have plenty of information to persuade your brain that you can, in fact, sit down and start writing. And you have the tools to help you put words on paper even on those days when writing is as frustrating and painful as squeezing the last bit of toothpaste from the tube.

Give them a try and let me know how it goes.

When you're ready for the next step—get a copy of the non-fiction book bible: *How The Hell Do You Write A Book* for everything you need to write your own non-fiction book. You can buy the book from Amazon or from my website here:

**[www.moxiebooks.co.uk/buythebook](http://www.moxiebooks.co.uk/buythebook)**

## Build a Happy Writing Habit

Then build a strong writing habit and commit to writing every day in the Team Moxie Writers Power Hour. These are daily live writing sessions... but they're so much more than that.

I wanted a way to guarantee that people could get a chunk of writing done every day, no matter what else they have going on in their world. So I started this supercool writing club. We meet every day.

We share our goals for the next hour—some people work on their books, others plan webinars, some write emails, some write and record videos and podcasts, and some work on sales pages and websites. We all get more done before 8 am than most people get done in an entire morning. Then we get to smugly go about the rest of our day.

And if you can't make it live? No problem. I email you the recording later on so you can work through it in your own time. My writers often do that when they can't make the live sessions, and find them just as useful.

I wrote this mini-book during two weeks of Power Hours—that's 10 hours—and then added a few hours editing and polishing it. What could you create?

You might be thinking, 'Well Vicky, I could just set a timer and do it myself.' In fact, I know of people who made that exact objection. But let's be honest: you won't. The people who said that to me certainly aren't doing it because they're not achieving their writing goals.

## Chapter 7

Don't underestimate the power of a group of dedicated, supportive, smart, funny people getting together and keeping each other accountable. And don't take my word for it—here's what my Power Hour writers have said:



**Tam Wilson** 🌱 Guys of you're in the fence about joining, let me tell you this. I joined in July/ August hoping to write a teeny ebook. However during the power hours my writing took off & I ended up writing this book instead. It's just a little one, prob only 70 pages in paperback, but it's a book and I will publish before the end of the month!! The Power Hours have completely changed how I work, how I feel about my work, how I feel about myself, how I even SPEAK to myself and how I view myself. It's not just a power hour, it's amazing conversations with fascinating people too.

Like · Reply · 1m



Re: #1 Power Hour Recording! FRIDAY July 3, 2022

To: Vicky Fraser

Hi Vicky,

Thanks for another great session - it is amazing how sitting in silence with a load of other people is so effective and productive.



**louisearnold**

01:28:09

this group is going to take over the world :)



**Tam Wilson** · 1st

Collie enthusiast 🐕 Drinker of tea 🍵 Canine Adventurer & fluent in s...

52m ...

The Power Hours have been amazing for me. As a single mother who runs a business, time & energy are limited. But forcing myself to sit down for an hour to write instead of doing the dishes, putting the washing in etc etc (that stuff can always wait!!) has meant I've wrote 1000s of words in the last few weeks. Plus the discussions are amazing!



**Yinka Ewuola**

01:11:50

More in 40 mins than in 2 days...  
1500 words (hooray!!)



**Yinka Ewuola** · 1st

Enabling Busy, Ambitious Women to build a thriving profitabl...

51m ...

Power hours actually rule!! - I cannot say enough nice things about it!!

## Vicky Quinn Fraser

It's more than "just" live writing sessions, too. After the hour is up, we share what we accomplished and how we feel about it, then we have a 10-15 minute Q&A or discussion about writing or books or publishing or business. They're incredibly valuable and insightful, and you get access to all these chats in the Members Area, where they're categorised for you to find what you need easily.

There are monthly Q&A calls where you can ask us all anything, and get the answers you need.

Come and join us—write more than you ever have before, consistently. And not only that, but you'll learn techniques to make you a better writer... and a whole host of great business and marketing skills, too.

(And, of course, you'll make new friends and contacts.) Join us here:

**[www.moxiebooks.co.uk/powerhour](http://www.moxiebooks.co.uk/powerhour)**

## About the Author

### Really Did Run Away With the Circus

How does one accidentally end up with three TinySheeps? Answer: be in the wrong place at the right time, and come home with a surprise wonky lamb. Not a joke. This is my ridiculous and delightful life.

This isn't one of those About the Author pages where I tell you my rags-to-riches story. I don't have one. I'm pretty average really. Also, I don't think you want my CV, do you? How dull is that?

Instead, I thought I'd open the window into my brain. Just a crack, mind. If I open it too wide, all the weird will pour out and swallow the world, kind of like VANTA black (look it up, it's fascinating).

So here's a little bit about me. I'm not only a writer and teacher; I'm also a collector of small, cute animals, horrifying bruises, inappropriate facial expressions, and colourful socks.

And I did, in fact, run away with the circus. Kind of.

After my ever-patient and totally awesome husband Joe and our animal friends, and my love affair with writing, the other big love of my life is the circus and aerial arts. Specifically, trapeze, handstands, and pole dancing. Just don't ask me

to juggle; it rapidly turns into chaos and lethal projectiles.

## 24 Things About Me

1. I started out as a direct response copywriter and marketing bod, so when I tell you I can help you sell and market your book, I'm not bullshitting you. (I've spent years not just learning from the masters, but writing sales copy that has made millions for my clients.)
2. I love, *love*, LOVE helping business owners gain the confidence to tell their stories in their books.
3. I've been pole dancing for more than 12 years—and, yes, I do the exotic stripper-style proudly (and often ineptly), mo-fos.
4. I love my cats more than is socially acceptable.
5. Ditto, my TinySheeps and my Beaky-Face chickens and Maisie Snake Fantastico.
6. I don't drink alcohol and I'm vegetarian. If it weren't for cheese, I'd be vegan.
7. My addiction to buying books is not at all under control and I'm fine with that.
8. I have a short hairtenntion span (it's currently blue and silver).
9. I legit ran away with the circus (I'm a

- trapeze artist, and I do actual performances on a trapeze onstage. I have the scars and bruises to prove it).
10. I send an email to my email list subscribers several times a week—and they make me money (if you want to sell and use your book, you should do this too. Ask me how).
  11. When I decided struggling and working 18-hour days and having no weekends sucked big hairy donkey balls, it took me just six months to make my first £100k. I'm pretty damn proud of that because it means we're now living in our dream cottage in the country. The only downside is, we can often see the outside through the walls. And I don't mean through the windows.
  12. Random ability: I can read and write ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs (although I'm a little rusty these days).
  13. I once made Drayton Bird scream and rendered Dan Kennedy speechless for a few moments (true stories).
  14. I have sensory processing disorder, which means I react oddly and extremely to certain sensory inputs.
  15. I'm learning to draw cartoons, and I'm occasionally competent at it (I started cartooning so I could illustrate my own blogs, articles, books, and other marketing gubbins).



16. Once, when I was a teenager, I was in a band. We played at a pub, and they gave us free drinks. We drank so many free drinks, they cancelled our next gig and banned us.
17. My aim in life is to accept only excellence from myself. Occasionally I fall short because I'm human. But still I try.
18. I am an anti-racist, feminist, tree-hugging, science-loving supporter of the LGBTQ+ community, and I'm learning every day how to be a better human and how to make the world better for other people. Sometimes I screw up. But still I try. Want to know more? Start with *How to Be an Anti-Racist* by Ibram X. Kendi and *Invisible Women* by Caroline Criado Perez.
19. I love words. *Love* them. Love the feel of them as they roll around in my mouth and the sound of them as they caress my eardrums. I love how they go together, of course, and the things you can do with them... but I love the words themselves.
20. I am learning patience through growing my own vegetables (did you know you can't harvest asparagus for the first two years?)
21. I have discovered that "nice" isn't valuable or helpful... but kindness and grace will get you a very long way.

22. I rewatch *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* every few years because it is magnificent. Ditto *Amelie*. Ditto *The Day After Tomorrow* (shut up).
23. Joe and I spend more time than is probably sensible or sane working on my Zombie Plan (look, you never know what's around the corner, okay? Especially after 2020...)
24. One of life's tiny pleasures, for me, is putting on socks in the wind. It's like a hug for your feet.

So now you know more about me than you probably ever wished to. Sorry. I'd like to know all about you now.

Tell me *your* story. Write it in your book.

Share it with the world. People are interested, I promise.



[linkedin.com/in/moxieauthor](https://www.linkedin.com/in/moxieauthor)



[facebook.com/themoxiebooks](https://www.facebook.com/themoxiebooks)



[instagram.com/tinybeetlesteps](https://www.instagram.com/tinybeetlesteps)



[twitter.com/tinybeetlesteps](https://twitter.com/tinybeetlesteps)



# Acknowledgements

Thank you thank you thank you

I've been meaning to write a series of mini-Kindle-books—Mindles—for years now. It didn't happen until I started the Moxie Writers Power Hour. For that, I need to thank John Holcroft from the bottom of my slippers. The Power Hour, and maybe this book, would not have happened with him because he told me about the idea and then told me he wanted me to do it. So I did. Thank you.

And thank you to all my Team Moxie Writers, past, present, and future. Including but not limited to: Carol Clark, Julian Northbrook, Louise Blackburn, John Holcroft, Sarah Silva, Tam Wilson, Claire Lawrence, Stephanie Benfield, Abby Popplestone, Julia Roebuck, Carin Jackson, Jill Robinson, Sarah McGuire, Deb Fanner, Sarah Bartlett, Carrie Stuthridge, and Yinka Ewuola.

Special thanks to Yinka, another Power Hour regular and one of my best friends, who talks me down off so many ledges and encourages me to do things like this, which I would otherwise put off until “later”.

Thanks also to Dom Hodgson, another one of my besties, who wrote his first ever book with me—then went on to surpass my wildest dreams for him and write TEN bestsellers! Which is

incredible. Of course, being super-competitive, I cannot let this stand. So this is the third book I've written for myself... and there are many more to come thanks in part to Dom's endless encouragement and good example.

And, of course, thanks always to my wonderfully patient and supportive husband, Joe. You're awesome.

**Also by Vicky Quinn Fraser**

Business for Superheroes

How the Hell Do You Write a Book



# Super Books

## Recommended Reading

*A Technique For Producing Ideas* by James Webb Young

*A Whack on the Side of the Head* by Roger von Oech

*Atomic Habits* by James Clear

*Bird By Bird* by Anne Lamott

*Cassell's Dictionary of Slang*

*Daring Greatly* by Brené Brown

*Deep Work* by Cal Newport

*How To Eat The Elephant* by Ann Shey bani

*Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide* by Mark Kramer and Wendy Call

*The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron

*The Elements of Style* by Strunk & White

*The Power Of Habit* by Charles Duhigg

*The War Of Art* by Steven Pressfield

*Walk Yourself Wealthy* by Dominic Hodgson

*Wired For Story* by Lisa Cron





# Super Podcasts

Recommended listening for writers

99% Invisible  
Akimbo by Seth Godin  
Freakonomics Radio  
Getting Curious With Jonathan Van Ness  
Hidden Brain  
Philosophize This!  
Published by Greenleaf Book Group  
The Copywriter Club Podcast  
The Moth  
The Self Publishing Show  
The Story Grid Podcast  
Writing Excuses  
You Are Not So Smart



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# Notes

## The Dirty Truth About “Writer’s Block”

1. *Blocked, The New Yorker*: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/06/14/blocked>

## 1. Your Inner Superhero vs Your Inner Dickhead

1. R.F. Baumeister, E. Bratslavsky, C. Finkenauer, and K.D. Vohs (2001). *Review of General Psychology*
2. King, S. 2012, *On Writing*, Hodder Paperbacks
3. Fraser, V. 2019, *How The Hell Do You Write A Book*: [www.moxiebooks.co.uk/buythebook](http://www.moxiebooks.co.uk/buythebook)
4. Brown, B. 2015, *Daring Greatly*, Penguin Life

## 2. The Joys of the Shitty First Draft

1. I got this idea from the brilliant Ann Sheybani, who, in her book *How To Eat The Elephant*, gave me permission to do a number of similar things when writing this book, and sparked these ideas for me to share with you.
2. Levitin, D. *This Is Your Brain On Music*, 2019. Penguin.
3. I only just discovered Mavis Beacon is not a real person. One of our hens was called Mavis Peacock, as a shout-out to Mavis Beacon.
4. Nuance Dragon used to be called Dragon Dictation.

### 3. Your Pencils Could Always Be Sharper

1. Hill, A. and Curran, T. 2015. “Multidimensional Perfectionism and Burnout: A Meta-Analysis, *Personality and Social Psychology Review*. July 31, 2015.
2. James Clear writes wonderfully about habits. He’s also written a book (surprise surprise!) called *Atomic Habits*. Writing is a habit.
3. Paraphrased from StarTalk Radio with Neil DeGrasse Tyson: A Conversation with Nichelle Nichols. July 11, 2011 ([www.startalkradio.net/show/a-conversation-with-nichelle-nichols/](http://www.startalkradio.net/show/a-conversation-with-nichelle-nichols/)) Go and listen to this interview because it’s fascinating.

### 4. Scaling the Great Wall of Pain

1. Oubliettes are a fairly horrifying form of medieval punishment. You find them in castles sometimes. They’re deep holes reached only by a trapdoor, and prisoners were thrown into them to be forgotten (“oubliette” comes from the French meaning “little place of forgetting”).
2. A study from the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas, Austin, found cognitive capacity is significantly reduced when your smartphone is within reach—even if it’s switched off. <https://news.utexas.edu/2017/06/26/the-mere-presence-of-your-smartphone-reduces-brain-power/>
3. At least, that’s what Suzi Gray, another splendid writer I know, calls them. I like it.
4. Which you can join here: [www.moxiebooks.co.uk/powerhour](http://www.moxiebooks.co.uk/powerhour)

### 6. My Top 12 Tools to Help You Beat “Writer’s Block”

1. If you are one of those people, I take my hat off to you. I’m waving it in your general direction right now.
2. Obviously I wrote this before 2020 struck. The idea of writing “in public” during the pandemic was kind of horrifying, but hopefully by now we’re all allowed out again so if that’s the case—fill yer boots.