

parent is scolding him for not doing it and my inner adult is reflecting on what might be a more useful course of action.' I can then rise above the block and engage my adult 'who'.

Learning styles and moving beyond words

A popular concept is that people either have a visual, auditory or kinaesthetic learning style. I personally believe we all use our own unique mix of these styles. I use this principle to work out how specifically I am experiencing writer's block. I notice that I am not producing only inner self-talk, but also inner pictures, sounds and feelings (both emotional and physical). When I spot that I am running a negative narrative, I pause and become aware of any pictures and the location of those pictures in my mind's eye. Also, the location of any sounds – perhaps I am replaying someone else's voice such as one of my parents. What are the words I am using in my self-talk? Where specifically do I feel this in my body? (Usually just under my ribs and in my shoulders and sides of my neck). Can I then name the specific emotions I am feeling? Usually a mix of anger, sadness, powerlessness, fear or shame.

By being far more specific and labelling these experiences with my senses in this way, I become consciously aware of my unconscious negative thought patterns and then have a choice to refocus my efforts to the matter in hand.

Constructing positive states

Switching the above technique from the negative to the positive: how can I start to deliberately recreate positive states as an antidote to all this negativity? I recall doing a technique in one of my trainings when I was invited to either imagine or remember a safe and pleasant place. For some reason rather than picking something from a memory, I created an image of myself sitting on the bank of a stream, with my legs dangling down toward the water and sitting on a warm and comfortable surface. I also have a sense of a calm version of myself somehow watching over me. Although this might sound a bit odd, I can now quickly re-access this fantasy and regain a sense of wellbeing and creativity.

Having practiced it numerous times, it is something I can also do easily, sometimes focusing on different images such as a grassy meadow or the shape, shades and texture of the clouds. This 'blows away' my feelings of writer's block.

Archetypes

Another key principle from literature that has been smuggled into psychology is that of archetypes, influenced by Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell's classic story structure of the hero's journey.

Although there are numerous examples from the classics, I have found that condensing these into three main types a more practical way to solve my writer's block. They are: 'Strength' (Warrior); 'Softness' (Lover) and 'Intelligence' (Sorcerer). Archetypes also have shadows, the naturally occurring and problematic manifestation of an archetype. I also find these energies essential to explore in my writing. Let me explain how I use these myself.

I have a good 'Strength' archetype but can move into a shadow of cowardice in certain contexts. For writing, I have noticed that I can shy away from being fully honest, concerned how my words could potentially upset those close to me. Indeed, the other shadow of the 'Strength' archetype is that of cruelty – an essential energy to express in writing fiction and one I likewise need to avoid censoring.

To add to this, my work as a coach and therapist also requires a good

'Softness' archetype – showing genuine interest and compassion for others. As a writer, that compassion can dull the more dramatic requirements of telling a good story. I have had to wrestle with this as fiction needs strong shadows to be compelling. I have had to 'let go' of my bias towards positive transformation and access the far darker side of human nature. At the same time, I am still allowed some happy endings!

Building an imagined world and creating a compelling narrative, certainly benefits from the 'Intelligence' archetype. However, the shadows of intelligence can also be expressed as two extremes. On one hand, becoming manipulative, arrogant and guru-like, while on the other – feeling like a 'dummy'. The writer's block tip here is to reframe these feelings as entirely natural. If I can accept that I will feel like a 'dummy' at times, and rather than feeling shame, I consider it the naturally occurring shadow of my 'gift' of 'Intelligence'. Likewise, being able to enter a world of scheming and seeking revenge is most useful to share on the page, especially for the cunning villain.

I hope that this article has provided some useful strategies to overcome writer's block. I also hoped to convey that many of the ideas above can also be used to enhance our imagination and help us question the artificial limits we apply to ourselves. I would like to end by sharing a saying I often use during my trainings, 'There is nothing as absurd as applying the rules of reality to your imagination.' 



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