



How to •

*Write*

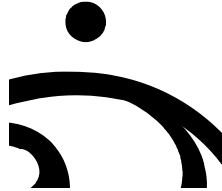
a **Book that**

**Sells**

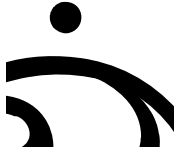


**DeBora M. Ricks**

# Contents



The Writing Journey .....	3
<i>Commitment</i>	
<i>Discipline</i>	
<i>Self Esteem</i>	
<i>Perseverance</i>	
Finding Your Voice .....	9
<i>Truth Telling</i>	
<i>Authenticity</i>	
Thrill Your Readers .....	10
The Art of Good Writing .....	11
<i>Elements of Good Writing</i>	
Suspend the Need to Know.....	12
Sitting Down to Write .....	13
<i>Do an Outline</i>	
<i>Write a First Draft without Editing</i>	
<i>Return to the Writing</i>	
When the Writing Stalls .....	14
<i>7 Steps to “Unstalling”</i>	
Overcoming Writer’s Block .....	16
<i>Fear</i>	
<i>Self-Doubt</i>	
<i>Perfectionism</i>	
<i>Boredom</i>	
The Editing Process: Edit or Regret It! .....	18
<i>Six Reasons to Hire a Professional Editor</i>	
 <i>About the Author</i>	
<i>Additional Reading</i>	



# The Writing Journey

*“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”*  
- Maya Angelou

*“Words are the most powerful drug used by mankind.”* - Rudyard Kipling

---

---

*Almost everybody I know wants to write* a book. Or say they do. In my travels, when I meet new people or run into old friends and tell them that I’m an author many will enthusiastically proclaim, “I’ve always wanted to write a book!” Or, “I started writing a book!” Or, “I have a *great* book idea!” I look at them and smile. I smile because I know it’s no easy task to write a book—especially a good book—that will sell for years to come. It’s not easy but many people do it. Zora Neale Hurston wrote her masterpiece, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, in seven weeks! I know people that have penned their book in less than 30 days. Then there are those who took ten years to get their book to print. *War and Peace* was one such book. It took me seven years to write my first book, *Love Addicted*.

No worries though. It’s not about how fast you can write a book, it’s about how well you write it. I’ve seen authors rush to get their book on the market only to regret that they hadn’t taken more time and care with their baby. They skipped critical steps, like editing, only to end frustrated and ashamed of their offspring. That need not be your story. I’m here to provide you with some assistance so that what you ultimately offer the world will make your chest swell with pride at the very mention of your book.

The writing journey can be a long and lonely one. To stay the course it takes Commitment, Discipline, Self Esteem, and Perseverance until you birth your book. If you’re lukewarm about writing a book, chances are you don’t have the requisite mindset to produce a finished product. Ask yourself a few questions:

- Why do I want to write a book?
- What really interest me? What am I curious about?

- Am I passionate about my subject? Or am I attempting to write about something that I have little interest in because I desire to be published or think it will make me money?
- Have I chosen a subject that can hold my interest to completion?
- Am I committed to finishing this book, no matter what?
- If the writing stalls, is my commitment strong enough to send me back to the page and resume writing?

I hope you answered these questions honestly. If you didn't, why not? Go back and answer them truthfully. Your answers will assist you in writing a book that sells, rather than a manuscript that's gray and yellow from mold either because you chose to write on a subject that doesn't resonate in your soul or you didn't have the needed resolve to get it to print. If you answered them honestly and you're still determined to write a book, congratulations you're ready to forge ahead. Let's do it!

## Commitment

*First we commit to a thing, a person*, a project, then comes our *demonstration* of that commitment. If our *actions* don't reflect our *words* or commitment, there is no commitment. If you want to write a book, decide that you are going to write a book. Once you decide that you're going to be an author you have taken the first and most important step towards making your dream come true. If you're only hoping and wishing to write a book, I see no book in your future. If you have a great book idea...that you hope *someone else* will develop, then you aren't committed to being an author. True commitment leads to action. Action tells the world what we're committed to. Let's say your man tells you he's committed to you and asks for your hand in marriage. (I know, that was old fashion, but sweet, right?) Year one, you love, travel, grow together. Life's good! Year three he's yet to put a ring on it. In fact, you hear through a very reliable grapevine he's frolicking with other women. His words say one thing, his actions tell another story. Which do you believe, his words or his actions? If you're smart, you believe his actions. His actions say, "I'm not ready for marriage." If you intend to one day be a published author then you must take steps in that direction. Consistent action demonstrates deep commitment. I'd been thinking about writing a book for years before I sat down and wrote the first words. That was 1998. Interestingly, at some point the disk on which I'd saved my manuscript failed to open. But I was committed by then, so instead of quitting I began again. I simply took the disk malfunction as a sign from the Universe to start fresh and proceed in a different direction. When we're committed we're prepared for the inevitable obstacles in the road. Our commitment helps us either go around them, hurdle them, or use them as stepping stones.

Consider putting yourself on a writing schedule. You might commit to writing two hours every morning before work. If you're not a morning person and the passion for your project won't wake you mornings, choose a better time. Set yourself up to win. If evenings and weekends work best for you, ink your writing times in just as you would a movie date. What's important is that you write. If having a schedule "forces" you to stop,

sit and write, then put yourself on one. A friend of mine, who is writing a book, put himself on a schedule; he writes one hour every night. When I'm passionate about a project, I can't keep myself away from it. For that reason, I don't use a schedule. I approach writing a book like I did matriculating through college; I do what's before me. I see every dotted "i" and crossed "t" as progress. I write often. I expect and even allow for the pause in my writing journey, especially when working on a book. You know what you need; if a schedule is what you need to get it done, put it in writing! Whatever you do, don't expect the time to write to present itself, you've got to make it a priority and carve time out of an already busy life to make it happen. If you wait for the "perfect" or convenient time to write, well, you'll never see your name on the cover of a book. No such time exist for the typical person. You have to create it.

## Discipline

*"No music plus bad TV equals bad mood and no pages." - Hunter S. Thompson*

---

*It takes discipline to accomplish anything of note.* What is discipline? Merriam-Webster says discipline *"is control gained by enforcing obedience or order. Orderly or prescribed conduct or pattern of behavior."* If you desire to one day hold a book in your hand or see your e-book available on Kindle, you've got to regularly sit thee butt down in the chair and write! Trust me when I tell you this, the book won't write itself. Whether you feel like writing or not, you must write. Some people believe they can only produce good prose or poetry when inspiration strikes. Other writers, those who produce book after book, commit to writing daily. They don't give their feelings that much power. Dr. Maya Angelou has a big house in which she lives. However, every morning she dresses and goes to a hotel room where she keeps a bottle of Sherry. She never sleeps there. It's her writing room. Dr. Angelou is disciplined. She has the books to prove it.

Distractions abound. If you want to be an author you've got to manage your distractions. There's the worldwide web, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube. There's TV, cable television, reality TV, Ellen, Dr. Phil, Lifetime movies, American Idol, uh, well, you get my point. There's always another party, lecture, seminar, course, workshop, gathering beckoning you. Are you going to scatter yourself trying to do it all or are you going to focus your attention and energy and produce something? You decide. When I wrote *Love Addicted*, I quit my 9 to 5. I had a four year old and knew it would be nearly impossible for me to work all day, tend to my preschooler morning and evening and still have the energy to write. I'm not recommending that you ditch your job. I am, however, encouraging you to decide what's important to you—and spend your time accordingly! Like I tell my now teenage daughter, "Those people on TV are living *their* dreams, while you sit there watching them. What's wrong with *that* picture?"

The most compelling distractions of all are people. Yes, I'm calling people a distraction. Loved ones especially. Children. Parents. Siblings. Lovers. Husbands. Significant others. Those who keep a standing appointment on your to-do lists can be major distractions, if you let them. We, especially women, can find a multitude of "reasons" to neglect ourselves and our dreams. As I wrote *Love Addicted* I found it necessary to wall myself off from some people. Some people are emotional vampires. If you let them, they will suck you dry. You'll have nothing left to give to the writing. I don't, however, blame them. I hold you responsible for how you use your time. As my dad would say, "There's a time for everything." We must be selfish. Yes, selfish, if you want to succeed at anything you've got to set boundaries that honor you and your time. You've got to learn to say no to doing for others what they should be doing for themselves. No is a complete sentence. If you can't say no to overextending yourself you won't have space in which to say yes to your dreams. Make you and your dreams a priority and you set an example for others to live their dreams.

## Self Esteem

*"Be yourself. There is something that you can do better than any other. Listen to the inward voice and bravely obey that."* - Unknown Author

*"Self-trust is the first secret of success."*  
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

---

---

*"Why do I say it takes self esteem to write a book?"* Art creation, whether it be a book, painting, choreographed dance, demand that you trust yourself. That you believe what you have to offer the world is worth something, worth reading, seeing, experiencing. One thing that stops people from writing a book is that voice stomping through their head that chants, *"I'm not a writer. I'm not a writer! I'm not a writer!"* Or *"Who would want to read about my life?"* Or *"What do I have to say that's original?"* Or they're immobilized by the question that they seem to have no answer to, *"How do I start?"*

## Let's deal with each of these concerns individually:

***"I'm not a writer!"*** – Let's be real, everybody isn't a writer. Just like everybody can't sing, teach, play a harp, everybody that has a story doesn't have the talent or skill to write it. Notice that I say *everybody* has a story. Everybody has a story because everybody has a life. Life is incredibly interesting, don't you think? Every person, even a newborn, could tell you an interesting tale about his life journey. If you doubt whether you have a story, you can stop doubting. You have one. As for writing, it's a skill and talent. When I first started writing, I sent awesomely awful articles to ESSENCE magazine in hopes of getting published. I'm sure my stuff was straight away filed, uh, you know where. When the janitor came around I'm sure it was handed off to him for proper

disposal. I, however, believed I had something to say so I kept at this writing thing. I doubt that I'll ever write short stories that make you to roar with laughter like J. California Cooper does. But, I can write to educate, inspire, and enlighten. Okay, enough about me. In all the years that I've been editing books I've only reviewed one manuscript that had me wringing my hands about how to suggest that this aspiring author consider another career, uh, like maybe home improvement or Mortuary Science. On a serious note, he, I think, is a rarity. People who yearn to write usually *can* write. And please don't trust a voice that insists that you can't do a thing...when you've yet to attempt it! Write anyway. Writing, like singing, swimming, ice-skating improves with practice. So write, write, write and write some more! By the way, lots of rich and famous people, though they may author a book or two, don't actually write them. If you can afford a ghostwriter, great! Hire one and get your book out there. If not, write your book and then hire an editor who is skilled at editing and re-writing. Lastly, aspiring authors are recording their books. If you can talk, you can "write" a book. It's simple. You buy a tape recorder and talk into it. Then you have that material transcribed and edited. This works well if you believe you're too busy to sit at a computer. I know at least three people who are or have used this approach.

***“Who would want to read about my life?”*** – It's a shame that people that claim to know insist that only books written by celebrities and the rich and famous sell. Who are these people? What makes them an authority on such matters? I not only disagree but can tell you that there are bestsellers that disprove their claim, like Iyanla Vanzant's books...before she had notoriety. The life of a celebrity isn't more worthy of being read than yours. I just finished **The Little Bastard: Autobiography of a Sociopath**. The author was a drug addict who wrote the book while he was homeless! I thoroughly enjoyed it. You've got wisdom, insights, interesting life experiences that someone can't wait to read about. A well written, interesting book is a joy to read regardless of the status of the author. When God was giving out intelligence, story telling abilities, and smarts, God didn't forget about you and me. *Love Addicted* is largely about my journey through relationship addiction and the lessons I learned from men, love and life. One woman said my book changed the course of her life. Had I listened to those who say nobody wants to read my story because I'm not rich or famous I would have denied someone a blessing. So, who wants to read your story? Who knows who? But rest assured, somebody does. And don't you dare deny them.

***“What do I have to say that's original?”*** – Nothing's new under the sun. What makes your story original is how you tell it. If you write from your soul, it will be original because there's not another human being on the planet exactly like you.

***“How do I start?”*** – To be quite frank with you, I don't understand this question. Then again, I do understand it if I remember how afraid people are of making a mistake. Now that I think of it, all I need do is recall my law school days when I had to do a paper. Footnotes, bibliographies, cites...all required. I was plagued by the “*How do I start?*” question. So, let me tell you how to start. First, choose a title. Give your book a title, for that will be your compass. It may be what they call a working title; still, it's a title. A title

will also anchor and focus your writing. A great title will also sell books. So choose one that whispers to your would be reader, “*Pick me up. Pick me up.*” Now, as I suggest later, do an outline. If it’s autobiographical, an outline sort of presents itself to you. Write it down. It need not be detailed. Chapter headings are fine. Okay, find a chair or bed, grab your laptop, ipad or pen and write whatever comes to mind. Don’t concern yourself with how good it is. Keep writing. If you’re like fiction writers who say their characters speak to them, then be the scribe and record what they say and do. The main thing is that you let go of the notion that you’ve got to start some particular way. Just start. You can re-write and edit later.

We trust what emanates from us when we think well enough of ourselves. If you don’t think enough of your own mind, you may start writing but it will stall if you don’t think you are worthy of being heard. I love novels. Works of fiction are excellent avenues for telling bits and pieces of an author’s story behind the scene, so to speak. A novelist gets to tell sometimes painful or embarrassing truths without having to “put himself out there.” And yet, to write a compelling novel one must be willing to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. What I mean is this, a well written work of fiction mustn’t be “too” nice. The best novels show their characters ugliness as well as their beauty. Their characters are human. They have flaws. They curse, if that’s what’s called for. They cheat on their husband. They smell bad, eat with their mouths open, lose faith in God. If as a writer you fear your writing/book will be too revealing of you and embarrass you, something will be missing in your work. A strong sense of self and self esteem undergirds you as a storyteller. If you want your book to sell, then you’ve got to be fearless about telling the story however it comes. It could be gentle, gritty, raw, nasty, sweet, hard, mean, whatever. This applies not only to fiction but to nonfiction as well. Maybe more so.

## Perseverance

*“Writing is like giving birth to a piano sideways. Anyone who perseveres is either talented or nuts.” - Flannery O'Connor*

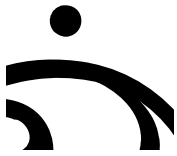
*“Eighty percent of success is showing up.”- Woody Allen*

---

*Merriam-Webster says perseverance is “continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition. Steadfastness.”* We can start a lot of things but without perseverance we will not complete them. Only folks who persevere through the inevitable “difficulties, failure, or opposition” get to become authors. It’s not the people who start writing but those who put in “continued effort” who get to see their name on the cover of a book. There would be no need for perseverance if life didn’t present challenges. But life does. In fact, many of the difficulties and opposition will not be out there but inside of your own mind. You must find a way to

ignore or silence that inner noise if you're to get published. Years ago a therapist told me something that's been invaluable to me. She said, "Don't believe everything you think!" Your mind will tell you it's blocked. It will tell you, you have nothing much or more to say. It will tell you, you don't know what you're doing. It may tell you to quit because what you've written thus far is crap. You can't always trust your mind. If it tells you to give up on yourself, on your dream to become a published writer, whatever you do, don't trust it. Ignore it and keep writing. Persevere!

Let me say this, there may come a time when you stop writing. Perhaps en route to becoming an author you lose someone you love through divorce, separation or death. From summer 1998, when I started my book, to May 2005 when an 18-wheeler pulled up at my place to deliver 1060 books, I left the practice of law, took a job that paid a third of what I once made, worked a multitude of odd jobs to sustain me and my daughter, lost my baby sister to a stroke and coma, had my heart broken a bunch of times, got in credit card debt to avoid going back to full time work, sold a home to avert a foreclosure, lost heart when a blocked would be writer harshly criticized my work, put my daughter in private school without a clue as to how I would pay the twenty thousand dollars a year tuition. Phew! Through it all, I held fast to my dream to become an author. I persevered! You can to.



## Finding Your Voice

*"If you do not tell the truth about yourself, you can not tell it about other people."*  
-Virginia Woolf

*"If there's a book you really want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it." - Toni Morrison*

---

### Truth Telling

*If you have something to say, then you have* a unique way in which to say it. After the success of Terry McMillan's novel *Waiting to Exhale*, the copycats flooded the marketplace. The success of Sister Souljah's *The Coldest Winter Ever* is responsible for the spike in hip-hop urban fiction. Urban fiction isn't my taste in reading but after hearing a community college instructor declare *The Coldest Winter Ever* one of

her favorite books, I decided to read it. I thought as an educator—I too was an instructor—it behooved me to be enlightened, especially after such high accolades. It was a page turner! Beautifully written. Sister Souljah had found her voice. Her imitators, not so much. How can I say this? Well, writing isn't about imitating another successful author. Writing is about telling a story, maybe an old, familiar love story, in an original voice. The world doesn't hunger for another James Baldwin for Mr. Baldwin blessed us with his powerful voice. What the world needs now is to hear from you, the authentic you. Find your authentic voice and let us hear it.

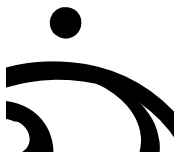
*“I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.”*  
- Bill Cosby

## Authenticity

*“It is extremely arrogant and very foolish to think that you can ever outwit your audience.”* - Twyla Tharp

*Listen to that inner voice, write from there.* You can sense when you're not being true to your authentic voice. The writing is flat, dull, boring. It bores YOU! Can you imagine how your readers feel? You guessed it, bored. You have something to say, a story to tell. Forget about being like E. Lynn Harris, be you. Turn your listening inward, then record what that voice whispers. Or bellows. Be its servant. Save your ego musings for another time and place.

*“Write only if you cannot live without writing. Write only what you alone can write.”*  
- Elie Wiesel



# Thrill Your Readers

*“Every human being has hundreds of separate people living under his skin. The talent of a writer is his ability to give them their separate names, identities, personalities and have them relate to other characters living with him.”* - Mel Brooks

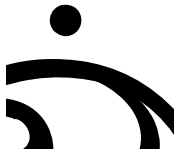
---

*I'm a nonfiction writer. Writing nonfiction,* at least for me, is simple and straight forward. It still, however, requires skill. My goal in writing this e-book is to help you produce a book that sells. If I'm going to get you to read this to completion, I've got to hold your interest. If you've gotten this far, then I'm halfway to accomplishing my

goal. Writing a novel is different. People read fiction for enjoyment and entertainment, unless a teacher or instructor requires them to read it. We want to be pulled into a novel and carried by the plot and great storytelling through to the very end. If the book delivers on its promise to thrill or entertain then we approach the last page with both jubilation and sadness. That's how I felt reading *The History of Love* by Nicole Krauss. I loved that novel. I felt I'd entered a strange and interesting world that I had grown to anticipate. To satisfy my longing for what I felt I'd lost when I closed that book I immediately ventured back to the library in search of another delightful read.

*“When I'm near the end of a book, I need to sleep in the same room with it.”*  
- Joan Didion

Many say you must capture your readers on the first page. I disagree. Readers will give you more than one page to pull them in, at least avid readers will. Don't, however, wait until you're halfway through the book to give them your juiciest writing, unless you want people to finish your book only because they hate to not finish things they start. This especially applies to fiction. It's not uncommon for people to skim through nonfiction books, in search of answers, antidotes and information that they need. Not so with fiction. With fiction, you have a license to thrill...entertain and enthrall your reader. Pull them in the first several pages, or lose them. Oh, as for nonfiction writers like myself, no need to bore your readers either. If you're bored writing it, so will your readers be reading it.



# The Art of Good Writing

*“Don't use words too big for the subject. Don't say "infinitely" when you mean "very"; otherwise you'll have no word left when you want to talk about something really infinite.”* - C. S. Lewis

*“Autobiography is only to be trusted when it reveals something disgraceful. A man who gives a good account of himself is probably lying, since any life when viewed from the inside is simply a series of defeats.”* - George Orwell

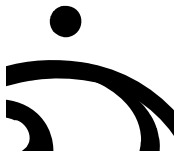
---

## Elements of Good Writing

*“Easy reading is damn hard writing.”* - Nathaniel Hawthorne

*What is good writing? As an Avid* reader, author, and editor, here is what I think good writing is. Good Writing is:

1. Honest – tell the truth, the good, the bad, the ugly. Tell it the way you’d like to read it. If your writing is autobiographical, don’t leave out the stuff that embarrasses you. Tell it!
2. Has Heart – good writing isn’t about big, fancy words that don’t ring true. Nor is it about showing how educated you are. Good writing comes from the heart and soul. Actually, simple words make for the best writing. Share your true self with your audience.
3. Speaks Truth – some stories sound false because, uh, they are false. The writer is afraid to tell it like it is, so they attempt to hoodwink and bamboozle their reader. Dip your mind into the well of your soul and whatever you scoop up, write.
4. Moves, Inspires, Teaches – what’s the point in writing something that has no affect on people? Whether a novel or nonfiction, good writing moves your reader in some way.
5. Clear – some writers are poetic. Nonfiction writing ought to be clear, unless of course you write text and law books. (I’m a lawyer; I’m allowed to joke about the legal profession.) Since writing my first book and reading hundreds of well written books that use very simple words, I’ve grown to appreciate the beauty of simple words. If you’re writing fiction, paint clear pictures and scenes with descriptive words.



## Suspend the Need to Know...

...How You Will Get Published

*“Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step.” - Martin Luther King Jr.*

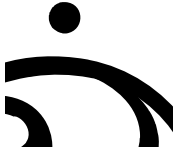
---

*One reason people don't write the book* in their head is because their focus is on the wrong thing; they're concerned about how they will finance the publishing or if they'll find an agent or if someone else will publish them. When I sat down to write *Love Addicted* I had not a clue as to how it would get published. I was driven by the desire to produce a book; that's what impelled me to write. Once upon a time self-publishing, though a viable option, most people still sought to get published by big houses like Random House and Simon and Schuster. I suppose there are thousands of manuscripts sitting somewhere gathering dust because no one would publish them. If a publishing company like Random House publishes you, they pay you. You need not put

out any money. Instead, they give you an advance on the sales they expect your book to generate. About 60,000 books are published annually. If you're not a celebrity and not a well known author I hope you won't permit a rejection from a big house to keep you from becoming an author.

Whether you pursue getting a literary agent who will work to sell your book to a publisher or self publish, during the writing phase give no thought to how it'll all happen. Focus on the writing. Trust that somehow in some way your book will get to print. I self published my first book. Sure, I queried a few literary agents. After a few rejection letters, uh, rejection comments scribbled on the query letter I'd written them, I retreated. I, however, was not defeated. I revamped my strategy, resolved to self-publish and did. I'm glad I did. I discovered, self-publishing has its benefits.

Have faith. Believe that everything you need will be provided, as the need arises. Trust me, you will get published. For now though, just focus on what's important—the writing.



## Sitting Down to Write

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

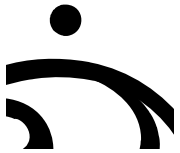
---

You're committed. You have something to say. You're disciplined. You're not worried about how you'll get published; you've decided you can wait to cross that bridge when you get to it. That is, you're mentally ready. Now what? It's time to write. Time to begin. Before you start, you might want to: **Do an Outline** – I wish I'd done an outline for the book I'm now writing, *Why Did He Break Up With Me?* Had I, I would have spared myself a lot of time and anguish as I sought to organize what I'd written. Well, we live and hopefully we learn. Your outline is your guide. You may or may not proceed from chapter one through whatever, but when you sit down to write you can go to whichever chapter that beckons you at that time and turn your attention elsewhere.

*“You have to write badly in order to write well.”* - William Faulkner

You've started writing. Maybe long before you started reading this book. But you're stuck in re-write mode. Well, I suggest that you: **Write a First Draft without Editing** – Write. Write. Write. Don't censure or edit your writing. Just write. I confess, I edit here and there as I go. It slows me down, too. There have been times when I not only got stuck spinning my wheels over the same old text but I wrote the energy and juice right out of the piece. You will edit, when you return to the writing. By the way, it's a good practice to write then leave it to cool. Upon your return you will always see how to fine tune what you've written. Write some more. Let that cool. Do that often. As the author, expect to edit a gazillion times before surrendering your final product to a professional editor. As one of my college professors once advised, "Good writing is more about *rewriting*."

You're fired up now! Feeling good about what you've written thus far. You go to work, spend time with friends and family, cook, eat, work some more, sleep, play, make love, exercise, take vacation. Your book is underway. I suggest you: **Return to the Writing** – This is obvious, right? Nobody expects a book to write itself and yet people talk about writing a book as if thinking and talking about writing equals writing. Of course it doesn't. The committed writer's creed: If I write, write, write and write some more...one day I'll have a finished product. Give no thought to how long it takes or how "hard" it is, just write. And keep writing. Until you commit the last period to the page.



## When the Writing Stalls

*"My ideas usually come not at my desk writing but in the midst of living."* - Anais Nin

---

The writing could stall. Actually, it very likely will stall. No worries though. Sure, there are those who write a book in weeks. One writer of erotica penned her book in 19 days. Of course they don't write non-stop; they sleep, eat, go to the bathroom...I suppose. Yet, but for the inevitable life obligatory "detours," like the fastest man in the world, Usain Bolt, they plow right through the writing to the finish line. If, however, your writing process is anything like mine, the writing will pause, stall, be put on hold. I write. I live. I play. I travel. I write. I work. I speak. I edit others' books. I love. I write. I spend time with family and friends. I write some more. Life informs my writing, especially since I, largely, write about love and relationships. If it takes years to pen your book, then there will be pauses and stops on the writing journey. You may consciously choose to put aside the writing to tend to other things. Or be pulled away from it by more pressing or important matters at any given time. If you're committed, then you're committed. That commitment won't loose you until you've completed what you set out to do, write a

book. If the writing does stall, but you think you ought to be writing, I offer you seven strategies for resurrecting your creative genius.

## **7 Steps to “Unstalling”**

**1. Relax** – That is, trust you. Trust the process. *Why Did He Break Up With Me?* patiently anticipates my return as I pen this e-book. Because I’m 100% committed to completing it, I can relax knowing I’ll get back to it. We’re anxious about a pause in the writing when we don’t trust that we’ll resume writing. Or perhaps we think our creativity has been tapped out. You will, if you’re committed. If you’re not committed, get committed. Or decide writing a book isn’t a good use of your time and energy.

*“Learn to get in touch with silence within yourself and know that everything in this life has a purpose.” – Elisabeth Kübler-Ross*

**2. Seek Solitude and Silence** – Noise. Noise. Noise. So much noise in our daily lives. Our senses our bombarded by the noises of life, is there any wonder that our creativity sometimes shuts down. The noise out there can be so deafening that we can’t hear the whisper of our creativity. Get to yourself. Sit in the silence. No reading. No TV watching. No web surfing. No chatting on the phone. Out of the silence will emerge something original, sweet and wonderful. Even if nothing new comes, you’ll reemerge refreshed and clearer about what’s truly important and deserves more of your time and attention.

*“I will tell you what I have learned myself. For me, a long five or six mile walk helps. And one must go alone and every day. I have done this for many years. It is at these times I seem to get re-charged.” – Brenda Ueland*

**3. Walk** – Yes, Brenda Ueland, author of *If You Want to Write* is right to advise sluggish or blocked writers to take a long walk. These walks, with no pre-set destination, regenerates you in mind, body, and spirit. A leisurely stroll in nature or even around the neighborhood works like a magic elixir, freeing, relaxing and stimulating those brain cells. Fresh thoughts, ideas, plots, directions, revelations, solutions miraculously appear.

**4. Journal** – I’ve been journaling since 1985. I started for one reason but keep at it for different ones. I’m convinced that journaling has helped me hone my writing skills. Journaling also clears out the mental cobwebs. Julia Cameron, author of *The Artist Way*, instructs blocked artists to journal, at least three pages daily. She calls them Morning Pages. Whatever you call them, writing without an agenda or destination can help you get unstuck. When we dump the many mental distractions that clog our thinking, we can be more present to the writing when we return to it.

*“If you don’t live it, it won’t come out of your horn.” - Charlie Parker*

**5. Live** – Many times my writing has stalled, or seemed to, so that I might, I’m convinced, feel, experience, read, hear something that informs my writing. I needed to

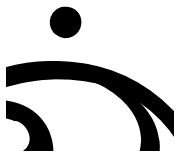
stop, live some more and carry back to the writing the new understanding, insight, wisdom. Live! I still marvel at prolific writers James Baldwin, Maya Angelou, Langston Hughes. Those folks LIVED! and still got the writing done. Don't beat yourself up about not writing. Enjoy the present moment. Unless you have an external deadline, don't worry about how fast you get the book written.

*“The highest level of creativity unfolds through play.” - Albert Einstein*

**6. Play** – We can be so serious, us adults. Who do you know, if handed a paint brush and blank canvas, won't hesitate to create something...anything? Without regard to whether it's good, bad, or “perfect.” Who are they? They're children. Children create. When my daughter Adia was in kindergarten, she had a combined drawing and writing project. I'll never forget how boldly she approached her assignment. She drew a picture of aviator Bessie Coleman and wrote just as confidently. I fell asleep on the bed beside her. When I woke up, she was still going at it. Passionately. Confidently. Play more. Laugh out loud. Jump around. Skip. Run. Yes, run. Sit on the floor. Be silly. Free yourself!

**7. Read** – Readers are the best writers. Reading enriches the mind. Reading expands your vocabulary, stimulates new thought and ideas and broadens your worldview. Reading is fundamental to good writing.

If you're stalled, rather than beat yourself up for not writing, accept precisely where you are. It's okay to be there. Be present. Live, play, dance, paint, laugh, see a play. Then return to the computer, refreshed, ready to write your heart out.



## Overcoming Writer's Block

---

*“Crazymakers are often blocked creatives themselves...Your crazymaker is a block you chose yourself, to deter you from your own trajectory.” - Julia Cameron*

---

*The writing can also stall because we're wrestling* with the infamous writer's block. I know people with unfinished manuscripts that have been gathering dust for years. One friend knows she “should” or could be writing yet she can't seem to find the fuel and will to return to the writing. Is she suffering from writer's block? Maybe. Maybe not. It depends on how you define the term. Some say writer's block happens when you go to the computer, fingers poised on the keys ready to express yourself, but wait, all those brilliant ideas have vanquished. Your mind is blank, as blank as the computer screen.

I, however, think writer's block is precisely what's stalled my friend and so many other would be authors. What are the causes of writer's block?

**Fear of Failure** – Whenever we aren't doing *anything* that we desire or say matters to us I'm convinced fear is the culprit. We could be plagued by a fear of failure, fear of not being good enough, fear of not being a fine enough writer, fear of writing something that will provoke disapproval, fear of offending someone, fear of it taking too long, fear of not knowing how to proceed, and fear of not getting it "right." FEAR is the ultimate dream stealer. Here's what fear stands for: **F**alse **E**vidence **A**ppearing **R**eal. Fear is all in your mind! It's not real! Your mind created it. Use your better mind to push through it and write.

**Fear of Success** – How do you know you fear success? And why would anyone fear success? How do you navigate this fear? You know you fear success when you get what you want—a great relationship, a promotion, people anticipating your book—and you sabotage those things. You know you fear success when everything is going well and you feel terrible about it. That is, you're so anxious you can't enjoy your success. Instead you look around every corner for something unpleasant. Fear of success can block you. You may have trouble trusting that beautiful, divine voice pouring onto the page. So what do you do? You stop writing. You permit the ego, where fear lives, to tell you you're fooling yourself, that you can't be *that* good. Just like fear of failure, fear of success is ALL in your mind. It's a phantom. You do deserve the best that life has to offer. Push through this fear by writing anyway. Feel the fear...and do it anyway.

*"The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt." - Sylvia Plath*

**Self-doubt** – Doubt is a form of fear. Fear that you're not enough or good enough. Millions of people have died with their book still in them because they listened to that inner critic. That voice that demands to know, "*Who do you think you are?*" When an idea strikes, our enthusiasm about it drives the writing. Maybe we read another writer's work and compare our writing to theirs. Or perhaps a well meaning friend, editor or fellow writer offer suggestions as to how to make the writing "better" and you hear it as "confirmation" that you're not an able writer. A few years into writing my first book, I met a woman who worked for a well known author. As promised, when I returned to Baltimore I sent her several chapters of my still unfolding manuscript. Some time went by, then I got the chapters back with a note attached. The person, who I'll call Teresa, said she'd shared my chapters with a few of her co-workers who agreed that my writing was dull and redundant, they concluded nobody would be interested in reading such garbage. Now, to be fair, she didn't call it garbage but that's what my doubting mind heard. I bawled like a baby. For months self-doubt stood between me and the computer. Finally, I slid back in front of the computer and resumed writing. After I scooped my self-esteem up off the floor, I decided to consider her criticism. Though harsh and mean spirited—I'm sure she was a blocked writer—her comments had merit. By the way, a blocked artist is someone who desires to paint, dance, act, write but doesn't for a number

of reasons, most significantly because he doesn't believe in himself. Consequently, she's frustrated and unfulfilled.

The reason we're crushed by the opinions of others—and this applies to any area of our life—is because their opinions echo what we think about ourselves. If they say our writing is boring and that feels like a slap in the face it's because we believe them. It's okay to have doubt. Just don't let it immobilize you.

Two words about comparing yourself to others, please stop! Don't even compare you to who you imagine you could be! Appreciate who YOU are. Comparing gets us nowhere. Comparing blocks us. We get stuck in the loop of “*No matter what, I'm just not good enough*” because we forget that like fingerprints and snowflakes no two people are alike. So how could they create the same? If you didn't have anything to say the Universe wouldn't be urging you to write. J.K. Rowling, the author of the famously popular and well-received Harry Potter series, was rejected by more than 25 literary agents before one, now wealthy fellow, saw something the others missed. Criticism, whether well-meaning and constructive or mean-spirited and damaging can be crushing. We, however, have to believe in the beauty of our own work. Like Rowling seemed to have done, we can take the word NO to mean **New Opportunity**. Rowling forged ahead and ended up a very, very, *very* wealthy woman. Push through doubt...and write!

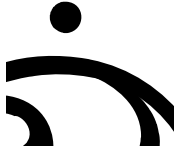
*“An absolutely necessary part of a writer's equipment, almost as necessary as talent, is the ability to stand up under punishment, both the punishment the world hands out and the punishment he inflicts on himself.” - Irwin Shaw*

**Perfectionism** – The need to be perfect is one of the worst mental dis-eases that anyone—writer, painter, business person—can labor under. Years ago, after a comedienne friend had come off stage people milled about networking. Someone asked me for my number. I gave them nothing because I had yet to invest in business cards. My friend blasted me, saying what was wrong with me was that I needed everything to be perfect before I acted. She was spot on! Excellence is one thing, perfectionism is another. Merriam-Webster says perfectionism is “*a disposition to regard anything short of perfection as unacceptable.*” The problem with perfectionism, when it comes to writing, is that it fails to tell us that, largely, writing is about rewriting. The first draft will be “flawed” and “imperfect.” But if you won't allow yourself the first rendering then it goes without saying there will be no need for rewriting. Besides, what's perfection? By whose standard is your work imperfect?

*“Perfectionism has nothing to do with getting it right. It has nothing to do with fixing things. It has nothing to do with standards. Perfectionism is a refusal to let yourself move ahead. It is a loop—an obsessive, debilitating closed system that causes you to get stuck in the details of what you are writing or painting or making and to lose sight of the whole.” – Julia Cameron, *The Artist's Way**

**Boredom** – If you're not deeply interested in what you're writing, then you won't complete it. I hear people encourage folks to write about what's trendy or en vogue. I

disagree. What if J.K. Rowling had done that? We wouldn't have Harry Potter, nor would she now be living on easy street. Rather than follow a well worn path why not forge a new highway. Write what fascinates you, what you're curious about; that passion will carry you from A to Z.



# The Editing Process...

...Edit or Regret It!

*“God in Her infinite wisdom sent me an author of a book riddled with typos and sentence structure problems that nobody would recognize or recommend to others... before I made the foolish decision to publish my first book without the assistance of an editor. I had two editors, and still found some mistakes when Love Addicted went to a second printing.” – DeBora M. Ricks*

---

---

*You're a writer. An excellent one, you might add.* You take tremendous pride in being a good writer. You've been writing for decades, all kinds of documents. In fact, you help other people with their writing and they love the results. Now you're writing a book. You don't think you need an editor. Well, think again! Or perhaps you concede that you're no Toni Morrison or John Grisham but your shoe string budget doesn't allow for an editor. You can't see how you're going to fund the printing of your book, let alone pay an editor. So you figure you'll cut costs by editing the book yourself. How hard could it be anyway? You'll also enlist a bunch of your friends, the ones with letters behind their names, to read and edit your manuscript. In fact, you've already asked and some say they'd be happy to read your manuscript and give you honest feedback. Want my advice? Do not trust your friends to be honest about the quality of your writing. They won't want to hurt your feelings, so their assessment will likely be pretty useless. With all this help, you just don't see how an editor will make that big of a difference. Well, I suggest you look again!

Before you turn your manuscript over to an editor I strongly suggest that you print, read and edit it. Do this as many times as necessary. I printed this e-book five to eight times, read through it and corrected it before I felt satisfied that I had a respectable product. Even after I'd had it edited, I tweaked it several more times. A hard copy lays bare typos, content and structural problems in a way that the computer version can not. Now, it's time for an editor.

## Six Reasons to Hire a Professional Editor

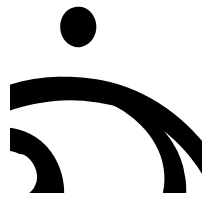
1. An editor, unlike your family and friends, will give you honest feedback.

2. An editor will catch typos you'll never see, no matter how many times you comb through your manuscript. It's human to see what you think is there, rather than what's really there or not there.
3. An editor will help with sentence structure. Even the strongest writer sometimes word sentences in a way that can be misleading or confusing to the reader.
4. An editor can suggest fresh words/synonyms for overused words and thereby strengthen your voice and message.
5. An editor can assist with content development and timeline issues.
6. An editor can spare you unnecessary embarrassment that will inevitably come from putting a shabby book on the market, all because you failed to have it edited.

*Okay, there you have it!* You have NOT one excuse for not starting or finishing your book. The world is waiting!

*Hold fast to your dreams, for without them life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly.*  
- Langston Hughes

## About the Author



*I wrote this e-book because* I know intimately the dragons a writer must slay if she's going to write a book. I also know how deeply gratifying it is to get an email from someone who says your book is a "hot commodity" or to walk into a room and see someone reading your book or to meet someone who has read your book and they're thrilled to be in the same room with you. I want every person that desires to be an author to enjoy such experiences.

I am the author of **Love Addicted: One Woman's Spiritual Journey Through Emotional Dependency**, a book about my misguided attempt to find love and approval in the eyes and arms of men. In my search for the love that my father didn't give me, I found me and a sense of wholeness. I'm the editor of several books, fiction and nonfiction, a writing

coach, empowerment speaker, radio talk show co-host and attorney. I live in Baltimore, Maryland. I'm currently at work on my second book, *Why Did He Break Up With Me?* Expect a 2011 release. Visit me at [www.DeBoraRicks.com](http://www.DeBoraRicks.com)

---

---

## Additional Reading

*If You Want to Write: A Book about Art, Independence and Spirit*  
by *Brenda Ueland*

*The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*  
by *Julia Cameron*

*The African American Guide to Writing and Publishing Nonfiction*  
by *Jewell Parker Rhodes*