

Own it

Embracing your writing process can help beat writer's block.

I'm not a writer. Writers write, and I'm not writing. I'm a fraud!" screams the voice in my head.

Then another voice pipes up in defense. "I am too a writer. I have lots of clips – in print, online, in magazines, newspapers, anthologies. I've even read my work in public. I'm going through a phase, that's all."

The first line of the classic Buddhist text *The Dhammapada* reads: "We are what we think, having become what we thought." So, am I or am I not a writer?

This question invariably plagues me whenever I find myself in a writing slump, blocked and anxious that I will never write again. Exciting ideas for new articles or fresh insights into old stalled ideas elude me, making me feel frustrated, lost, at loose ends, full of self-doubt. I have to engage in self-talk just to lift my head off the pillow in the morning; when I'm writing, I leap out of bed like an Energizer Bunny, excited about facing the creative possibilities that await me at my computer.

Feeling deprived of the joy of creativity, I berate myself for not being "a real writer" who is prolific and ever able to self-motivate and write on the spot whenever and wherever, no matter what. Consumed with guilt, I wonder why I reduced my work schedule to give myself more time to write if I wasn't going to write.

While paralyzed in non-writing mode, I also become overly thin-skinned and hyper-

sensitive to any rejection of my work. Although the publications I've submitted to may be long shots with odds heavily skewed against my chances, their rejection feels like a major setback even though I know all too well, as a writing mentor of mine once said, "That's what writers do, they get rejections."

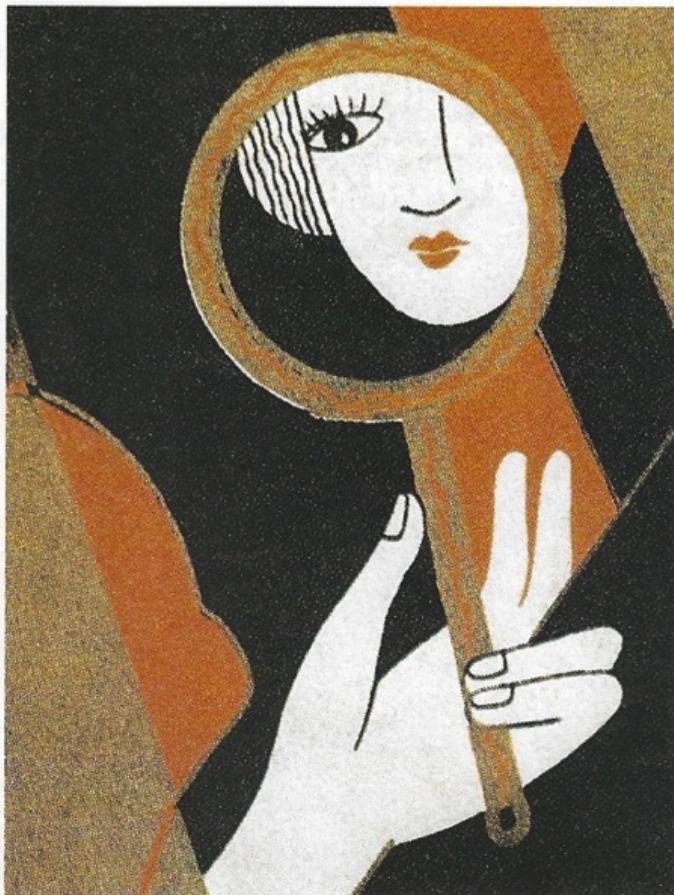
Throughout my writing career, with my share of writer's block, I've been advised, "Just write about anything, don't edit and don't worry about the result"; "Give yourself permission to write badly"; "Try a five-minute exercise prompt"; "Join a writer's group"; "Take a writing course"; "Meditate; trust in the universe and the ideas will

manifest." I wish it were otherwise, but these tried-and-true unblocking tips that may get other writers' creative juices flowing rarely work for me. My failed efforts to benefit from the conventional wisdom make me feel worse and even more blocked.

A recent writing hiatus, which lasted a few months, followed a similar frustrating, anxiety-provoking scenario with its dearth of ideas to ignite my writer's passion, not to mention several rejections that were tough to accept. However, this time around, perhaps because I felt so dejected and despairing and hence more prone to self-reflection about my writing predicament, my experience shifted, was even enlightening, and revealed some positive truths about my own writing process.

First, I remembered how I truly enjoy the wonder of writing. Although I may agonize about not having ideas to get me writing, my actual experience of writing is creative bliss, a miracle that never ceases to amaze. I don't know how it works, but when I write, I am fully in the present moment. I forget about the pile of laundry, what happened at work yesterday or the bad behavior of another person. I sometimes forget to nosh, although the fridge is only a few steps away.

In my writing universe, alone with myself, my thoughts and feelings, ideas and words flow. Even if I find myself struggling with wording or content, the process



itself eventually reveals what “feels right,” and I follow that direction.

As I write at my computer, I don’t focus on the outcome of my work, whether it will be published or not. If I look back at the pieces that have yet to find a home in print or online, I remember the experience of writing them as joyful and productive, never a waste of creative time or energy.

I also discovered that even if I am not physically writing, I may be unconsciously simmering with an idea that is taking form and awaiting the right time and circumstance to burst into my consciousness. Until I am aware of what my unconscious has in store for me, I cannot force an idea to materialize. When the idea is ripe, I suddenly find myself unstuck and guided about how to proceed.

So it happened with the present arti-

cle I have been writing. Once the idea was revealed, I became bombarded – upon awakening, in the shower, doing unrelated tasks, working out at the gym – with even more ideas and thoughts on the subject. My excitement and creativity sparked, I could barely wait to transcribe what was happening in my head into a piece of writing.

If I don’t acknowledge my love of writing and respect how my ideas need to percolate, I only set myself up to compare and despair. It is self-defeating and futile to focus on my perception of how other writers work and ignore my own creative process. After all, I am in no way privy to their process, which most likely varies from writer to writer. I have recently read that even “real writers,” the ones I envy with a seemingly limitless stash of ideas – the legendarily prolific Joyce Carol Oates comes to mind – have

experienced writer’s block. I don’t judge them or their progress any less for not always measuring up to my ideal standards of creativity.

For me, the takeaway from these revelations was clear: to claim and embrace my own writing process and have faith that the right idea will come to me at the right time and in the right way. This self-knowledge can help me better cope when writer’s block strikes again.

Once I started on the path of accepting how I write, an idea, seemingly from nowhere but in reality “in my face” for weeks, suddenly exploded into my consciousness, and I began writing again. The irony of it: My writer’s block unblocked with an article about writer’s block. ■

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Farizan’s prose is frank, funny and bittersweet.
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