

# THE CREATIVE INDEPENDENT

## On dealing with creative anxiety

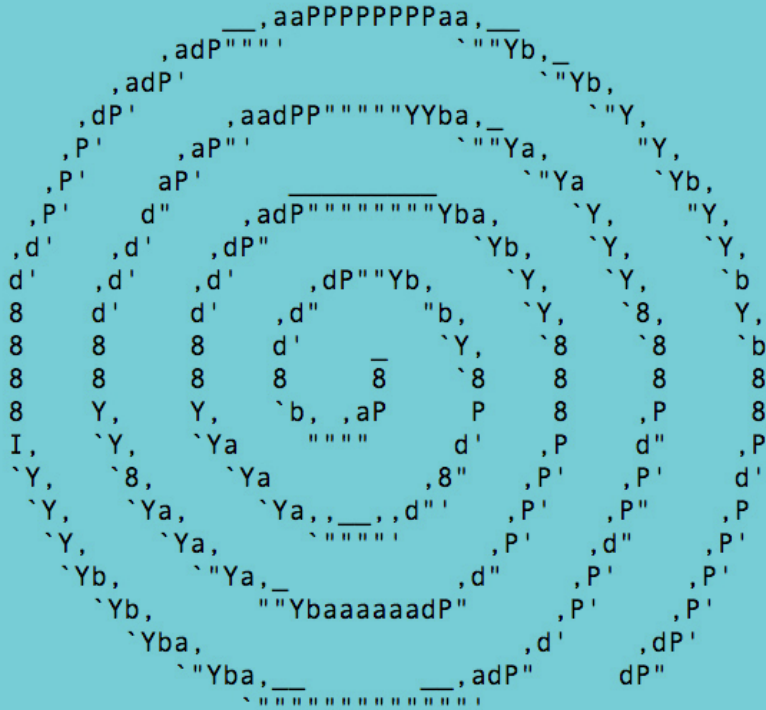
### WHAT YOU CAN FIND IN THIS ISSUE

Hope Hall's mindset for dealing with stress, Mike Rugnetta on getting over the anxiety of sharing your work, Eve Ewing on challenging your own ideas of failure, Christopher Shinn on pushing through anxiety-induced procrastination, notes on staying [mentally] healthy from Thor Harris, plus thoughts from working artists—including Jlin, Aubrey Plaza, Sheila Heti, Tabita Rezaire, Ottessa Moshfegh, Mykki Blanco, Addie Wagenknecht, Alison Goldfrapp, and many more—on rejection, working with fear, and channeling anxiety into creative work.



## THE CREATIVE INDEPENDENT

## On dealing with creative anxiety



# What's the best way to deal with your creative anxiety?

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The Creative Independent is a resource.

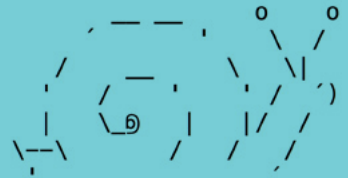
Our goal is to feed and grow the community of people who create. We publish interviews, wisdom, and guides that illuminate the trials and tribulations of living a creative life, as told by working artists—including writers, musicians, designers, visual artists, and others.

The Creative Independent's logo is a spiral. We like spirals because they're about circling back to a core idea over time, something all creative people must do. As Julia Cameron puts it in *The Artist's Way*, "You will circle through some of the issues over and over, each time at a different level. There is no such thing as being done with an artistic life. Frustrations and rewards exist at all levels on the path. Our aim here is to find the trail, establish our footing, and begin the climb."

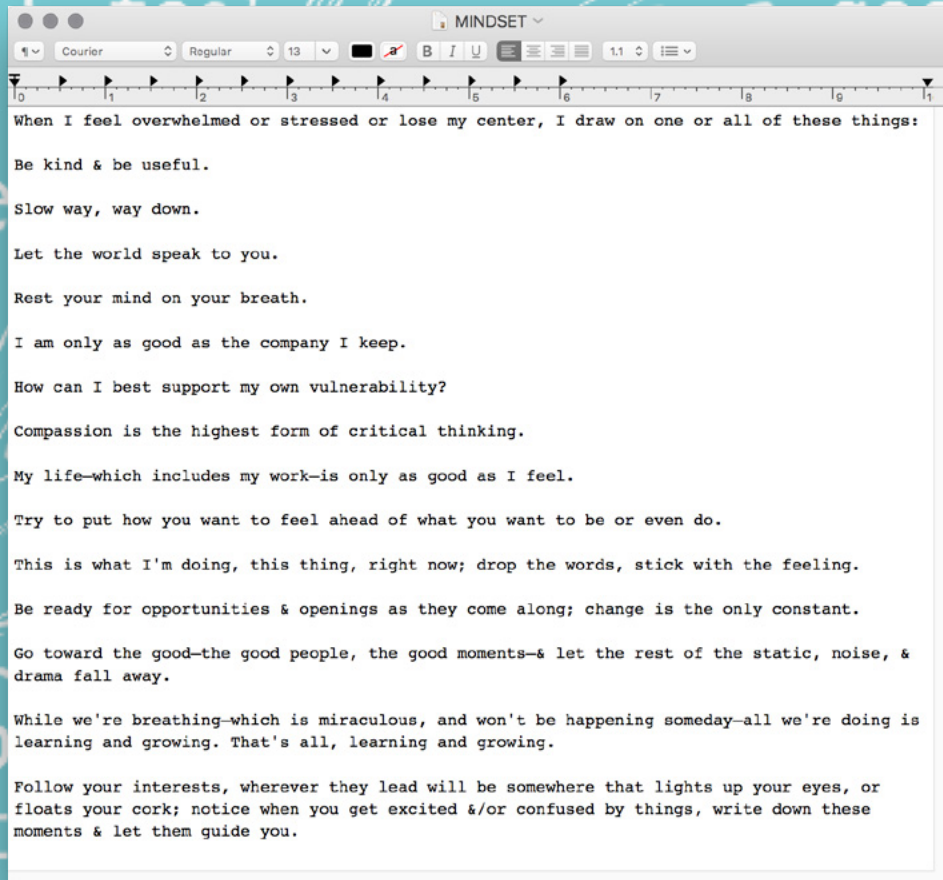
While our logo is a spiral, our mascot is a snail. We like snails because of their spiral-shaped shells, and because they excrete slime. The slime helps a snail glide over abrasive terrain, and also creates a map of the snail's path through time. Tracing a snail's trail makes us wonder, *Where is the snail now? And where was it going in the first place?*

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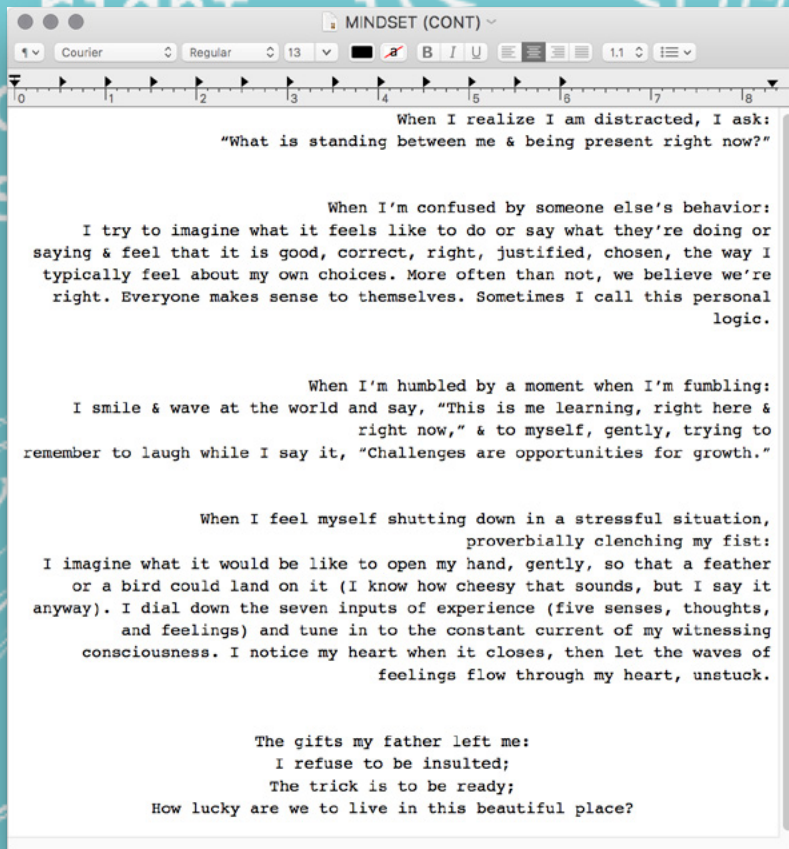
What you hold in your hands now is a publication focused on **dealing with creative anxiety**, compiled from The Creative Independent's archive. We hope it helps you glide a bit more smoothly as you forge your own creative path.



Documentary filmmaker, cinematographer, and photographer Hope Hall offers a few strategies for when you're feeling stressed out and overwhelmed.







## How do I get over the anxiety of sharing my work with other people?

Answered by composer, programmer, and podcast host Mike Rugnetta

**T**he short answer is you don't. Sorry. I know. That's probably not what you wanted to hear. The long answer follows:

I am not sure what kind of work the work you're sharing is; I'm going to assume it's creative in nature, an art of some kind. And, for sure, there's a kind of artist that bests the anxiety of making good work, or doesn't submit to the fear of an audience's reaction. Or was never plagued by either in the first place. But I don't know many of that kind of artist, and \*looks over shoulder, turns back around, leans in and speaks quietly\* their work is usually less interesting?

In my work, and that of others, I find the better things are often paired with some

fear, or at least a less-than-total confidence. If you're afraid people won't like what you've done, that's often a good sign: it means you care, and it means there are stakes. Creating things isn't necessarily about pain and sacrifice as people tend to claim, but it is often about risk, intimacy, and vulnerability. If you are gung-ho confident about your creative endeavors, it's likely that you are not risking anything. For me, at least, this is often a mark of boring work.

As difficult as it can be, it is also important to interrogate your anxieties. Where do they arise from? Often I find myself needing to figure out the source of my fear of publishing. Is it because I am afraid people won't find what meaning I have put into the

thing? Is it because I am afraid it will be too challenging or off-putting or boring? Am I afraid the craft is not up to snuff? These are good—and, I think, normal—fears.

The fears I pause in front of are more like frustrations. Am I frustrated with the pacing of a piece of writing? Or its editing? Am I frustrated by some creative decision? I want to be proud of my work, but scared of it in the way I am scared of things I respect; or really, I want my work to remind me how much I respect my audience, and want to justify their mutual respect of me. Our relationship, built through my work, is an ongoing negotiation.

I don't want to be frustrated by my work, and scared of it in the way I am scared of things that are dangerous. You have to be wary of a fear that warns you from publishing something that will hurt you, hurt someone else, hurt your audience or hurt that mutual respect (unless you're in an antagonistic relationship with them, but that's another answer, to another question, for another day).

The line between fear and frustration is blurry sometimes—and can even be the point of your work. I've made the mistake

of pulling back on something I should have published. And, more often, published something I should have pulled back on. But in both cases, you learn good lessons. Then comes the work of showing that you learned those lessons in future work.

In no case, though, should you be without fear. Your work is good. You should be proud of it—and also a little intimidated by it.



Poet, author, and sociologist **Eve Ewing**  
on challenging your own ideas of failure

**S**mall failures and confusions, I think, are really generative. There's this idea in educational psychology called the zone of proximal development. You know this as a parent of young children learning to read—you can't give somebody a book that is so hard for them that they're just gonna get frustrated and not be able to read or enjoy it. And you can't give them a book that is so easy that it's gonna be a baby book, right? We think about this in terms of children, but I also think it's true of adults. In children, the zone of proximal development is the area in your own cognition where you're just capable enough, but not perfectly capable, so that there's a little bit of a stretching, where you have to work a little bit to get something, but then the reward is really big.

I think about that in terms of my own artistic production, but also my life. I'm attracted to things that I either am really good at and that I can just do comfortably, but I've also learned to appreciate things that are a little hard, where even the small successes become immensely rewarding. I used to not be like that at all.

When I was 19, I learned how to knit. Knitting is this practice where especially in the beginning, you have to accept that you're gonna make mistakes. When you make a mistake you have two choices. One is you can accept that the final product is gonna be flawed, and maybe no one will ever see it but you will always see there's a little hole right there. The other alternative is to start

over. And either of those options is totally fine. I would knit and be like, “Oh, I made a mistake three rows back,” and rip it out. And people watching me would be like, “How can you?!” They just saw me labor over building a garment loop by loop, which is a ridiculous enterprise, right? How can you undo it? And I’d always be like, “Well, I did it once and I’ll do it again. And now I’ll do it better.”

I learned from that. That was the first thing in my life that I really pursued where I was like, “I’m not that great at this, but if I work at it a little bit at a time, there’s always something to improve.”

The other things that taught me [to see the value in failure] were teaching and drawing. Teaching was my first job out of college. I had to accept that I was not good at something. Every single day my only goal was to try to be a little bit better than the previous day. I ultimately became a very good teacher, but it’s just a hard job. There’s nothing you can do, there’s no shortcuts.

Drawing is really, really hard for me, and it does not come naturally. But I like it. My father is a visual artist and I remember once I was sitting with him and I was trying to draw an arm, and every time I

showed it to him, I was like, “Look, this is good now.” And he’d be like, “People have wrists. This person has no wrist. You just drew a wrist-less person.”

Natural talent—I don’t actually know how much I believe in such a thing. I do know that there are things that if I work hard at them, I will get better.

I have a few tricks that I [use to keep myself sane]. One is that I always forgive myself for what I’m not doing. I focus on something really hard and I forgive myself for everything that I’m not doing. When I was working on this second book I was miserable in my office at like 2am, and my mom said, “Try to find the positive and see it as a blessing.”

At first I was super indignant. There is nothing positive about me being here thinking ghosts are gonna come murder me in my office in the middle of the night, right? But then I sat back and I was like, someone is paying me to write a book, right? This is literally my dream. It’s literally my dream!





## How do I get over my procrastination and fear of failure in order to create?

Answered by playwright Christopher Shinn

Resistance to creative work takes many forms, and you mention two of them: procrastination and fear of failure. For some, it's fear of success that stops them from creating, or maybe creation isn't the problem, but the quality of the creative work is. I think all forms of resistance share a common foundation: a fear of what is inside oneself. What makes much creative work so different from other ways of being—especially in our hyper-connected, technology-mediated era—is that it comes from the self. One is not reacting to external stimuli; the stimuli is internal. This is wholly at odds with how we operate during most of our waking hours.

How can you become more relaxed as you engage with your inner space—a place filled with pain, trauma, thoughts, and feelings, many of which you have no control over? First of all, you have to allow yourself to start where you are. Imagine you have not exercised in ages. Your first workout will need to be light, otherwise you'll injure yourself. The same is true of creative work. If you are not used to sitting with yourself, first try it in short bursts, five or ten minutes at a time. Be with yourself, away from any external stimuli.

Repeat this until you build up the capacity to sit with no external stimuli for longer and longer periods. Then, when you feel ready, start to add creative work to this practice—



bracketing off the external world completely save for the dimensionality of the creative object you are working on. Just as during a workout you can feel when you are tired and need a rest, during creative work you should be able to feel when your inner tension becomes “too much” and you need a break.

I sometimes tell my students that creating a work of art is like visiting a room you do not want to go into because you know your traumas and deepest fears are inside it. (By the way, this does not mean these things are necessarily the subject of your work. I find that even in creating “lighter” work, areas of pain and agony are still often accessed.) Initially, you can only open the door a crack, peek in, then quickly shut it again. But over time you’ll be able to open the door a bit wider, and look a bit longer. The goal is to be able to walk into the room, shut the door, lock it, sit down in the middle of that space and open your eyes to everything that is inside.

Most of us cannot get to that place in a day or a week or even a month. It takes time to build up the psychic strength to face all that. The important thing is to have the daily discipline to consistently move towards that. It cannot happen too quickly or it

risks shattering us, and yet if we don’t push painfully into our discomfort, it may never happen at all. The only way into that room is to go a little further, and stay a little longer, each day. We will never want to live in this room, but with discipline we can visit it for a long enough time to get our work done.

Bonus tip: If you find entering this solitary practice difficult, you might try finding a therapist. If you are in a big city, you can almost always find a good clinician at a reasonable fee. Sometimes we need someone to walk into that room with us before we can do it on our own.

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“One thing that a lot of people don’t cover is how important it is for you to fail. You have to fail. Failure is more important than your success, so like, please fail, please. Fail happily. Because there’s a saying that goes, “Nobody has failed more times than the master.” And I think that’s very true.”

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*Musician, producer, and composer Jlin*  
*on learning from failure*

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*✓ ON GETTING OVER THE IDEA OF FAILURE ✓*

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"I'll always feel like I need to prove something. In some ways, it's good for me because I'll just always keep pushing myself. I sometimes think about how if I did something that was really successful it would actually terrify me. Maybe even more than something that is considered a failure. When I say 'failures' or 'I feel like I'm a failure,' I know I'm not a failure. In fact, I kind of find comfort in rejection sometimes. There's something about rejection and failure that feels like it's okay. It makes me feel connected to the world."

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*Actress, comedian, and producer Aubrey Plaza  
on taking control*

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"Failure to me is lack of movement, or retreat, and wasted talent. There is no success to be found in these things, only in their avoidance. I feel I'm both a failure and success at the same time and in varying ratios depending on the time of day, but I don't dwell on the idea too much or see it as something to worry about."

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*Artist, filmmaker, and video game designer David O'Reilly  
on making sure you keep going*

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*ON GETTING OVER THE IDEA OF FAILURE*  
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“We have a very narrow understanding of success and failure, as though they were absolute states. Consider the price one pays for victory: hours of pain and sacrifice and self-denial. When you consider all these factors, a victory isn’t really a victory. Nothing can be a pure victory. I think about that a lot. Any success can also be considered a failure, in some sense, and every failure can also be considered a success because it presents an opportunity to learn.”

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*Writer Anelise Chen*  
*on establishing balance*

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"Take risks. Be brave. Put yourself out there even if you're worried it won't work out. It often won't. But the times where it doesn't are actually more valuable internally than the times when it does work out, because failure is the best teacher. It is so dumb that societally we talk about 'failure' in such negative terms. People who don't fail don't grow."

*Musician Katie Alice Greer*

*on practical advice for new musicians*

"I always followed my heart and I definitely never lost my enthusiasm. There's the one quote from Churchill that I always think about, something like, "success is what happens after an incredible accumulation of failures." Even if you have one failure after the other you still can't lose a speck of your enthusiasm. I really feel that way."

*Singer and actress Ute Lemper*

on the responsibility that comes with being an artist

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*✓ ON GETTING OVER THE IDEA OF FAILURE ✓*

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"There's no way to know [how to develop your work] without just fucking fail, fail, fail, fail, failing at it. I mean, failure is such a boring old trend now. Everybody knows that failure is the key to everything. But then what's next? If we know that failure is the way to get anything done that feels good, then it's about getting the space to imagine the actual utopia that follows it. So yes, fail, but also allow yourself to imagine what could come next—not the perfect world inside of this world, but the perfect world that seems impossible. That is the thing that I hope comes out of a million failures."

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*Writer, comedian, performance artist,  
and singer Erin Markey on trusting yourself*

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"I deal with rejection, or perceived rejection, by feeling like a loser. I know some people who say you have to just let rejection roll off of you like water off a duck's back. Well, sorry but I'm not a duck. Much of my life is an exercise in waiting for confirmation of my worst fears about myself, all of which can be distilled into two categories: that I am a loser, and/or that I am cosmically bad. Sometimes when I get validated for my work, I get high off the validation and forget that fear of whether I deserve to be here for like five seconds. But ultimately nothing gold can stay, including the high of achievement. And in terms of rejection and the feelings of loserdom that follow, I don't stop writing or anything. Writing is just what I do."

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*Writer Melissa Broder*

*on dealing with creative rejection*



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👁 **ON HOW REJECTION ISN'T AS BAD AS YOU THINK** 👁

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"I went from this really dark period of constant rejection, which felt like the world just inviting me to capitulate to the fact of my own worthlessness and give in, to something really wonderful... You just persevere. There are time periods where people think you're terrific and then time periods where they don't want to take your calls, but you haven't changed, you know? It happens."

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*Actress, singer, and performer Betty Buckley  
on understanding your creative path*

"Obviously, there are bad times along the way where you're like, 'This is frustrating' or 'I need a break.' I've had, like anyone, my fair share of big career rejections or things that I thought were going to work out better or whatever and they didn't, but I'm grateful for them because if you're still in it, they'll make you better. It gives you a stronger perspective."

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*Comedian Josh Fadem  
on putting in the time*

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“Being a playwright or an actor—or really being anyone in theater—is so full of rejection. It’s really hard to keep going at times. My advice would be to further encourage the ‘don’t give up, keep going’ mentality. Because after hundreds of rejections comes a really big-deal acceptance. Then you’re going to get more rejections. But then you’ll get another really big-deal acceptance. And you’ll just keep going from there.”

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*Lawyer and playwright Mary Kathryn Nagle  
on working two full-time jobs without burning out*

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👁 **ON HOW REJECTION ISN'T AS BAD AS YOU THINK** 👁

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"When people talk about the heartbreak and rejection of [the TV industry], I'm always like, 'Really? You don't have a sense of humor about it? How can you take it personally when stupid execs are the ones making these decisions?' [My creative collaborator and I] both had tons of micro rejections along the way, but [this recent rejection of our TV pilot]... This was our biggest dream. And it was truly crushing. I didn't sleep. There was lots of crying. It was really, really bad. But we had a little refocusing trip and got back in touch with that more brazen side of ourselves that knows what we're doing and knows the kind of creative people we are. And we know it's gonna be a long road for us because we don't make things that are immediately sellable in the minds of executives."

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*Comedian, actor, writer, and producer John Early  
on learning how to calm the fuck down*

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"I just feel very often that I'm in a state of intense agitation. I think it's energetic. I think it's about my physical self. I don't think there's anything wrong with my psychology per se, although maybe people reading my work would disagree. I just feel like I have a very deeply agitated body, and that can sometimes provide the impetus for passion. Like, 'Oh god, I hate this feeling. Maybe if I can have a spiritual experience through being creative, I'll feel different.'"

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*Novelist Ottessa Moshfegh*  
*on writing as a rite of passage*

"Some days you might not want to face the agony it takes to process the stuff you have in you—but this kind of work is not for the fragile. You have to be somewhat of a warrior. It's why you see a lot of writer types that are kind of angry, itchy people. That's because they're playing chess with their psyche all the time. You have to be ready to grapple with the fact that some days there will be nothing. You've got to trust and remember that on other days there'll be too much and it'll make you crazy in a different way."

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*Jack-of-all-trades Henry Rollins*  
*on defining success*

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° ON CHANNELING ANXIETY INTO WORK °

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"No one likes writing. At least, I don't think any great writer likes writing. It's the worst. To live in anxiety, it's the worst. I'm just a huge fan of therapy. I'm currently at a place called Wi Spa. It's a Korean spa. It's like 20 bucks to get in, but it's the best place in the world. I'll write for 20 minutes and then I'll go sit in the hot tub for 10 minutes, and then I'll come back up and write for an hour. I will surround myself with luxury in order to get [the first draft] out. It's a \$20 luxury, but that is what I'll do. The hardest part is just getting it out, getting out the bad draft and accepting that you're going to be bad at it."

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*Writer and Navajo tapestry weaver Sierra Teller Ornelas  
on giving yourself permission to suck*

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"I saw my strength as the ability to find beauty in things that aren't inherently beautiful. I was trying to write from that place, more or less, but at a certain point I became so depressed that I was no longer able to do that. So I made this very distinct decision—what if instead of trying to hide that voice in my head, a voice that I had chosen to see as having no value, a negative voice—what if instead I just gave in to it and tried to write as that voice instead? When I would try to speak as the depression itself, it could often be kind of hilarious when said out loud, so that become the voice of the book."

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*Comedian Jacqueline Novak*

*on giving a voice to your depression*

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° ON CHANNELING ANXIETY INTO WORK °  
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"In the past I was trying to look at what in literary tradition allowed me to feel liberated or free. But in the last three years I've just been working through ideas of grieving. I am writing through ideas of grief and trauma and exploring how the obvious cliché that life is for the living has really been depressing and yet important. Poetry has allowed me to go deeper into thinking about what it means to grieve, and love, and to make difficult choices that are about will. Poetry can will certain senses into my daily life."

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*Poet Prageeta Sharma*  
*on writing through grief*

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"I feel unsafe in different ways. The unsafety in writing a book is the fear of not being able to pull it off, to finish it. Then, where it's going to take you mentally, and in terms of the choices you make in your life, because it always affects everything that you're doing and your path forward. Releasing a book, the feeling of unsafety is just [the fear of] people hating it, people hating you, and then being cast away from the herd of humanity. I always feel very aware of how fragile my perception of my own work is, and I know that people will see it differently than I do."

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*Writer and editor Sheila Heti*  
*on being vulnerable in your work*



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\* *ON WORKING WITH FEAR* \*  
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"Often we are afraid. We're just full of fears, full of doubts, full of insecurities, and we're unable to manifest our vision because we are broken inside. When you're broken you give birth to broken dreams. So healing is how to allow a flow of infinite creative energy to move through you, with you, and for it to work as you. How can you be yourself, a body in service of the infinite? That's what healing is for me, right now. It changes as I grow, as I bloom."

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*Visual artist and healer Tabita Rezaire  
on the infinite flow of creative energy*

"After you've done something thousands of times you become better at it and ideally you get some great joy in doing it. There's also something truly magical about starting something new, about not knowing what the fuck you're doing. I'm always kind of chasing that. I'll be honest with you, I still hear that goddamn critic go, 'You don't know what you're doing!' I hear it and I'm like, 'Where did you come from?' It's just fear."

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*Musician, writer, and photographer Nikki Sixx  
on not getting stuck*

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"I feel like a lot of my life has been about intentionally approaching the things that freak me out. I'm easily freaked out. I'm super anxious. I've always been that way. I'm a very fearful and anxiety-ridden person. I feel like part of my life project has been walking up to things that freak me the fuck out and just doing them because otherwise I'd be mad at myself. That's really important to me."

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*Writer Carmen Maria Machado*

*on writing about whatever you want*

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\* *ON WORKING WITH FEAR* \*  
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"I remember before shooting *Spa Night*, realizing that I hadn't actually shot a film in years. Calling myself a director in that moment sounded crazy when I had only directed five days out of the past four years of my life. I had this moment where I was like, "Okay, I just have to take this as a learning experience." I think there's a lot of fear about not knowing something, and we just have to accept the fact that we don't know a lot of things, and that not knowing isn't something to be scared of, but is actually the thing that drives learning. I try and look at it from that angle... and then the anxiety disappears."

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*Director Andrew Ahn*  
*on imposter syndrome*

## We asked The Creative Independent readers to tell us what made them anxious about starting something new. *Here's what they said:*

1

Worrying if all this effort is going to result in anything.

The crippling fear of “ruining” a promising little nugget of an idea.

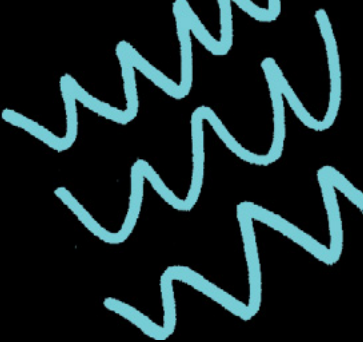

That nagging question, “What if this isn’t that life-changing idea?”

Fear of having started too late (which leads one only to starting later).

2

The understanding that it may take years to reach a workable draft, only to realize it’s actually unworkable (or just plain bad).


Self doubt. When I’m starting something new, the hardest part is seeing all the benchmarks ahead without becoming overwhelmed by the question, “Is this even realistically achievable?”

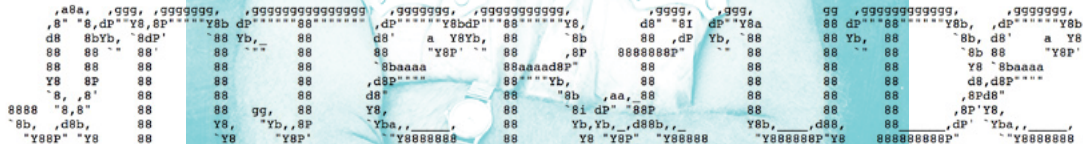


Not letting it just be an experiment. It's hard to just try something new without spending a lot of time thinking about it, making it look good, and all that. I want to get better at just letting things ride out, and seeing what unfolds.

All the other things I want to be doing. It seems that the creative spirit is like going to the supermarket for one thing, and then being confronted with hundreds of variations of that one thing. I'm always thinking, "Maybe I should have done this other thing."

Deciding what to focus on. I can easily drift into so many different topics, even when studying just one object, event, or emotion. The hardest part is to filter out what I think is important and what's not, and then decide if my decision is correct. There's a constant doubt about whether I chose the right path.





*Thoughts on mental health  
from musician, painter, writer, plumber, and carpenter Thor Harris.*

**I**t's hard to know if we as a species are more or less mentally ill than we were in the past. Overall, anxiety does seem to be up. Diet and exercise have profound effects on our mental health, but sometimes our brains need additional assistance. I hang out with a lot of creative people, and many of them use psychotropic meds and/or talk therapy. If you ever feel like criticizing anyone for employing these, shut the fuck up. You are ignorant. Using pharma to help your brain is not "treating the symptoms and ignoring the problem." We all have to figure out what works for us. I have many friends who are on SSRIs. Others microdose with everything from LSD, to ketamine, to mushrooms, to lithium, to marijuana.

As the natural world disappears, anxiety could be a way sensitive brains respond. Who the hell knows? But if your brain chemistry betrays you, treat yourself the way you would treat a friend in a

similar situation: with gentle care. Do not isolate. We are social creatures. We all (even introverts) need each other. Get help. It is harder for many of us to accept help than to give it.

Many of us are cruel self critics. Quit it. Be good to others and for fuck's sake be good to yourself. Purge all of your childish expectation about what you (or your parents) thought you should be by now. None of that shit has any basis in reality. Important work does not always pay. Capitalism is pretty shitty to a lot of the most brilliant members of our society. It actually rewards cruelty. I deal with depression. It ain't easy, but it can be managed.

Read all of Thor's advice  
on staying healthy at  
[www.thecreativeindependent.com](http://www.thecreativeindependent.com)

**We asked The Creative Independent readers how they [attempt to] overcome anxiety and reach their long-term creative goals.**

***Here's what they said:***



By reminding myself daily of what makes me happy.

By calling friends a lot and supporting them and their work.

By taking risks, and by considering potential outcomes—but not fearing them.

By taking pauses between the bullet points on my list to let myself do nothing.

Through planning, routines, letting go of my ego, and being okay with starting small and seeing slow progress.



By spending time doing productive activities, and less time reading news on my phone and scrolling through social media.

By looking for and celebrating the good. Taking time to be grateful. Identifying my soft spots and being tender with them.



By getting lost in the process of creation without judging it, and by realizing that everything I need to create is right in front of me.

By embracing weirdness and queerness and being brave enough to show it to others. And by developing my view of the world and my place within it.

By being honest about how I'm feeling with the world, in both simple and complicated times. I want to find my limits and push them, nudge them, feel them out and then define them for myself.

By not wasting energy on people and things that don't help to nourish or sustain me. By working on building slow connections with the right people. By asking for what I want, and by being direct. I'm working on admitting my needs and desires, and admitting that it's ok to ask for help.

By embracing joy and softness as forces for radical change. When things feel crazy, take a nap and drink some water. I want to worry less about everyone else, go to bed at a reasonable hour, and read more books. I want to show affection even when it feels vulnerable to do so—perhaps especially when it feels vulnerable to do so. I want to give myself credit when it is due, which is more often than I tend to believe.



# How to ask for what you need

~ WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DEAL WITH YOUR CREATIVE ANXIETY?

AND HOW CAN YOU ASK FOR IT? ~

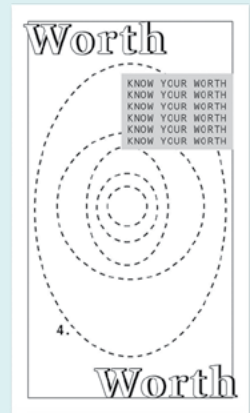
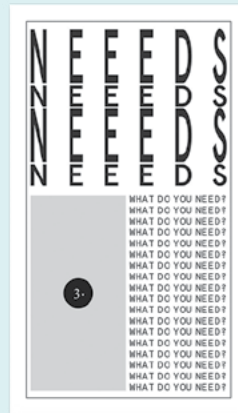
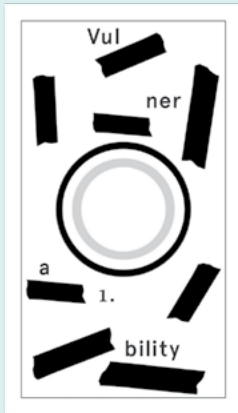
Excerpted from *A guide to asking for what you need* by The Void Academy

If you're afraid of asking for what you need, you are not alone. In some ways, this fear is what we're all conditioned to feel in a capitalist society managed by a scarcity-model market. These two factors create competition. Feeling like you have to constantly fight for your space in the world can make you believe that since everyone else is fighting the same fight, people will be unwilling to help you. This fear can be further exacerbated by institutional marginalization of folks other than those privileged within the white-supremacist-racist-ableist-transphobic heteropatriarchy.

There are a few factors that are crucial to shifting this endless cycle of fear and alienation so you can get on with asking for what you need. The first is being able to recognize that this fear is not innate, but rather conditioned; that fear is a symptom and that we do indeed live in a world in which many humans want to help other humans.

The second factor to overcoming the fear of asking for support is by recognizing and naming your own needs. What resources or skills do you lack? Where are you struggling? Nobody exists in a vacuum and everyone needs support sometimes. By naming your needs, you can let go of unreasonable expectations you might be holding onto in relation to handling everything yourself.

A third factor to overcoming your fear of asking for support is learning to ask directly for what you need, rather than waiting around for someone to ask if you need anything. When you name your needs and proactively ask others to help you, you allow the ask to do work on your behalf. And, by asking for support, your vulnerability allows a person to make a choice to play a positive part in your creative journey. This kind of exchange opens doors and enables a kind of positive world building to take place.



**Let's do a quick mental exercise to help sweep this fear of asking out of the way.**

Make a space where you can write some things down.

Now ask yourself: How does the idea of asking someone for something you need make you feel?

You can answer this question in a few words, or with full sentences.

Now, answer this question: What does it feel like to give?

Think about yourself as a giver. How do you give to the people, causes, and institutions you love? What does it feel like when you support an artist or person who you care about?

Most people don't realize that when you ask, you're not just creating an opportunity for yourself—you're also giving your supporters an opportunity to engage more deeply with you and your work. Asking gives a person the opportunity to experience all of the positive feelings and thoughts that can come along with giving.

Remember: if you make art that resonates with people, they'll want you to keep making it. But until you clarify what you need to keep making it, you'll be the only one who knows what you need to keep going.

*Read more about how to ask for what you need at [www.thecreativeindependent.com](http://www.thecreativeindependent.com)*



# A few recommendations that may help alleviate creative anxiety



- Use sage
  - Eat raw garlic
  - Drink wheatgrass
  - Swim in the Mediterranean
- *Musician, poet, and performance artist Mykki Blanco on trusting your own talent*



- Have at least one dog in your life at all times.
  - Read *The Lonely City: Adventures in the Art of Being Alone* by Olivia Laing. It's about a woman living in NYC in her 30s, and the spaces between people—how those gaps can draw us together, and how loneliness is so intrinsic to the very act of being a person.
  - Care less about what other people think, and remind yourself that most people are so concerned with/insecure about themselves that they don't notice your imperfections.
- *Visual artist Addie Wagenknecht on finding happiness and giving zero fucks*



- Tropical fish stores. I love the otherworldly lighting, the thick, fish-tanky air, the nerdy patrons, and, of course, the fish themselves.
- Biking over bridges. Going up is not fun, but at the midway point you can stop pedaling and just glide, feeling like you're floating high above water.
- The cold. If you let it, a cold day can really put you in touch with your will to live. Plus there's nothing sexier than coming in from the cold, ideally into a warm space that smells of cooking.

*– Artist and teacher Neil Goldberg  
on process and performance*



"It's really important for me to be in nature. I find it healing and creatively inspiring. I also read a lot and see lots of films. And, the more absurd and scary the world becomes, the more I crave the presence of art. Looking at art, making art, being creative—all of these things are more important than ever. That's what I always come back to. Art is a lifeline for all of us. And I'm not talking about escapism—that word actually kind of annoys me—because I don't think looking at art or watching a really beautiful film is escapism. Art helps us connect very deeply to these parts of ourselves that we tend to ignore or overlook sometimes. It's mind expanding and heart expanding and it keeps us all connected."

*– Musician Alison Goldfrapp on  
paying attention to detail*

# APPENDIX

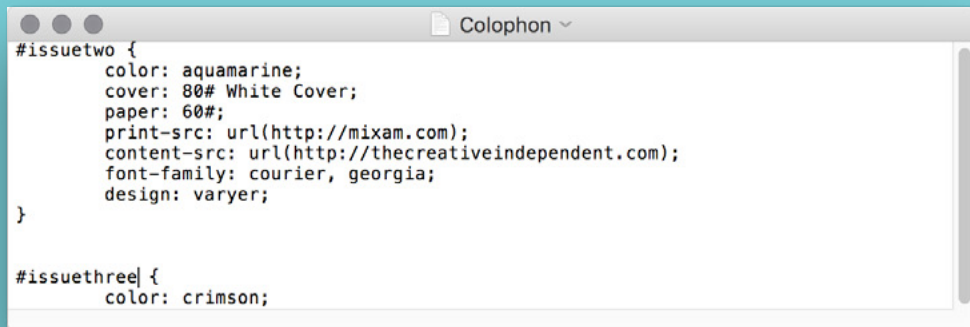
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