

Title:

The Masks Of Writer's Block

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623

Summary:

Writer's block is one of those enigmatic problems that all writers must face. However, how often does a writer experience an inability to write properly and claims to have writer's block, but is actually dealing with an altogether different issue?

Keywords:

anxiety, performance anxiety, status anxiety

Article Body:

If you've ever tried to write anything more important than a random message to someone over the Internet, then you've likely encountered writer's block. That odd, undefined mental event that keeps one from getting any workable ideas, or prevents you from making full use of a good concept. If you've ever tried your hand at writing a novel, chances are you've managed to get a good start or two, but something happened along the way. Chances are, you're still telling yourself that you'll get back to that piece and give it the proper narrative it deserves, even if you don't even remember when you last opened that file. There's a very good chance you might even feel a touch of anxiety in going back to it. The fact is, writer's block is one of those undefinable states of mind that can kill even the best ideas.

The nature of writer's block makes it difficult to pin down or describe. Some have pointed to performance anxiety as being a condition that writers commonly misconstrue as writer's block. The inability to competently perform - or write, as the case may be - can often be interpreted as performance anxiety, particularly if the problem occurs at the perceived "onset" of the creative process. This is far from being an absolute assumption, however, as some people have a creative process that experiences natural difficulty in getting a project started, but picks up speed as the narrative is constructed. That sort of event is more closely tied to the personal intricacies of the creative process, rather than to any outright form of performance anxiety. It is possible for writers to manifest symptoms of performance anxiety when writing sequels or prequels to previously published novels, but even that observation is debatable.

In some cases, status anxiety has also been "labeled" as writer's block,

particularly for authors who write successful series. The reasoning behind this is that the initial work gains more popularity the longer the series goes on, which in turn, puts more and more pressure on the people responsible for the series. Assuming that the series is written by a single author, that poor soul has to bear the burden of continuing a series that has not only established itself in the literary market, but he also has to contend with an even more difficult task: the author must also contend with the written canon of his own work. Sometimes, the pressure for the next novel in a series to outdo the previous ones can take the form of status anxiety. The author may feel status anxiety as he writes the novel, preventing him from completing any significant portions of the new narrative for fear that it does not match up to the previous one. In theory, the anxiety just gets worse with every novel that gets churned out.

Of course, there is also the perennial cause of the temporary "death" of a person's creativity: laziness. Let's face it, writers - and, by extension, all other creative types - are as prone to fits of laziness and lack of motivation as the next worker along the assembly line that is modern society. Far more often than any author would like to admit, writer's block is really just a fancy cover for being lazy. There will always be times when a writer simply would not feel the inclination to write, but this can often be seen as a mistake. Writing is like a martial art, in some ways, because you're never going to really master it without testing your skills repeatedly against opponents and sparring partners. Laziness and procrastination just contribute to a decline in skill that makes whatever writing project you decide to undertake significantly harder than the last one you finished.