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**IV. Bad Feelings About Writing Don’t Mean You’re a Bad Writer**

*Apr 09, 2015 by Amy Benson Brown*

Do you put off writing until deadlines aren’t just pinging on your digital calendar but pounding at your door? Are you haunted by the suspicion that your peers dash off an article a month, fueled only by natural eloquence and a decafe latte, while you, on the other hand, strain for hours to churn out a few paragraphs and delete most of them later? In short, would you rather do almost anything than write? Well, so would many professional authors.

Of course, writing can be deeply satisfying and personally rewarding in a way few other activities can be. But the poet Dorothy Parker’s quip, “I hate writing, I love having written” still makes writers everywhere chuckle. I love Parker’s frankness because it debunks the myth that good writing flows effortlessly, like a stream from a few rare mortals mysteriously gifted with the right stuff. The truth is that everyone who ultimately produces good writing goes through periods of feeling bad about his or her writing. Often those negative feelings are triggered by the difficulty of writing itself.

It is extremely hard work to arrange original words on a blank page to convey meaningful ideas in such a way that an audience will be compelled by those ideas. I say this as someone who at different points in life has swung shifts in a paper mill and reared small children while holding down a 4/4 teaching load. My point simply is that I have a fair understanding of hard work. And writing definitely counts. Like most every other labor, it does become easier, more efficient, and more successful with steady practice. So, why does the myth persist that talent alone carries real writers painlessly across the finish line to publication?

The fact is that writing itself, putting the hours in, gets you across the finish line. Negative emotions may regularly pop up when you sit down to work. Maybe you fear your argument doesn’t actually hold water. Maybe you fear the way a particularly nasty colleague might ridicule it. You might want to think of those critical thoughts “gremlins” because they can stalk your confidence like nasty little monsters. The trick is to not let those negative thoughts control your actions. It’s normal to experience some uncertainty as you pull the threads of an argument together.

Finding the right words to express complex ideas clearly is a struggle all writers endure. But the task for academic authors can be particularly difficult because often you are trying to articulate something that has not been said before. So, no pre-existing template or perfect vocabulary for expressing those points may exist.

This experience of temporary inarticulateness can make even highly intelligent people feel stupid. But it’s important to remember that feeling frustrated does not mean that you are deficient somehow as a writer or that your work lacks merit. Often, it means that you are extending your reach. The fact remains that sometimes the only way to see how to write it right is to write it wrong first. Though that experience can feel like failure, it is really no indication, ultimately, of how good the final work will be. It is often simply a necessary step in the process of developing clarity about how to best structure and express your ideas.

To increase your confidence or sense of self-efficacy as writer, it is also helpful to step back and gain clarity on the weaknesses and strengths of your writing. The next two blogs in this series explore how to more accurately, and usefully, assess what’s working well in your writing and what really needs improvement.