

# DAVID HICKS

## Writing Tip: *Stay in the Chair*

While “**writer’s block**” is sometimes a physical thing (caused by a disability, chronic pain, or nutrition/hydration issues), in most cases it’s at least part psychological.

If you find yourself unable to write, you may think it’s because you need more coffee, or the house is a mess and you need to clean, or there’s something wrong with your writing space. But the two most likely reasons are . . .

1. You’re not invested in what you’re writing; or
2. You *are* invested but you’re afraid of what’s coming.

In either case, there’s no reason to feel inadequate or ashamed about being “blocked”. It’s just part of being a writer, and more importantly something you can address.

**Problem: You’re not invested in what you’re writing.**

**Tip: Find your “why.”**

If you’re not fully invested in what you’re writing—for example, if you’re writing something you’re supposed to write or think you *should* write, as opposed to something you feel compelled to write—that may be why you’re “blocked.” It may be an assignment, or something you’re doing for money (or because it’s what you think the market “wants” right now), and because of that, you’re just not that into it; so you’re going to feel bored, or “stuck,” or “blocked.” But you’re not actually stuck or blocked—you’re just writing the wrong thing.

So . . . what’s your “why”? If your answer is “If I do this, I’ll get published and make gobs of cash,” and not, “I love this story” or “I want to discover something about myself,” then consider switching to a story that would turn you on instead of turning you off.

**Problem: You’re afraid of what’s ahead.**

**Tip: Stay in the chair.**

Let’s say you’re writing something you really want, or *need*, to write—okay, good. But maybe you’re a little afraid to write it, or your character is about to do something you don’t want them to do, or there’s an unexpected memory coming up, and your brain and body know what’s ahead, even if *you* consciously *don’t*. Unless it’s something triggering or traumatic and you don’t have the support you need (in which case it’s not always *necessary* for you to plunge ahead), then the answer is not to take a walk, or make another pot of coffee, or read blog posts about writer’s block. The answer, as my writing mentor Ron Carlson often said, is to *stay in the chair*.

Because what you’re afraid of is giving up control of your narrative. Whatever is coming next, it’s something that you didn’t plan on, or something a family member is not going to approve of, or something you’ve repressed in order to cope with your daily life—and it’s going to make you quite vulnerable to write it. Your psyche is fighting simultaneously to get it out and to keep it in. On the surface, all you may be thinking is “Huh, I guess I have writer’s block.” and you take a break or abandon the project. But what you really need to do is stay in the chair. And wait. Because it’s coming.

It’s an act of faith, really. An act of trust. In yourself. In your unconscious. Wait, and let whatever it is bubble up to consciousness. And then write it down, whatever it is. It’ll end up being good for the story, good for you, and good for the reader. Your surprise will be the reader’s surprise, and your vulnerability and authenticity will draw the reader into a more intimate engagement with your work.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson’s aunt once said to him, ***Always do what you’re afraid to do.***