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The Main Reason People Don't Chase Their Dream of Writing

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The Main Reason People Don't Chase Their Dream of Writing

By Emma Gisclair
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The life of a successful author: Revise and revise and revise...



(Photo by Pixabay)

When you tell people that you're a writer, I've found the most common response is: "I want to write a book one day, too."

While it seems like everyone wants to write a book, the number of people who follow through with that dream is significantly fewer. Why? Maybe it's because of a lack of

time—between a career, hobbies, raising children, and the never-ending to-do list, 24 hours in a day never feels like enough.

Learning how to write a book, developing that idea into a full plot, and writing those 50,000 to 100,000 words that make up a book all require time. And we won't even talk about the endless rounds of revisions, figuring out how to get the thing published once it's finished, and on and on...

After seven years of studying the craft of storytelling, and drafting and revising four books, I still haven't reached publication.

At least, that's been my experience. After seven years of studying the craft of storytelling, and drafting and revising four books, I still haven't reached publication. I have so much more to learn and improve on before my work is ready.

But I don't think time is the only factor that prevents people from chasing their writing dreams. Instead, it's an excuse that masks the real reason they don't even try: Fear. Fear that they won't be good enough. Fear that their ideas are worthless. Fear that they will fail.

As poet and novelist Sylvia Plath said, "The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt." And a lot of that doubt stems from misconceptions that we, as a society, have about creativity.

Misconception No. 1: Creativity = uniquely original ideas

I get it. You want to write something that no one else has ever written before. And you will. Not because you've come up with an idea that has never been done before, but because no one else is going to combine story elements together in the way you will and because no one else is coming to the story with the exact same background, tastes and experiences as you.

Humans have been telling stories as long as we've existed, so the chances that someone else has written a book about a ghost haunting a boarding school are good. That's OK. Suzanne Collins wasn't the first to write about teens fighting to the death. Bram Stoker probably wasn't the first to set a terrifying tale in a gothic castle. Their stories are still full of creativity because of the way they chose to tell them.

So don't stress if your idea bears a passing resemblance to some other book. As you write it, it will become uniquely yours.

Misconception No. 2: Creativity requires an innate talent

This type of thinking is a trap we've all fallen into. By the end of elementary school, I'd already decided that I just wasn't "good" at drawing. But the truth is that I never took the time to learn how to draw. I didn't take art classes, I didn't practice. We tend to put

art—whether painting, writing or playing the piano—into a separate category from other skills, a category that we surmise requires some special piece of DNA to be successful.

Anyone can learn coding or phlebotomy with enough practice, we believe, but if you aren't an immediate violin virtuoso, there's no point in trying.

Ask any artist about the years they spent honing their craft and you'll learn about the hours of practicing that complicated piece of music, the 50 failed sculptures before the masterpiece, the terrible first draft that had to be rewritten and revised a dozen times before it became a best seller. We see artists as innately talented, as overnight successes, because we don't usually get to peek behind the curtain at the failures and the persistence that led to their triumph.

So when you write that first chapter but then decide it's complete and utter garbage, don't give up. Keep writing and by the time you get to "the end," you'll already be a better writer than you were before. Read a book or find a blog about how to craft a compelling story. Study your favorite novels to figure out how they pulled off that twist, what made you sympathize with the main character, why you just couldn't put it down.

Write another book and another. Make friends with fellow writers who can help you find the flaws in your work (because bonus misconception: Writing doesn't have to be a solitary act). Use their feedback to improve your book. Write another book, revise it and revise it again.

Is it hard? Yes. There will be days where you cry over your keyboard and wonder if you should quit. Nights where the words just won't come. Keep practicing; don't give in to self-doubt. Because in the end, the joy of creating—of knowing you took a kernel of an idea from your head and turned it into something—is incomparable.

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