

Writer's Block Detox

Transcript:
What's in your head?

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So. There's something I want to talk to you about, and it is what's in your head. Some of you are here because you just want to be walked through creating your ideas, but most of us have some procrastination issues. And you know how it is, the problem is that when you're not writing you start to feel bad about it, and then like you can't do it and so it gets harder to do it and then you feel worse about it, and it's something about this little cycle that I want to talk about.

I've got 3 thoughts for you that have made a huge difference to my life, they're things that can help you see your patterns in the way you think about writing, and how you can start to change it so that you feel good about it.

So the first thing is, what in your head isn't real, is not reality. And I know that we like to think that we're right all the time and that we know what the truth is, that we're objective, but we're just not.

I mean, as a little example, when I was six I was convinced that there were adult names and child names and that you picked yourself a new adult name when you were grown up. This was based on the facts that I had available at the time which was that I didn't know any adults and children who had the same name. But just because I thought it didn't mean that it was actually true. Equally, whatever the voices in your head are telling you about your writing, whatever you believe about them and about your ability in writing, it's probably not objective truth.

I mean, we kind of absorb all of these messages about who we are and what we are and what we can and can't do as we grow up, and these things turn into our internal voice, and it turns into the thing that we say to ourselves all the time. And it means that there's all sorts of junk in our head that's not really the truth and it's not really helpful, we get so used to putting ourselves down that we start thinking that we're not capable of doing this or that or that we don't like this or that. I heard someone once say that it was like the equivalent of walking around with windows 95 still loaded into your brain, and this is the same thing, you're working on old assumptions and old programming that's not really relevant and is not really right any more.

So the second thing is that these thoughts, these thoughts that tell you the supposed 'reality' that you aren't a writer, they create your feelings.

So as an example, you know when you wake up from a dream about having an argument with someone and you're annoyed with them all day and then by the time you see them you're really snippy and they're like, what?! I haven't done anything! Because they're completely innocent! It's *your* thoughts and the fact that *you've* been going over and over some non-existent dream-argument that has made you irritated.

Again, totally normal, but it's really helpful to be aware that all of these things that you say to yourself and which you do repeat over and over and over again, because that's what people do, *that* is what's creating the negative feelings that you have about writing and about who you are and your ability to write, and it's making you feel like you don't want to do it. So you can change your feelings by changing your thoughts.

Now, the third thing, and this is where a lot of us have trouble with making changes in our behaviour, is that it's really hard to rationalise your way into action if that goes against your feelings.

We all like to think, not just that we're right all the time, but that we're also really rational, and

unfortunately there's a lot of studies suggesting that this just isn't the case, and although people think that they'll act rationally and act in their best interests, they consistently don't. There's a book called *Change*, no it's called *Switch* sorry, where they use the analogy of you and your subconscious being like a person riding an elephant, it's all well and good if the rational person who wants to do something like write more agrees with the elephant, the subconscious, but if the elephant's really against it, it's not really that easy for the tiny person on top to physically force however many tons of elephant to do it.

So, what can you do? The first thing is, that if feelings are that powerful, and they are, you need to start paying attention to them. If you've done any mindfulness work you might be familiar with the idea of noticing. Make a point of noticing: stopping and thinking, what am I feeling about writing, particularly if you find yourself not wanting to do it. And you can either just take a moment to do this or you can write it down and kind of keep a log of how you feel about your writing.

And the point isn't to judge yourself and to think, ooh I shouldn't be thinking that, I shouldn't be feeling that. This isn't another stick to beat yourself with. It's just so that you can see what's inside. So if you think about writing and you get this feeling of dread and you want to shrink away from it and you think, I don't want to write, that's really useful information to have, just the fact that this feeling exists. And it's not a quick fix, just plain noticing something you don't necessarily get rid of it, but it does give you a bit of breathing room, it can help you to be less tangled in the emotion and it gives you the opportunity to take a moment and think, well, okay, is this a helpful thought? Is there another way of looking at it? What else might be true?

And the other thing that you can do about it, is to show yourself that you're wrong, to make yourself see it and most importantly to *feel* it so that you then get good feelings about writing and want to do it again, and the way to change the way that you feel is by doing something. Like I said, it's quite, if you've got negative feelings about say writing it can be quite hard to push past that, but if you can find a way of doing it, so maybe you can just do the one thing that you would feel least horrible about, like maybe you agree with yourself to pick up a pen and write one sentence and that's all you have to do, then you actually experience it not being so terrible because really writing a sentence is not that bad. And if you can do this a few times then you start to change how you feel about it and your feelings start to become positive because you've had a positive experience, and that is what we're trying to do in these four weeks, to help you see it and feel that there is an alternative to all of this junk in your head that's been getting you stuck and remind you that wahey, writing can be fun.

So this week, just try and notice what you're saying to yourself, and I'll see you back here soon!