



Freeze: Overcoming creative block



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A squeezing grip around your heart, no matter how hard you wish for artist's block to go away that freeze on the flow of your ideas just isn't going anywhere. Like being snowed in for a long winter, it can be dark, bleak and miserably lonely. For a while now I've been struggling with breaking down that wall and getting those ideas and creativity flowing, and it's definitely harder than it looks.

Creative block can happen to all of us, no matter what you do - draw, paint, write, cook, bubble gum sculptures, it can strike at any moment. The lights go out and suddenly you can't see the beauty or wonder in anything. Life is just blah. Being creative in a blah life is next to impossible. I'll sit in front of the computer, a sketch book, a bucket of lego and nothing will happen. Nothing will get created.

Have you ever experienced it? It's awful, and when creativity is such a huge part of who you are, it can seem like a piece of you just flew away. As I sit in front of a blank piece of paper I start to get the feeling that nothing is ever going to come, and this leads to an unwillingness to try. The notebooks get dusty and my sharpeners begin to rust, and I get blue watching all this time go by without a single thing to show for it - apart from perhaps a healthy right hand mouse click, and the highest number of rings I've ever collected as Sonic the Hedgehog...

In my journey through the proverbial wall, I discovered ways in which to equip myself with metaphorical tools that would help me break the barriers down. The best first step I could think of was going past the symptom to find the cause, and trying to solve the problems that may be building this wall around me.



Feeling blue.

I've been pretty down lately, overwhelmed by personal issues, stressed out at work and generally feeling pulled in all directions. When you feel like that, it's hard to make yourself pay your bills on time, let alone pick up a pencil and make something pretty. It's important to recognize when you're feeling upset or need to deal with something else that takes energy away from creativity.

No time.

Running around town with a ton of things to do means creative outlets get pushed to the bottom of the list. From day to day tasks like laundry, cooking dinner, drawing moustaches on magazines to making time to see friends and family. Even things like enjoying the sun while it lasts, it all adds up and before you know it three weeks have passed and you can't remember how to hold a pencil.

Comparison.

While I was feeling blue I didn't really have it in me to do much. Add to that a stressful day at work and no real time to sit and draw, I figured the least I could do was research. That might spark that flame that gets the fire going again! No, what it actually did was make me compare myself to all the other blogs and artists out there that are doing it better than I can, and make me wonder why the hell I was even trying.

Failure.

A few months back now I took part in a craft fair that completely ruined me. It was a terrible show that put almost all the vendors out thousands of dollars. I was one of the lucky ones, being smaller scale and local I hadn't lost out on too much. But I did lose out, and what made it worse was the lack of response to my stuff. It was the wrong crowd, and with no feedback, no sales and no visitors to my booth, I was left feeling like it was all for nothing. The wind was definitely out of my sales.

These are my reasons. When I stopped and looked at everything I had on my plate, it was clear to see why I might not be feeling very creative. From this point I found it easier to navigate the next step and find a way of dealing with the problems, and pushing through them.



It's tricky to decide in which direction to go next. Although identifying the issues behind it made things a little easier, figuring out how to combat the block was still a hefty task. It's getting over that first hurdle that's the trouble, chipping away slowly and patiently until you can finally remove that first brick, and see the light on the other side.

The first thing I did, was nothing. As I was not able to think of ideas or feel in the mood to create, it seemed like a sensible move to embrace the lack of movement in my artistic life. I took a break from creating, and by choosing that break rather than trying to push through it, I was validating my own decision to not create. That felt miles better, particularly in this heat as it gave me the chance to really enjoy the summer and get parts of what some people might call a tan. I wasn't thinking "I should be using this time to create" and trying to be more productive, instead I was actually beginning to enjoy the lack of work and pushing myself. I became an art bum. Van Gogh would have been proud, the mooching layabout.

Accepting my forced hiatus gave me some breathing room, and a little perspective. It refreshed me and took a load off my mind, and felt like the first domino had finally began to fall. After that, I took some steps to ensure I maintained that positivity as I began to break through. These were my guidelines, I don't like to call them "rules" because it sounds too rigid. Rigidity is what got me here in the first place...

Take a break - Allow yourself that time to relax. Nothing is happening anyway, the ideas are not flowing, so you might as well step away and forget all about it. Staring a problem in the face doesn't get it solved any quicker, and can exacerbate the situation if you try and force yourself into doing something that's not coming naturally. Time spent away refreshes you and gives you the space to recharge.

Don't beat yourself up - Comparison just makes you feel like you're losing an impossible race. There is always going to be someone better and someone worse. And the great thing about art is that there is no right answer. Someone else's venus is not necessarily to everyone's taste, and that's just fine. So get off your own back, you're doing fine.

Remember why you started - Think about what you love about what you do. Why do you draw? Why do you write? Why do you watch Hell's Kitchen and eat Nutella straight from the jar? The answer is obvious, because it makes you feel good. You enjoy it. But why? Whether it's the finished product, the process or the silky hazelnut taste, you chose to do this for a reason and now's the time to remember what that is.

Clean up, Clean out - No wonder you can't think of anything decent to draw, your desk looks like the reject pile of the Walking Dead props department. Clear that stuff away and make some room. I mean really away where you can't see it or better yet, get rid of all that old toot completely. Cluttered space leads to a cluttered mind, open up some room where you can lose yourself in a project that takes up space. The metaphorical wall is not your problem, the dirty tea mug wall is your problem.

Feel the Flames - It's not as simple as "finding something to draw". It's not a physical disability, if I wanted to draw or write something, anything I could. The problem is the ideas are not formulating, not flowing freely from my mind. I could sit there and draw a thousand monkeys or all the socks in my drawer, but I am not able to feel the imagination I had before. That was what I need, to feel that spark again where one idea leads right into another and my mind is alight with inspiration. That love of what I do. I need to find that passion for an idea.

Sitting staring at the screen feeling sorry for myself I took a big gulp from my mug and thought to myself how deliciously comforting a cup of tea can be. Warm and wet, washing away all of life's distractions with one milky wave. It's like a snugly duvet on the inside. Tea. Glorious Tea. I got out my sketchbook and drew a cup. Then a pot. Then ten pots. Then a room with a teacup in it, and a typographic poster about how amazing tea is and before you know it, ideas are sliding in thick and fast, and piling up in my head like love letters on Ryan Gosling's door mat. I had broken through, and finally I could feel the flow begin again.



Having lived my whole life knowing that a brew will always see you through, I don't know how I could have missed it being the key to combating artists block. I guess the fact that it's been too hot to drink it for the last 3 months has been a contributing factor...

Now that I'm back in the game I'm churning out decent ideas by the bucketload. The past week or so I've been thoroughly enjoying creating new things, coming up with new ideas and exploring just how far I can push my creativity. But like a cold hard case of jury duty, it can come how far I can push for as little or as long as it chooses. All an artist can do is be prepared.

Always carry a pencil and pen - Write those ideas down when they arrive, because when the drought comes, you'll be thankful you don't have to go thirsty.

ALWAYS write ideas down. ALWAYS - You will not remember it later, and you will want to rattle yourself when future you can't remember that million dollar plan.

Make time - Life has a way of just happening, no matter what you do. There will always be something more important to do. The way you prioritize your time and what time you treasure is key. Do you really need to spend 3 hours on Instagram? Really?

Enjoy what you do - Don't think about the final product, whether people will buy it, how much it's worth or even if it'll turn out the way you want. Just do it. Enjoy it. Create for the sake of creation and for the love you have of it. Remember before Facebook we did things for our own enjoyment, and not for the approval of others? Yes, that was rather good, wasn't it. Give it another go.

Don't follow other people's advice - Seriously. What works for them may not work for you. Take in what other people are saying, evaluate it's worth and make your own decisions. Trust your own instincts. Follow your own path.

Creative block is a struggle. I'm not saying it's a fight for your life or anything, I'm not in talks with Lance Armstrong about any wristbands. But it is something that can affect an artist and their work. It makes them moody, at the very least. Take some time to validate and appreciate your creative process and flow, you never know when it'll dry up. And if you're ever in any doubt, put the kettle on.