

M&Ms

If you have ever sat down in front of your computer and tried to put your thoughts into written words, you know the term “writer’s block.” No matter how hard you try, the words just won’t flow. At times like these, my mind conjures up images of Snoopy from the *Charlie Brown* comic strip as he sits atop his doghouse with his typewriter in front of him as he undertakes another attempt at writing his future best-selling murder mystery.

“It was a dark and stormy night . . .”

Then, writer’s block takes over. No matter how hard he tries, his mind remains blank. Frustrated, he removes the sheet of paper from his typewriter, crumbles it up, and throws it in the trash. While Snoopy might never get his novel published or even written, I don’t intend to be in his situation for long. When writer’s block begins to invade my brain and cloud my creative channels, I know that I need to do something. That usually means a change of scenery . . . or at least a snack!



Chocolate can do wonders

Chocolate. That’s it! I think somewhere on the list of ingredients listed on the package is some fine print that says, “Cures writer’s block” or something to that effect. Just yesterday I was in my local Publix Supermarket doing some food shopping. I was almost to the checkout when I impulsively grabbed a bag of M&Ms and tossed it into my shopping cart. That purchase wasn’t planned, nor was it logical. If I really wanted quality chocolate, the candy aisle offered a full range of high quality selections along with inexpensive alternatives manufactured by Hershey and Mars. The aisle had a number of elaborate and enticing displays from Ferrero Rocher, Cadbury, Ghirardelli and Toblerone. Perhaps it was my talking digital scale that gave me the subliminal message to keep walking based on my recent history of weigh-ins. And like other sensible thoughts that actually do reside inside my head, I ignored them and bought that bag of M&Ms. That random purchase just might turn out to be a good thing.

Recognizing writer's block is easy. I define it as my inability to get all those creative thoughts that are hiding deep in my brain to materialize in a way that I can use them. Others might use the Merriam-Webster dictionary: "A psychological inhibition preventing a writer from proceeding with a piece." That definition assumes you as a writer know how to start your story.

There are many things in life that we do unconsciously. Nobody has to remind us to inhale, exhale, or to give our heart a nudge to beat. Once we've mastered the art of driving, the process of starting our car, putting it into gear and checking our surroundings before pulling out into traffic is nothing more than muscle memory and reflexes. (Even though some drivers have better muscle memory and reflexes than others!) So, why is creative writing different?

There are numerous accounts of writers waking up in the middle of the night and scrambling for a pen and a note pad to write down an idea before it retreats back into the deep and complicated chasms of their mind. It can happen anywhere: in the shower, while driving, or in the middle of an important business meeting. As a writer, you learn to live with it despite its frustrations. The rewards always outweigh those temporary setbacks.

Perhaps writer's block stems from what we have been taught concerning the logical order of things. Yes, the *order of things*—the beginning, the middle, and of course, the end. Getting back to our pal Snoopy and his typewriter, perhaps his problem stems from the fact that he knows how he wants to start his story, but doesn't know how to get to the next phase of his three-part journey. "Build a bridge, Snoopy," an editor might advise him. "That will help you transition that great opening line to the next part of your story." So, no matter how hard Snoopy tries, he just can't build that bridge . . . now. But experience tells me that will change.

Oversimplification

There are times that people who have really good intentions try to give us advice. Sometimes that advice is nothing more than stating the obvious in over-simplified terms. An example of this type of thinking might best be exemplified in a football team's locker room. The players are gathering around their coach for additional motivation and some pre-game strategy. They need every edge they can get. The coach steps forward and says, "Men, I don't have to tell you the importance of this game. We've practiced hard and everyone knows his individual goals and

assignments. But there is one more thing I need to say before we take the field. I *guarantee* that we will win this game if we score more points than our opponent!”

There it is. A simple solution to what is perceived to be a complex problem. I should have thought of it earlier.

Maybe the answer to solving writer’s block is as simple as *just keep writing*.

. . . And then, there’s that unopened bag of M&Ms.



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