

## TEACHING THE ART OF POETRY

---

### BEATING WRITERS' BLOCK

by Tamar Yoseloff

There comes a time in any writer's career when the words simply come to a halt. It could be that nothing is inspiring you, or perhaps there is another issue in your life which is taking centre stage, or perhaps you have just finished a large project (maybe a collection, maybe something else which has nothing to do with writing), or perhaps you are just not in the mood. Writing takes energy, full powers of imagination, confidence, drive. And we are only human.

Is there a way to kickstart your writing if you are going through a fallow period? I believe there is. The mere fact that you have downloaded this lesson means you are in the right frame of mind to do so. Many authors say the only way to keep writing is to do it constantly. Starting a writers' journal or producing a piece of automatic writing on a regular basis is a good way of keeping things flowing. Not everything you generate will be useful, but all you need is one phrase or thought to spark something new.

Here are some more ideas for beating writers' block:

- Stray from your normal habits. Chances are you always sit in the same place when you write, with the same objects around you. Go out. Take a notebook. Respond to the immediacy of your changed surroundings. Sometimes you need outside stimuli to remove you from your usual concerns.
- Use other texts. All writers are surrounded by books. I sometimes pick a volume at random (poetry or prose), open it to any page and read out the first phrase that catches my eye. I then try to use that phrase in a poem. Sometimes I am more deliberate in my choice, and I will pick a poem I know and admire, and try to use a line or idea from it as the basis for something new.
- Utilise other art forms. Sometimes other texts place a burden on us and it is refreshing to take a non-verbal approach. As I'm interested in visual art, I will often look at a reproduction of a painting (or take myself off to Tate Modern) as a way of triggering a new poem. If I'm in a museum or gallery, I make random notes as I'm walking around. But you can use a piece of music if you prefer, especially as a way of suggesting rhythm.
- Find like-minded people. One of the most rewarding things I have done as a writer is to collaborate with an artist. Both of us produced work which we would not have done without the stimulus of the other. Find someone working in another art form, or perhaps even another writer, and see where your discussions lead you. Or join a writers' group; it's important to have other writers you trust to critique your work. Even joining a book group in which you discuss the work of other authors will have an impact on what you are writing.
- And finally, accept the fact that sometimes you just need a break. If you are not writing, perhaps it's because you have nothing to say at the moment. This is natural. All writers go through it. Think of it as clearing your throat before you are about to speak. A break may give you a chance to start again with new ideas, new concerns, new energies. Embrace the silence. It doesn't mean you have to stop thinking in the meantime.

---

More ideas to inspire your writing at [www.poetryschool.com](http://www.poetryschool.com) – download, online and face-to-face

All material is © The Poetry School and the Author. Please do not reproduce, distribute or transmit this material without permission from The Poetry School.