



DEFEAT
YOUR
INNER CRITIC

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BLACK

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Defeat Your Inner Critic

By Regan Black

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Introduction

It happens to writers at every stage and pursuit. The delightful moment when you're happily writing away by pen or keyboard is suddenly interrupted by a pesky voice in your head telling you every word, every idea is crap. Telling you no one would ever want to read the drivel you're pumping out or that you'd best give up now before you embarrass yourself.

This brutal voice is known as the *inner critic*. It manifests differently in all of us, but if you ever want to achieve your best writing you need to develop a strategy to cope or tune out this dreadfully persistent voice.

I used to *believe* that horrible voice. Worse, I believed this phenomenon only happened to me because I was a newbie writer, unstudied and therefore unworthy of seeing my ideas and stories come to life on the page for readers.

After connecting with other authors, I soon learned I wasn't alone and I want you to understand that as well. The inner critic happens to everyone who writes. It's a strange, troubling expression of fear and doubt, but there are ways to overcome the dreadful, false messages it sends echoing through our heads.

That annoying voice still pipes up for me at the most inopportune moments, despite all the books I've written over the past sixteen years. On a few occasions, this voice has succeeded in pushing me off a project entirely. It took me a long time to realize my inner critic sounds like the voice of my sixth grade English teacher who told me I had no talent during a poetry project. (Spoiler alert: poetry was my first published work.)

This guide is designed to help you defeat your inner critic, empowering you to maintain a productive and healthy writing life. Each chapter is an in depth expansion of the original Inspiration For Your Writing Journey live broadcasts and along with the replays of those broadcasts, I hope this mini-course will motivate you to press on through adversity and make your writing dreams come true.

Courage and Bravery

“We don’t develop courage by being happy every day. We develop it by surviving difficult times and challenging adversity.” -Barbara de Angelis

Inner critic is a unique, internal form of adversity. Courage and bravery are essential for you to keep writing when a piece of yourself is spouting off negativity about something that should make you feel wonderful and accomplished.

Courage and bravery take practice, just like everything else in life. Did you hop on a bike and just pedal over to your best friend’s house that first time? I sure didn’t. There was a big elm tree at the end of my street that probably still has an imprint of my front bicycle tire on it. Why? Because we lived on a bit of a hill and I couldn’t make the turn or stop effectively once the momentum of the slope took over. I’d pedal out of my driveway and down the sidewalk, then stop pedaling because the increasing speed scared me. Feet not on the pedals, I couldn’t backpedal to brake so the tree at the corner always ‘caught’ my bike. Once stopped by the tree, I’d hop off the bike (assuming I’d managed to hang on), back it up, turn in the right direction, and continue on my way.

I can still hear my dad shouting out advice behind me. I can still feel how much I wanted to implement his sage advice correctly. Looking back, I can’t tell you if I mastered that turn in days or weeks, only that I was grateful for the tree so I didn’t wind up in the street. (My parents were probably grateful as well.)

Remembering that you have survived difficult circumstances is the first building block in your strategy to defeat the inner critic. Survival of any kind is the first evidence we can give ourselves of success against adversity. Whatever your background, I’m sure not every stage of your life was sunshine and rainbows, but you’re here now and you have a story to tell about how you got through those challenges.

Only days (or possibly weeks) of practice got me around that corner on my bike. It’s the same with writing. Developing a healthy writing habit and practicing sharing your work with others will build up your courage and bravery quotient.

Every day that you write, despite any internal negativity or doubt, is proof that you *can* do it. Every chance you take to further your writing is evidence of your determination.

The best news is that persistent determination trumps the inner critic.

Practice, practice, practice

Thinking and Overthinking

“There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.” -William Shakespeare

Writing, just as other forms of art, is subjective. It's neither good nor bad as we get it onto the page, only as we think it through and analyze - or overanalyze - the words.

Yes, thinking is a vital part of all writing efforts. There is the thinking of brainstorming, the daydreaming of plot twists, the research and connection with a topic or concept. Then, on the heels of those highs of having an angle or fresh idea, comes the inevitable overthinking of the value of your story or the importance of your viewpoint, and often the sense that it has all been written before. Overthinking is the inner critic's first volley in the war against writing progress.

To move forward in your writing, it is essential to ditch the urge to overthink too soon and find ways that keep you in the flow of words, tuned into the heart of your message or story. But how?

First, focus on just getting the words down. While writers should have a kernel of the impact we want to make with the end product, we gain real clarity when we have some time and distance from our work. So we have to put our best effort on the page through the draft, make it stronger in revision and editing stages and let the results come as they will when our work goes out into the world.

It isn't our job to know precisely how our reader will embrace our story or message, only our job to tell it to the best of our ability. During my husband's first deployment, I needed a mental and emotional shift from the gritty and dark world of my 2096 novels. A dear friend told me to go write something 'light and fluffy' just to keep writing. From that light and fluffy effort, the contemporary paranormal romance novels of the Matchmaker series emerged.

It was a wonderful, lighthearted experience that not only kept me writing, but buoyed my spirits and allowed me to fall in love with my writing life again. After the first book was released, I received an amazing letter from a fan who thanked me for creating a story that allowed her to laugh, smile, and simply enjoy a happy distraction while she was missing her husband when his work took him out of town for an extended time.

That lesson in that fan letter - that the words I write today could have a marvelous impact later - has stuck with me ever since. Now, when my inner critic pipes up with annoying messages of my inadequacy, I ask her, "How many books have you written?" Miraculously, this usually shuts her up so I can get back to the writing.

Seriously, who is more qualified than *you* to bring *your* writing to life? Whether you maintain a journal, aspire to monetize your blog, or want to write epic novels, if you won't write the stories in your heart or chronicle your journey to help others, who will?

Countless romance novels have been written and countless more are pitched to editors every day. Countless articles on mindset and success and overcoming adversity are written every day, and yet no one else can tell what you went through the way you can, because no one else has your insight or viewpoint. Our experience colors our world view and our world view becomes interwoven in the unique message we each need to share, no matter what industry you're in.

I believe that consistent writing, even in a journal, reveals our strengths, offers insight to our desire and purpose and gives us evidence of success to help us ward off the negativity of the inner critic.

Give yourself time to write, preferably a few minutes each day at the minimum, without the burden of expectation hovering over your shoulder. Let the words flow free, without thought or care, and let that time build up your confidence in order to give your inner critic the cold shoulder.

The Negative Committee

“Tell the negative committee that meets inside your head to sit down and shut up.” -

Unknown

The inner critic, or even the entire negative committee, is most often born out of fear. Fear of the unknown, fear of failure, or even fear of success. On top of that, fear often comes in layers. Label your fear and you can conquer it, layer by layer, day by day, page by page with a healthy writing life.

Your inner critic needs to learn to honor your experience and expertise. Your inner critic has no real-world experience, you do. That pesky voice or chorus of negativity is a ‘what if’ manifestation of the unknown, don’t let it derail what you want to accomplish.

Often when I’m writing, my inner critic will tell me I’m overusing words or phrases or butchering the glory that is perfect grammar. I’ve learned to make a note to myself and keep on going. If you experience a similar issue, remember that grammar and vocabulary choices can be corrected and improved in the revision and editing. Tell that voice to sit down, shut up, and keep on writing.

The next attack my inner critic will attempt is to pester me with an ongoing negative commentary that I write the same premises or scenes over and over, that I’ll never be an original or an innovator, etc. It goes on and on. One day, after years fighting that off, it dawned on me that of course my words, phrases, scenes and premises were familiar to me. It’s *my* work!

Writers spend a great deal of time with our characters or topics even when we’re not writing. There’s a place in our head where we’re thinking of quippy dialogue, noting the play of sunlight on a tree for future use, or toying with how best to capture a mood or an effect.

The inner critic uses this positive trait against us, proposing the notion that we’ve written that already and the words are dull and repetitive. When that happens to me in the drafting stage, I make a note like this: [repeating?] and keep right on going. Taking the time to double check the issue when the inner critic mentions it only throws me off my game and into a different mindset.

I’ve learned the hard way, the inner critic’s agenda is not in alignment with mine. My goal is to write great stories that entertain or books that inform and inspire, and to write them swiftly. My inner critic is all about making that process more of a challenge so I’ll misplace my true purpose.

One of the easiest ways to combat the noisy and persistent committee of negativity is music. Music is powerful and it can change a mood faster than nearly anything else. The right music can be a lifesaver when the inner critic proves impervious to other tactics. Meditative music, movie soundtracks, or an album that makes you want to dance in your seat or hum along can drown out those nasty voices.

For me big, Sousa-like marches are perfect when I need to nail an action scene and sweeping opera is wonderful when I'm going deep into emotions. And while I rarely write to anything with lyrics, there are several artists from country to metal to inspirational that help me get into the right mindset for certain characters.

Recently I was staring at what my inner critic assured me was an impossible deadline. According to the negative committee, I'd wasted too much time on silly things like family and research. Ruthless and rude, aren't they? Anyway, I was looking for some positive way to shake myself free of those limiting thoughts and drive out the antsy feeling that this time the committee was right.

My acupuncturist suggested a reward system of five-minute meditation breaks when I stuck with the story for a certain amount of time or a certain word count. Despite my concerns that the interruptions would be a problem, I bought the chakra album she uses during our treatments and gave her suggestion a whirl. I'm thrilled to report resounding success with that method and I continue to employ it frequently in all stages of my writing processes.

The Voice Within

“If you hear a voice within you say, ‘you cannot paint’ then by all means paint and that voice will be silenced.” -Vincent Van Gogh

In my opinion, this quote is perfect for painters, writers, and anyone who has a goal or dream. Somewhere between your decision to journey toward a goal and reaching it, there is a point when that inner critic pops in to sneer and taunt you with the idea that you’ll never make it.

I’ve learned to expect the intrusion after thirty novels and numerous additional writing efforts. I’m not always successful in batting away that voice the first time, and it is interesting how creative my inner critic can be, but writing progress is the proof I need to stand firm and silence that negative voice in my head.

It’s one reason I keep track of not only the books and stories I’ve written, but I use my journal to track how much writing I do on any given day. It’s a record of success within my chosen field.

There are author friends of mine who *regularly* have 10,000 word days. Writing at that speed, most of my drafts would be complete in less than two weeks. Nice! While I celebrate that incredible success with them, I admit I’m a little jealous that I’ve never laid claim to a day greater than 9000 words, and most of the time my word count lands in the 3000 - 4000 word range. Yet I persistently strive to hit bigger daily word count results with more ease.

Writing well in any genre, for any purpose, is about progress rather than perfection. While I do not *yet* have a 10k day to my credit, I will keep trying and learning and improving my production process to make the most of my writing time. In the meantime, having a 9k day and consistent 3k days are pretty amazing.

My consistent effort day in and day out provides a body of evidence that I can use against my inner critic, when she insists I cannot write. The inner critic can gripe and moan, but she can’t argue that the word count grows with every hour I’m writing.

That body of evidence can work in your favor as well. Consistent effort empowers us all, whether it’s writing or painting, or helping our clients. A friend of mine on periscope.tv asked me why I haven’t just killed off my inner critic. It’s a great idea and I laughed at the time, finding it odd that I’d never thought of that obvious solution.

Then I realized there is a flip side to the inner critic - a weird, twisty benefit that allows the inner critic to push us forward toward our goals, simply by our willpower and our inherent drive

to defeat it. What book or movie doesn't benefit from the conflict between hero and villain? We all want to cheer when we or people we care about triumph over an obstacle. Pushing back against the inner critic, striving and reaching our goals despite that nasty voice, is a form of triumph over resistance that many of us need to propel us to new heights.

It's not a matter of if the inner critic will show up as a Negative Nelly, it's when. Create a plan to defeat it, though keeping a journal of your successes, having inspiring music ready, or preparing an automatic challenge question.

And now you have another option. You can turn your inner critic into an ally and get yourself fired up with determination to prove that the pesky voice is so very wrong about what you can accomplish. If the inner critic says you cannot write, you defeat it by replying "*I am writing.*" and get right back to the story you need to tell.

Ugly Ducklings

“All books were ugly ducklings once. Do not compare your draft to another author’s finished book on the shelf.” -Regan Black

What is it that you want to share with readers? What story or information do you need to get out of your head and onto the page? Your content, message, and story will be unique and comparing your draft to a finished book on the shelf only gives your inner critic more ammunition. Trust me the inner critic has enough ammunition already. Don’t help that negative cause.

Think about what you are really good at and write more of that. What do you love to read? Try writing your story in that vein or genre. If you’re not sure about what kind of writing you’re good at, or even what you’re good at in general, developing a journal habit can be an invaluable resource.

Set aside a few minutes each day and start with a gratitude exercise. List at least three things you’re thankful for. Make them different things each day. As you get comfortable with that, strive for longer entries, dumping out negative emotions, fear or insecurity. Next, try moving from what you are thankful for outside yourself into an affirmation exercise of what you’re thankful for within yourself - your skills and talents, your unique gifts and perspective. The journal time becomes less about the negative and more about your aspirations.

Many experts share similar content through various, individual methods and media. We all have a different life experience and a preference for how we communicate it. Your job isn’t to write or deliver your message like some other bestselling author. Your job is to tell the story inside you your way, capitalizing on your gifts and strengths. Your message or story might have similar themes, or a similar audience, but it will resonate with others like you and that is exactly the point! This approach helps everyone.

Ignore that annoying inner critic who says your book will never be as good as the one on the shelf. No matter what that negative voice says, the book you admire did *not* come out of the author’s head and hit the page with pristine perfection. Remember this basic truth or risk getting trapped in an endless loop of insecurity.

If you must compare something, look at your effort today versus yesterday. Did you improve? What did you learn about yourself or the work? Did you find a new piece of the process or a central theme of your message?

With each book I write, I strive to be a better storyteller or do a better job of inspiring and motivating writers. It takes diligence to hang on to that mindset in the face of so many authors with similar missions or stories already out there.

Whatever nonsense the inner critic is spouting, there are readers for your books and plenty of them. There are people who need to hear your story or message. Remember the adage '*When the pupil is ready, the teacher appears?*' You've surely experienced it in your own life, hearing a lesson repeatedly until suddenly, in the right context, it clicks for you. The same thing holds for writing as well. Every author had a starting point and I promise you it wasn't all smooth sailing to get any book ready for readers.

It's also a safe bet that nearly every author you admire has dealt with the inner critic in one form or another. *Be nice to yourself*, be patient with your process and embrace the notion that you and your books are in superb company. Every single book you love was once an ugly duckling in the draft phase. Through trial, error, and awkward stages that book was transformed into something beautiful thanks to an author's diligence, perseverance, and the outside assistance of encouragers, editors, cover artists, and more.

We are in this thing called life together. And together, sharing both our foibles and expertise, we are all stronger.

Livestream Video Links

Below are the YouTube links to the original inner critic discussions that were live via periscope.tv on my Inspiration for Your Writing Journey daily broadcasts. There are five discussions in all, but the third video has a quick follow-up because my greyhound Bandit interrupted the broadcast when he rooted a bunny out of a nest near the house. (Neither dog nor bunny was injured, it just made quite a racket.)

Though the original quotes and concepts have been expanded on here in the guide, I think the live broadcasts can prove beneficial as well.

Video 1: <https://youtu.be/sGkIIdNRZJ8>

Video 2: <https://youtu.be/AmfaCQ2BQcg>

Video 3: https://youtu.be/LO_V5CE_SDI

Video 3.5: <https://youtu.be/gND7mlKIUCa>

Video 4: <https://youtu.be/gfVMDsLbFbU>

Video 5: <https://www.periscope.tv/w/1kvJplnXDL0JE> (This video is only available at periscope.tv. You can cut and paste the link into your browser on your computer and see the comments and interaction as well or you can use the app through your smart phone.)

A Final Thought

I hope this guide on the inner critic has helped you strike the right balance between your ideal creativity and that pesky negative voice in your head. While a writing life is primarily a solo effort, you don't ever need to feel alone. Plenty of authors have gone before - blazing trails that can encourage and motivate you to reach for the dreams you have for *your* writing. This brief guide is one way for me to give back to the writing community much the way my mentors reached back and inspired me along the way.

For more inspiration or advice on writing, visit the dedicated page at my website: ReganBlack.com/for-writers. There, you can subscribe to the email newsletter, pick up another title to empower your ongoing journey, reach out to me for more assistance, or all of the above.

I wish you the very best on your writing adventure!

~Regan

About the Author

Regan Black, a USA Today and international bestselling author, writes award-winning, action-packed romantic suspense, paranormal adventure, and urban fantasy novels, as well as informative non-fiction books infused with humor and inspiration.

Raised in the Midwest and California, she currently makes her home with her family, their adopted greyhound and two arrogant cats, in the South Carolina Lowcountry where the rich blend of legend, romance, and history fuels her imagination.

You can visit her online anytime at www.ReganBlack.com

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The Writer's Survival Guide by Kimberly Hope and Regan Black

Goal Setting for Writers: Making Revisions Work in Life and Art

Into The Dorm! The Busy Mom's Guide to Streamline and Stress Less During the Transitions

Adopt A Greyhound Guide

Fiction

Knight Traveler Series:

Heart of Time, prequel

Timeless Vision

An Heirloom Amber

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Safe In His Sight (9/2016)

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Runaway Secret

~

Unknown Identities Series:

Bulletproof

Double Vision

Sandman

Last Strike

Death-Trap Date

~

Dangerous Protector Trilogy by Debra Webb and Regan Black:

Against The Wall | Too Far Gone | Nothing To Lose

Harlequin Intrigue novels by Debra Webb and Regan Black:

The Hunk Next Door | Heart of a Hero | To Honor and To Protect | Her Undercover Defender

Gunning For The Groom | Heavy-Artillery Husband

~

Matchmaker Series:

The Matchmaker's Mark

The Matchmaker's Curse

The Bodyguard's Vow

~

Shadows of Justice Series:

Justice Incarnate

Invasion of Justice

Veil of Justice

Tracking Shadows

Shadows to Light

In the Interest of Security, novella