

# Controlling Your Love Hate/Relationship with Writing

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*This is a transcript of the audio seminar, edited slightly for easy reading!*

You can find the audio version at [www.writershuddle.com/seminars/feb2012](http://www.writershuddle.com/seminars/feb2012)

Hi, I'm Ali Luke, and this is the February seminar for Writers' Huddle:  
Controlling Your Love/Hate Relationship with Writing.

**In this seminar, we're going to be looking at some ways to get back in control of that relationship and to get your writing done even when you feel it's just hard to get started.**

So, this topic was inspired by LaVonne, who posted in her introduction thread:

*I'm LaVonne Ellis and I hate writing. Until I'm in the 'flow,' and then I love it. Until I'm looking at the next thing I need to be writing, and then I hate it again.*

And I think that all of us feel like that, at least some of the time, about our writing. I know that the worry some people have is that when you feel like you hate writing, it means you're just not a writer, you're somehow not cut out for it. You're not going to make it, real writers love every minute of it.

Which is totally not true.

I think every single writer I've ever spoken to has something of this love/hate relationship going on and it's just the case that the more people have written, the further they've gone along that writing path, the better they are at controlling this relationship and getting the work done, even when it's sometimes tough to get started.

## **The Love/Hate Relationship is Normal**

**So, the first thing to realise is that this is totally normal.** Don't worry if you feel ambivalent towards your writing. Don't worry if it sometimes feels like you hate it more than you love it. It's really normal and it's okay.

The reason we feel like that is because writing is such a high-energy task. It can be emotional, especially if you're writing fiction or you're writing memoir or something that's quite personal to you. Writing can be quite draining – you might feel tired once you've written a substantial piece. And often it's so much easier to do something else, especially if you keep putting off the writing – which means that your resistance to it builds up and builds up.

You may find that you just don't want to even start, just the thought of sitting down and writing is tough. For me, this is a bit like exercise. I never feel like I want to start exercising. There's always something better I could be doing; it seems like it's going to be a big effort. And then as soon as I get started, within the first five minutes, it gets much easier. And after I've exercised, I feel really great about it, I'm really glad!

**I think for a lot of us that's our experience of writing: the getting started part is the hardest thing.** Like LaVonne says, once we're in the flow, we love it. And once we've done the writing, we're pleased to have written.

Another reason why some people struggle with this love/hate relationship with writing is because they associate writing with bad memories from school. Essays that were graded or corrected, teachers that pointed out mistakes, or said that you weren't writing the right way, or something like that. I think LaVonne mentioned in her introduction that writing sometimes feels like homework, and I know I've come across other writers saying similar things.

The thing to keep in mind is that **nobody is going to read your writing until you want them to.** If you write something and you're not happy with it, you don't have to publish it, you don't have to show it to anyone, you can delete it completely from your computer, you can burn it, you can do whatever you need to do. So the fear is a bit ungrounded.

**It's also the case that no-one ever writes a perfect first draft.** Writers at all levels need to edit their work; many writers have editors who help them edit – particularly for novels, or for newspaper articles, or for a lot of the writing that you might see and think *“Wow, I could never do that.”* Bear in mind that there may be loads of people behind the scenes, working to make that writing so good.

So, all of that is to say basically that this love/hate relationship is normal and to some extent it's to be expected. It's the nature of writing itself that makes us feel this resistance to it – along with this love and enjoyment of the writing. And the thing to remember from this is that you're the one in control, even if it doesn't always feel that way. **You're the one who can sit down and get on with that writing, even if emotionally you feel like you're not in the very best place.**

## Don't Wait to Be Inspired

There's sometimes a popular conception of writers waiting for divine inspiration, waiting for the muse to descend or the stars to align or whatever it is and then turning out pages and pages of beautiful prose or poetry.

I think that's completely alien to most people's experience.

**Sure, we'll all have the occasional moment where everything just seems to come together and the words are really flowing onto the page, but a lot of the time, writing is work.** Sometimes you have to do the work. That means getting back in charge and really making sure you can push through barriers where this love/hate relationship is especially strong.

So, I want to look at three key stages of writing where the love/hate relationship particularly comes into play. And that's:

- The beginning of a new work – probably the very hardest point
- The middle of a long work
- The editing stage

We'll go through those one by one and I'll give you some specific tips for getting past the hate and onto the love at each stage.

## Stage #1: Beginnings

This is probably the hardest thing for me, as a writer: whenever I have to begin a new project, it's really tough. Over the past three or four weeks, I've just started on the second novel in a trilogy of novels (this follows on from [Lycopolis](#) that I published a couple of months ago) and it seemed *hard* to get into this second one.

For a long time, I was busy, I wasn't sure how it needed to start, and it was so much easier to put it off in favour of doing a blog post or something for Writers' Huddle or some of my other work.

I had a lot of fears going on, and I think they're quite typical ones: things like *it's just not going to be good enough* or *it's not going to be worth trying* or *I'm not ready to write it yet*. Sometimes you are ready, you just need to realise it.

So the way I think of this, it's a bit like riding a bike or driving a car: getting the initial momentum is hard, because you need to go from zero to sixty, but once you're in motion, it's easier to stay that way, to keep going.

**Once you've got over this hump of the beginning, it's much easier to keep going with what you're working on.**

So, how do you do that? How do you just get those first few words down on the page?

**One thing that works for me is to set aside some time specifically for this project**, so to tell myself, *“Right, Saturday morning, I'm going to work on the novel, come what may. And if I'm still struggling, it can help to set a timer going, so I'll tell myself, “Okay, it's Saturday morning, I'm going to set this timer for 20 minutes, I can write the novel for 20 minutes, however bad it is ... I can do anything for 20 minutes.”*

And, usually, that's enough to get me past that initial stuck point and into the flow.

**Something else you can do is to write the first few words and just keep going.** It's so easy to write a paragraph and think “this sucks” and delete it, and then write another paragraph and think “this is all wrong” and delete it again.

However bad it seems to be, just keep on going, because you'll soon get into the flow and you can go back at the editing stage and fix the opening section.

If you're really struggling to get going, if you don't know how to start your very first scene of a novel or the first chapter of a book or the first line of your blog post, **you might find it helpful to use a writing prompt or borrow someone else's first line**, just to get you going, just to get you into the piece, so that you're flowing. You can always go back and take that out once you're finished.

So that's stage one, that's beginnings, and I really do think that's the hardest part. If you can get over the beginning, then half the battle is won.

## **Stage #2: Middles**

The second stage, then, is once you're well past the beginning and you've been on a roll for a while and you're into what I call "the long middle". So this is the stage with a novel, an ebook, a book, or a really epic blog post or something that's quite sizeable – you've spent days, weeks, maybe months on this project already.

You can get to the point where it seems to be dragging on, and maybe you feel like you hate it more than you love it, or it's hard to pick up that project and keep going back to it.

So there's lots of things you can do here. **One crucial one is to keep up the momentum: so write regularly, and make it into a habit**, because if you set aside your book for weeks on end and then go back to it, chances are you'll have forgotten where you were, you'll need to go back and reread, you'll have lost that momentum that you built up. It's almost like going back to that beginning stage and having to get over the initial hump all over again, every time you restart. No wonder that's something that we find tough.

**If you can, try to make your writing something to look forward to.** That might mean that you do it on the weekend and it's a treat, or you get your other work done first, or whatever way you can, you make this project something to enjoy. It could be as simple as you go to your favourite coffee shop while

you're working on this particular project, or you have your favourite food, whatever works for you.

Something else to keep in mind here is that sometimes writing is a bit of a slog, sometimes it's just *effort*. But that doesn't make it any less worthwhile.

**You don't have to love every minute.** I wish we all could love every minute of writing – it'd be great! But in reality, you can push yourself forward even when you're not quite feeling the love. You can act as though you're enjoying it, and hopefully you soon will. Be sometimes you do just have to push yourself forward a bit and accept that's part of being a writer, and part of undertaking any major endeavour, anything that's worth doing: there will be times when it feels like hard work.

One of the things I love to do is go walking, and sometimes I'll go with my husband for a few days and we'll have a walking holiday. We'll go from place to place and we'll spend six hours a day or so walking. And I really do enjoy it – but there'll be times when it just feels like effort. There'll be some boring stretch of road, or my legs will ache, or I'll just want to get to the next Bed and Breakfast and lie down and stop walking. But just because it's hard work at times doesn't mean that it's not enjoyable overall.

It's the same with writing. **Just because you have times when it feels tough doesn't mean that invalidates your writing in any way.**

There's a couple of specific problems people tend to have with middles, and these may be the cause of a love/hate relationship with your writing.

**With fiction, sometimes novels can sag in the middle, and that maybe means you need to add some more conflict.** Don't necessarily throw in a whole new character or an entire massive subplot or something because that can just overcomplicate things ... but you may need to engineer a scene between two characters who will *not* see eye to eye, or have something go wrong for a character. That's a great source of conflict: when someone's hopes are dashed or someone's plans just don't work out – and that can get things moving a bit more.

**With non-fiction, sometimes you might need to just skip a couple of chapters.** It may be that you planned more middle than you really need, especially

if you feel like it's just dragging on and on and on. It could be that some material doesn't need to be in your book or ebook and you can just refer readers to another source – or it could be that you'll come back later and add some extra stuff in.

So, onto stage three:

## Stage #3: Editing

This is the next really tough stage, because when you've written the whole draft of a novel or a book or an ebook or a blog post series or an ecourse or whatever it is you might just feel like you're done. You've said everything you want to say, and you don't want to have to go back over the same material again. And ... it is tough to have the energy for this.

**It's worth putting your work aside, at least for a week or two, so you can try to go back to it with fresh eyes and renewed enthusiasm,** because the editing stage is really crucial. It's when you turn what you *actually* wrote into what you *wanted* to write – what was in your head as opposed to what came out onto the page.

My first drafts are often very rough and scrappy and all over the place and full of clichés and plot holes and notes to self and stuff, and I need to go back and really do some work at the editing stage to shape things.

**When you're editing, you need to remind yourself that it's worthwhile. You need to know that what you're doing matters, that it's going to make your work as good as it can be.** It helps if you start off by making any bigger changes that you need – so that might be cutting out a character from a novel, or adding a new sub-plot. If you're writing non-fiction, it might be switching the chapters around or adding in some completely new material.

If you start off editing just by tweaking typos and spelling mistakes and things, then it can be tough to see whether you need to do some of this bigger picture work. Deep down, you might feel, *There's something still broken about this piece, but I've fixed every sentence so beautifully that I don't want to change a word now.*

**Another thing that can help with editing is to get friends or other writers involved.** So by all means post in the [Writers' Huddle forums](#) and ask for somebody who might be willing to critique a whole work for you – maybe if you can swap books with them, that works out very well. Then you can just get a fresh perspective on what you've written. You may well find that it's better than you think. You may find that there are some problems that you weren't quite aware of – as soon as they're pointed out, you realise that's what's been holding you back.

So that's the three stages:

- 1. Getting past the beginning**, which is the hardest bit
- 2. Getting through the middle**, which requires some discipline and willpower and focus
- 3. Doing the editing**, which perhaps needs a slightly different sort of energy, and the willingness to really engage critically with your own work. Not to be judgemental about it, or to think that you're a bad writer, because you're not – but to accept that everybody's work needs editing and your job as the author is to make your work as good as it can possible be.

I want to move on now to some general tips for any stage of writing, to try to stay on the love side of the love/hate relationship – and to at least get on with your writing and feel like you're making progress during the times when it feels tough.

## **Tip #1: Don't Procrastinate**

**Procrastination will only make it worse. The more you put something off, the more your resistance to it will build up, and the harder it will seem in your mind.** That's the case for writing, it's the case for pretty much anything. If you've ever put off, say, an important phone call or a difficult conversation or doing your accounts, you'll know that the more you put it off, the harder it becomes in your head.

Sometimes, the more you put it off, the harder it physically becomes as well. If you don't write for weeks on end on your book, you may just lose the thread of where you were. So don't procrastinate.

## **Tip #2: Don't Set Too Many Conditions on Your Writing**

Some writers are a bit prone to have their ideal way of writing: they only write longhand on yellow paper in blue ink when they have a whole afternoon to spare and the perfect mug of coffee next to them.

If you start to put conditions on when you can write and where you can write and what you need around you when you're writing, it really limits how much you can just get on with things.

**You don't have to be in just the right mood to write. You can write anywhere at any time.** Of course, some locations are better than others, but you can work in an airport, in a cafe, in a park, with the TV going, with family around you ... don't be afraid to try writing even at times when it really doesn't feel like the ideal circumstances.

## **Tip #3: Conversely, Do Try to Have Some Writing Sessions That Feel Special**

For me, that means trying to spend Saturdays on my novel. It might mean having a good mug of tea, it might mean having chocolate biscuits (that's *cookies* to the American Huddlers) ... **whatever it takes to make you feel like your writing is actually a special time, a nurturing time, something creative, something that's really for you and that's important – and that you enjoy.**

## **Tip #4: The Perfect is the Enemy of the Good**

**Your writing will never be perfect. My writing will never be perfect!** I don't like that, I wish it was different, but I have come to recognise that however

brilliant something seems in my head, it's never going to be quite that brilliant when I get it down on paper.

The thing is, if it just stays in my head perfect, nobody is every going to read it and it's not going to benefit anyone. It's not really even going to benefit me. So sometimes you have to settle for making your writing *good* and accepting that's never going to be *perfect*.

## Tip #5: When You're Writing, Just Write

Quite often, when people write, they write a sentence or two and then they check Twitter. And they look at their emails. And then they think of something that they need to look up and they go and do that and they get sucked into some other website and generally surfing the net.

If this goes on too much, it's easy for your writing session to turn into two hours of you typing a few sentences interspersed with an awful lot of you fiddling around on the internet.

One of the things that I do to help me stay on track, particularly with bigger projects, is to use a piece of software called Dark Room – that's for the PC, the Mac equivalent is WriteRoom. It's a full-screen writing environment that means I can't even see all those things like toolbars and other stuff that normally surrounds my screen. I just have a black screen and green text, and I write. I have no excuse to *not* write.

**When I've been feeling particularly distractible, I've sometimes turned off my internet connection altogether** – because the more barriers you can put between yourself and the distraction, the harder it is to convince yourself that it's okay to just open up your email and check it quickly. You've got a stop point where you have to turn back on your internet connection or close your full screen writing environment or whatever it might be.

Something else that helps is to set a timer. Tell yourself, *Okay, for thirty minutes I am just going to write. If I get stuck with what I'm writing, I'm just going to sit there and look at the screen. I'm not going to go and check my*

*emails, I'm not going to get up and make a coffee, I'm just going to get on with the writing for the next thirty minutes.*

Often, you'll be really surprised by how much you can accomplish in half an hour or an hour when you really write.

## **Tip #6: Accept That There Will Be Days When You Love Your Writing ... And Days When You Really Don't**

There'll be times when you really look forward to getting on with your novel or when you love working on that ebook because you know how useful it's going to be for your audience. And there'll be days when you want to kill all your characters just to be done with it. Or you question whether the world even needs another ebook, are there not just enough already...

Like I've said before, this doesn't mean you're not a writer. It doesn't mean you're not a *good* writer. Everybody feels like this sometimes. And in fact, you probably feel the same way about other important things in your life.

**You might feel the same about your job: there's probably aspects of your job you love and aspects you hate.** You might feel that way about people in your life: maybe your kids – obviously you love them dearly, but there are times when they just drive you up the wall. Or you absolutely love your partner, but sometime he or she does things that really bug you or you're having a bad day and you're just more grouchy than usual.

So there will be days when you love your writing; there will be days when you don't. Oddly enough, when you go back to look at what you wrote on the different days, there's usually not much difference between a day when you were completely in the zone and a day when every word was like getting blood from a stone.

## Tip #7: If Your Writing Is Boring You, You Need to Make Some Changes

This isn't quite *hating* your writing, this is ... you're just bored to tears by it, all your characters seem incredibly dull (or in non-fiction, the whole thing seems incredibly dry and tedious). If *you* feel like that as the writer, then your readers are definitely going to feel the same. **If it's boring you, it's going to bore them and you need to shake things up a bit.**

That might mean, in a novel, making some changes to your characters. It might mean killing someone off: that can shake up the rest of your cast.

With a non-fiction book, it might mean rethinking the style that you're writing in or changing around the structure of the chapters to make things more interesting for you and for the readers.

**So, summing up: it's okay not to love every minute of writing and, in fact, it would be kind of weird if you did.**

If I came across someone saying that every time they sat down at the keyboard, the words just flowed effortlessly, they loved it completely, they were totally in the zone, they forgot to eat, the whole thing was wonderful and miraculous ... I would question the quality of their writing. I'd be concerned that it sounded a bit too easy, and possibly what they were writing was too self-indulgent.

**If you hate it sometimes, if it's hard sometimes, that probably means you're doing it right.** And sometimes you do just need to push on through the resistance. You need to say to yourself, I can do this for ten minutes, I can do this for twenty minutes. Even if you're short on time, even if you're low on energy, you can manage ten or twenty minutes of writing every single day.

And even if there are times when writing's hard, when it feels like a real slog, it's totally worth it in the end. It's worth it when you've got a finished book that you can be proud of, or a great blog post that's really helpful to readers.

It's worth it when you get emails or comments, or reviews that tell people how much somebody else loved your work.

There's a handout for this seminar with:

- **Useful links to further resources** that you might want to take a look at, which can help you particularly with this love/hate relationship and with getting over resistance to writing
- **Key points from this seminar**
- **Exercises for you to try**

So you have no excuses! And if you do feel stuck, if you're still really struggling to get on with your writing and you feel like you hate it a lot more than you love it, then [pop on over to the forums](#) and **tell us what you're going through so that we can help. That's what we're there for.**

I look forward to seeing you around in the forums, and I will be back next week with the Q&A, so if you've got questions about writing that you want to ask, post them in the Q&A thread in the forums. If, for any reason, you'd rather not use the forums, you're very welcome to email your questions to me – [ali@aliventures.com](mailto:ali@aliventures.com).