

Dumb Little Writing Tricks That Work: Adopt a Different Writing Persona

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This is a first in this humble blog's history: Another Dumb Little Writing Trick That Work, only this one isn't my idea, but from some actual scientists:

We value creativity and are often justifiably proud of our most creative acts. Solving a difficult problem at work is a major achievement. Writing a song or creating a novel work of art is an amazing feat. If you wander the aisles of your local bookstore, you find lots of books that promise to unleash your inner creative

genius.

So, when a research finding comes along that suggests an easy way to improve your creativity, you should sit up and listen.

A paper by Evan Polman and Kyle Emich in the April 2011 issue of Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin provides just this kind of straightforward demonstration.

One of the factors that often prevents people from doing something really creative is their existing knowledge. If you are writing a song, it is hard to come up with something that is very different from what other people have written, because you are reminded of melodies that you have heard before. If you are solving a problem at work, there is a tendency to focus on solutions that people have used in the past to solve similar problems.

So how do you break away from the influence of the past?

Polman and Emich make use of construal level theory. This theory, developed by Yaacov Trope, Nira Liberman and their colleagues, suggests that we think about things that are near to us in space or time in specific terms, but we think about things that are far from us in space or time in more abstract terms. For example, when thinking about a trip you might take to

Paris next summer, you might focus on how much fun it would be or how great it would be to sit in a café and watch the world go by. When thinking about a trip to Paris you are going to take next week, though, you focus on what you are going to wear, how you are going to exchange money and what you will do when you encounter Parisians who speak no English.

Polman and Emich reason that if you are trying to think creatively, then generating some distance between you and the problem you are solving might enhance your creativity.

The simple trick?

When you are in a situation where you need to escape the curse of your own specific knowledge, pretend that you are being creative on behalf of someone else. That will help you think about the problem more abstractly and avoid simply repeating the solutions you already know about.

I think there is an additional dynamic at play: If we approach a creative task from someone else's mindset, we minimize whatever pressure we typically bring to bear on ourselves. In other words, if we are really hard on ourselves to produce something good, we would — presumably — be *less* hard on the persona we adopt as someone else.

For writers, this trick should come pretty easily because

when we write characters, we do so from their vantage point, we get into their heads.

So the next time you start to develop a story idea or even write pages, why not adopt a different persona? Not you, but someone else responsible for being creative. That just might be the trick to freeing up your creativity.

For more of the article, go [here](#).

This has been another installment of Dumb Little Writing Tricks That Work.

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