

Writing and the Creative Life: Creativity-In-Action

[Scott Myers](#)

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CREATIVITY IN ACTION

What exactly is creativity and how do we foster it? This is not only a question of interest to people involved in the arts. There is a lot of energy being dedicated toward its study in

business and science. Recently I discovered an interesting overview of these efforts in this article: "Elephants in the Room of Creativity and Innovation Talk" by Milena Z. Fisher, Ph.D. The whole piece is well worth reading, but this section jumped out at me:

Creativity preachers are constantly encouraging their audience to "follow their dreams." Every time I hear this message I can't help but think about the legions of young and promising kids who want to be actors, musicians, inventors... Unfortunately, some of them do follow their dreams but to the point of misery and even drug abuse. Take a look at the faces of these young people in Paul Jasmin's photos from his fantastic album "[Lost Angeles](#)". In the foreword, Jasmin explains the following: "Here are the 'tarnished angels' that hang out on Hollywood Boulevard or in local motel rooms, that have come to L.A. looking for the American dream, Hollywood style, and have quickly discovered it takes more than just desire to succeed."

*Creativity requires more than a dream. In many cases, people struggle to turn their dreams into a reality not because they lack ambition, motivation or imagination, but because they lack the necessary **skills** and **knowledge**. Too few opportunities and bad luck are two other obstacles. Creativity-in-action is more like the art of survival than daydreaming — you have to choose your tools wisely and "pivot" if necessary to find another, better solution.*

These observations spoke to me for two reasons:

- As someone who has worked in the entertainment business for over three decades, much of that time in Hollywood, I know full well the highs and lows of dreams achieved and nightmares befallen. I have experienced them directly myself and witnessed the effects of that roller coaster ride in the lives of dozens of friends and associates, as well as stories of countless others. As I wrote in this Business of Screenwriting post: [“Movies don’t owe anybody a living.”](#) It is a difficult path and success is not easily won.
- The other thing is this: What Fisher articulates here so clearly reflects a key sensibility I have brought to this blog from Day 1 of its inception: To promote ways to engender our creativity, specifically as writers, and also on a daily basis write about skills essential to the craft and knowledge about the business of Hollywood.

So when I read that phrase *creativity-in-action*, the proverbial penny dropped. As far as writers in Hollywood are concerned, it strikes me that is precisely it.

You must do whatever you can to foster your creativity, whether it’s a daily regimen using your creative muscles — journal writing, generating story concepts, character development exercises — or the feeding of your creative soul through movies, TV, books, poetry, music, dance and the like.

It is critical you stoke your creative fires.

Yet creativity alone does not cut it. You may ride that wave to an initial success, but to sustain yourself as a writer in Hollywood, you need more than inspiration. You need to master the craft. You need to immerse yourself in the worlds of cinema and TV. You need to develop discipline. You need to know what you know and learn what you don't know. And when you face the chasm of unknown unknowns, you need to have the confidence that somehow, some way you will build a bridge to get you from FADE IN to FADE OUT.

In other words, you need to know your shit.

The thing is, this idea of creativity-in-action is right there in front of us whenever we watch a great movie or TV show. For in those specific moments of brilliance where we are utterly wowed by the creative genius on display by the filmmakers or TV crew, we have to know and understand that literally thousands of hours of cumulative hard work studying and practicing the craft went into them.

As writers, we must revere and honor our creativity, and do what we can to nurture its vitality and ability to speak to us. But when it does burst forth into our consciousness, it is equally important for us to learn the skills and knowledge necessary to transform inspiration into a creative act.

For the rest of Fisher's article, go [here](#).

Writing and the Creative Life is a weekly series in which we explore creativity from the practical to the psychological, the latest in brain science to a spiritual take on the subject. Hopefully the more we understand about our creative self, the better we will become as writers. If you have any good reading material in this vein, please post in comments. If you have a particular observation you think readers will benefit from and you would like to explore in a guest post, email me.

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