

How to Refill Your Creative Well

by Cindy Barrilleaux

It's easy to become so intent on writing your book, or revising your manuscript or working your book proposal that you get tunnel vision. You can feel your creativity and imagination dry up. Your writing becomes stale, your ideas predictable. You need a change of perspective, to see the world and your writing through different glasses.

If you can go on a writer's retreat, do. But you don't have to. Just give yourself a mini retreat at home. For a couple of days or more, change your writing routine. Instead of working on your manuscript, experiment with a variety of writing exercises. Do free writes, a la Natalie Goldberg, guided exercises, play around with poetry. The main thing is to let loose, drop your inner editor, and write freely, unconcerned with results. After all, they're only writing exercises.

Writing exercises aren't just for beginners. Great writers have described how they use exercises to refresh their writing, to gain new skills, to practice aspects of craft separate from their manuscripts. Every artist practices: concert pianists play the scales, opera singers vocalize, batters go to batting cages, swimmers do laps. Returning to the basics refreshes, renews, and strengthens.

Keep your writing exercises in one place, even those that made you cringe. I often give clients short, timed, writing exercises to do between sessions. When they read them to me the next time we talk, they're surprised by the creativity and power in a piece they had hated. When you review your exercises, you'll find words, phrases, entire paragraphs you can use in whatever project you're working on. And over time, you'll be able to see your ideas shifting and developing, your skills getting stronger.

When you finish your mini-retreat, keep writing exercises in your daily routine. Take 10-20 minutes before you start on your project—book, article, essay, short story—to write for the sheer fun of it. It's like warming your car's engine on a cold morning.

Cindy Barrilleaux
www.WriteYourBest.com