

Get a Change of Scenery: Switch from Writing to Research

by Cindy Barrilleaux

If you have stalled out on your writing project--fiction, nonfiction, book, or article--consider the possibility that more research will get you going again. Experts in their field gather backup material from other experts and outside sources for their nonfiction writing. Or, if you're writing about something from your own life, supporting material will add credence to your story.

One client, writing a novel based on her family, spent weeks interviewing near and distant relatives, visiting the towns where they had lived, digging through memorabilia and junk in attics, until she had what she needed to make her story come to life. Her story is rich with vivid images and unexpected details. Another author was making lots of progress writing his book, a cultural critique. He gradually lost momentum, however, and couldn't think of anything more to write. When I suggested research, he decided to read everything he could by other experts on his subject, an idea he had resisted earlier. Within a couple of months, he not only fleshed out his thoughts and gained confidence in his ideas, but he began a correspondence with a couple of the experts.

It's not surprising that research is helpful. Think about how uncertain you feel when asked to talk intelligently about something you actually know little about. It's the same with writing. It's hard to write your ideas when you don't have enough background information to support them. Or to make them colorful and interesting.

Caution: Your need for more research may not jump out at you. It often masquerades as losing inspiration, being stuck, having writer's block. Before you leap to solving those problems, ask yourself if you simply need more foundational material and interesting details for your book. If so, get thee to the internet, the library, the historical society. Interview experts, pour over journals, go to museums. Research is not only practical, it's fun.

Cindy Barrilleaux
www.WriteYourBest.com