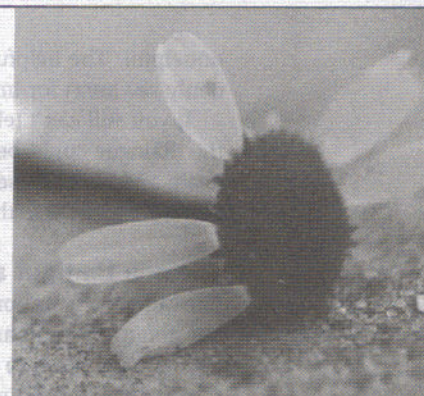


GETTING PUBLISHED

Boost Your Mood

Bouncing Back From Rejection, Rewrite Requests and Other Disappointments



by Eve Menezes Cunningham

All writers face rejection and other setbacks at some point. Creative writers can feel even more exposed in their work. But whatever you're facing, you're not alone. Here, published novelists share their strategies for dealing with disappointments.

Negative self-talk

All writers know that sinking feeling of being so close to their work they can't tell if it has any redeeming features. Even award-winning, best-selling authors struggle with fears that the story they're currently writing won't be good enough.

Sara Paretsky, most famous for her delightful V.I. Warshawski novels, still gets "terrified. I'm starting work on a new book now and I think, 'I don't know what I'm doing and I don't know how to do it and maybe it would just be better if I jumped off the bridge.'

"I just have to fight through it. I have this sense that if I don't look after myself, there's no one to pick up the pieces. So in the back of my mind is, 'Sara, you've got to pull yourself together and do it.' And then, when I'm actually writing I'm fine. It's only when I'm thinking about it . . ."

If you find yourself struggling through similar unhelpful self-doubt, write. Many of my clients share Sara's experience and feel completely in the zone while writing, only to beat themselves up by putting on their Editor hat too soon.

When doubts flood your mind, ask yourself, "Whose voice am I hearing?" It may be that you've internalized a critical parent or early English teacher's insults. Recognizing that the critical thought is a thought (and not the reality) is the first step to freeing yourself from it.

Once you've identified the voice, speak out loud to really get a sense of it. Then play around with it. You've been giving the critical voice in your head authority and free reign for too long. Dilute its authority by saying the same words but in a silly voice (Bart Simpson, your neighbor's cat, or any other voice that will have no power over you). Try it out. It really works. This releases the power you've given it and allows you to approach your writing more objectively.

Sometimes, you'll hear a little voice telling you what needs to be changed to make your writing better. So how can you tell the difference?

The best way to distinguish is the way you feel when the "voice" is talking. The one you should ignore makes you feel terrible about your writing and yourself. It's completely

unhelpful. The helpful voice will inspire you to make your writing even better. You'll suddenly see areas for improvement and feel really good about making the changes.

If you still can't tell, ask the voice for specific feedback. If your gut tells you that some of the dialogue could be more believable and this rings true for you, get your manuscript out again and make those changes. But if that voice is telling you, "You're a worthless idiot and literary fraud," use the technique above to disarm it.

The one that got away

Sue Moorcroft, author of *Uphill All the Way* (Transita, 2005) says, "The thing I try to remember about rejection and rewrites is that there's nothing personal behind either. Editors and agents have more to do with their time and energy than come up with ways to give me a disappointment. So my first coping strategy is always that the rejection has come because my work wasn't right for them. If their comments strike a chord with me then I use their insight to make my work better. I get back to work, because where there's work on editor's desks, there's hope that it'll sell.

"But when I almost got a novel to contract with a publisher and the publisher then ceased to trade, that was a particular kind of disappointment. It was outside of my control and probably outside of the publisher's control, too. The temptation was to sulk. I probably did sulk! I was entitled. But sulking is a singularly unproductive activity and it doesn't get work on editors' desks! So, again, I worked."

If, like Moorcroft, something completely out of your control has knocked the wind out of your sails, give yourself a moment to catch your breath. Take several deep breaths. Nothing (legal) works faster to change your state completely. And as more oxygen reaches your blood and organs, you'll also notice your mood changing for the better.

Once you're feeling better, make a list of every single thing you can do to bring yourself closer to the outcome you're after. And if you're not clear about the outcome you want, give it some serious thought. List all the steps you can take. Tiny things you can do immediately include researching other publishers and getting back to work on your book to see if there's anything more you can do to improve it. A larger step might be asking a trusted reader to read and tell you what they liked. Once you've identified everything you can do, schedule each step into your calendar or planner. Don't lose momentum. Keep moving towards your goal, and you'll find the right publisher for you and your book.

Back to the drawing board

Bernardine Kennedy (www.bernardinekennedy.com) has published several successful novels including *Old Scores* (Headline Publishing Group, 2006), *Taken* (2004), *Chain of Deception* (2003), *My Sister's Keeper* (2002) and *Everything is Not Enough* (2001). Even so, when her editor showed her the rewrites wanted for her current novel, Kennedy was "horrificed! But after stomping around and threatening to throw my PC through the window, I thought about it sensibly and realized that the suggestions were good. Unfortunately, it's all part of an author's life and although I would love to never have to edit/rewrite, it happens! I probably felt sorry for myself for about a day."

Kennedy got back on track by "writing up the new suggestions and re-plotting. The hardest part is when it's an additional storyline throughout the whole book and then it has to be threaded through nearly every chapter. I went into a phase of work displacement for a couple of weeks. Shopping, lunching, e-mailing, blogging—even housework! Anything rather than write. Then I knuckled down and got on with it. It's my job."

If you're in a similar situation, again, remind yourself that you're not alone. This is part of the editing process. Everyone involved is working together to make this novel or story the best it can be. Now take a break. Seeing all those amendments can feel overwhelming, so

your first task is to get yourself into the most resourceful state possible. If you find it unnatural to be kind and compassionate towards yourself, imagine your writer-self is your child. Do something really indulgent (a day trip, pampering treat, or a “cheer up” present within your budget) to boost the way you feel. If you try to tackle the rewrites from the disappointed, frazzled state you were in when you found out about them, you’ll feel awful and your writing will be flat.

When you’re feeling good again, revisit it. If it’s an enormous task, break it down into smaller chunks and list them. Assign yourself a celebration for each thing you’ll be ticking off. This will keep you motivated and stop you from burning out. Kennedy adds, “Accept that most of the time editors know best and their experienced eyes will be an asset to the manuscript in the long run. But it’s still a pain nonetheless!”

Family matters

Before publishing her debut novel, *Zade* (Saqi Books, 2004), Heather Reyes taught and wrote short stories for more than 20 years. Reyes says, “My immediate family is fine, but my parents don’t really understand how much time it takes. There’s a certain amount of sympathy, but people don’t understand what you feel is at stake.

“Although I’m female, I’m not terribly interested in shopping and the house. But in my family, as a woman, mother and grandmother, there is the expectation that I’m happy to spend three months planning Christmas. Five months into the year, my mother was already asking about what I was going to do,” she says. “Taking part in the life of the tribe takes time. If a distant relative is having a barbeque, you have to give up a precious Sunday and you have to talk to them about what interests them. As a woman trained very much to be nice to other people, this feels like a life of continual emotional admin. If you love somebody, like I do my family, it’s very difficult to say, ‘I don’t think like you. I don’t want my life to be like yours.’ And as a writer, you’re more sensitive to other people’s needs. But that can be a trap because you feel that your life is being sucked away from you.

“It’s important to have an ally,” she adds. “If I were on my own trying to deal with it, I would have gone under. For me, having a partner like Malcolm [Burgess, also a writer] makes all the difference in the world. It doesn’t have to be a partner—even mixing with other creative people stops you from thinking you’re quite mad. At the Society of Authors you meet people who are just as mad as you are! I want to be writing and meeting people who are stimulating and interesting. There’s something that drives you as a creative person and, if you’re not like that, it’s really hard to imagine.”

If this feels familiar, there’s no reason for you to stop loving your friends and family who aren’t creative. But if you feel marginalized at all, surround yourself with as many writers and other creative people as possible. Join a local group or find a friendly forum for writers on the Internet. When you have your need for support and empathy met by people who truly understand what it’s like, you won’t need it from your family.

Many writers dismiss their writing. Until they’re published or have awards or some other kind of external validation, there can be a sense that they’re not entitled to call themselves “writers.” Your loved ones may be picking up on this insecurity, so reclaim your writing for yourself and make it a priority in your life. You’ll find that when you start taking your writing seriously yourself, other people will also recognize that it’s an important part of your life.

Believe to achieve

Whatever situation you’re in, keep your focus on what you want to happen. Wallowing won’t make you feel better and it certainly won’t help you succeed. There is always something you can do to improve your chances. If you’ve had a rejection, send your manuscript off to another suitable publisher. Don’t let it get buried under a pile of papers. Keep things flowing

and don't stop writing. You can't control what an editor or agent is going to think about your work, but you can control your attitude to give yourself the best possible chance. If you're waiting to hear from an agent or publisher, what do you think they'll find more appealing when they do get in touch? Someone who's been waiting by the phone with their life and writing on hold or someone with loads of exciting projects on the go and a happy, positive attitude about making them all a success?

Keep following up your great ideas and enjoy your writing.

For More Information

Many of the techniques described in this article are part of a practice known as Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP). The "Neuro" aspect is about how we think and the link between our bodies and minds. "Linguistic" refers to our understanding of the world through language (what we say, what we think and how we interpret what we hear). "Programming" is how we put it all together. NLP can help with everything from changing unhelpful internal beliefs to improving communication and goal setting. At it's simplest, NLP is about deciding on an outcome (what exactly do you want to happen?), paying attention to the feedback from the world (is what you've been doing working for you?) and changing your behavior until you get the outcome you're after. To find out more about NLP, visit www.bbnlp.com, www.nlp-world.com/directory/NLP_Information/index.html and www.applecoaching.com or read *Introducing Neuro-linguistic Programming: The New Psychology of Personal Excellence* by Joseph O'Connor et al, and *Introducing NLP* by Sue Knight.