

10 WAYS I KEEP WRITING EVEN WHEN FEAR IS ROARING



She's fierce, isn't she? But I bet she lies with her cubs and purrs.

Fear is one of the hardest things about writing. Whether we call it resistance or block or anxiety or fear, these emotions, these psychological challenges about our own work are very real and very hard. We may fear rejection or looking foolish; we may fear that we're being an imposter or that we're wasting our time. We may fear judgment or apathy. Whatever we fear, we have to figure out how to work with it if we want to keep writing.

Here are 10 things I do to keep writing even when fear gets loud.

- 1. I remind myself that every write I know feels fear sometimes.** I take comfort in knowing I'm not alone in this, that I'm not freakish or particularly unsuited to writing. Remembering I'm not alone keeps fear in perspective and stops it from overwhelming me.
- 2. I try to give my fear a body, not just a voice.** I imagine what my fear would look like if she was a person. Is she thin and frail or short and solid? Is he young and screaming or old and reticent? What color hair does she have? Does he trim his nails? If I can put fear into a body, it's not so scary. Suddenly, fear becomes like all the monsters in Stephen King movies – when you can see it, it's not that terrifying.
- 3. I acknowledge fear. Then, I ask her if she'll help me.** There's nothing worse than trying to ignore someone who does not want to be ignored. She just screams louder and stomps her feet more. So instead of ignoring, I turn to her, greet her, and invite her to have a seat. I give her tea and even listen to her for a minute. I suggest that she help me write more effectively, if she'll guide my words so that I'm less likely to be rejected or feel foolish or whatever. I pull her chair next to mine, and I begin to work.

4. **I stay in community with other writers.** Writers understand writers, and so when another writer tells us that we aren't a fake or haven't wasted our time, we tend to trust those people more than we do, say, our partners or our mothers, who are bound by love and law to tell us nice things about ourselves. Having friends who are writers helps me stay balanced and keep perspective.
5. **I don't edit as I draft.** The quickest way I know to make fear pipe us is for me to start editing while I'm in the first draft stage. As soon as I begin to second-guess what I've just done, fear begins to stomp his feet and shout again. But if I keep going, keep moving forward on the draft, he usually stays quiet because, well, there isn't room enough for him to talk.
6. **I write as many days a week as I can.** When I go many days without writing, fear gets really loud. He tests my commitment to my work and asks if it's really worth going back to it at all. But when I write consistently, there isn't as much room for him to make himself heard.
7. **I read positive comments about my work.** I have an entire file of "good stuff" that people have said about my writing. When fear gets rambunctious, I open that folder and read a few selections. Since people have found my work meaningful or beautiful or helpful, I can stay centered on what matters – the writing.
8. **I read terrible reviews of the writers I love.** Yeah, this one sounds kind of petty. (If it makes you feel better, just read the bad reviews of writers who have died; they don't care.) But the thing is that if someone like A. S. Byatt or Octavia Butler gets terrible reviews, then what am I afraid of? Maybe I could even think of a bad review as becoming part of their "club."
9. **I talk to the people who love me best.** My husband, my two closest friends, and my parental folks. They are the people who love ALL of me, and they are the ones who – even if I quite writing – still would. So when fear is really being obnoxious, I'll turn to them and ask, quite literally, for reassurance. It works wonders.
10. **I remember why I write.** I write, first, because it makes me happy, keeps me healthy, and helps me understand the world. If I get all that out of it, then those things I fear – which are almost entirely located in other people's reactions to my work – well, they just fall away.

What about you? What do you do when fear begins to roar? I'd love to hear your tactics at andi@andilit.com.

Check out more of the ways I serve writers at my website – www.andilit.com. Hope to see you around.