

# WRITING WITH CONFIDENCE



**WRITTEN BY:**

GIULIETTA NARDONE, DENNIS FOLEY &  
SEAN GLATCH

PRESENTED BY:

**WRITERS.COM**

# Introduction to Writing With Confidence

If you struggle to believe in yourself as a writer, you're not alone: writing anxiety strikes everyone. However it manifests—as an inability to start or to finish, as fear and trembling or as a disconcerting numbness—we find ourselves confronting a painful question: What if I'm not good enough?

Each and every writer has been here before, and will be again. It's important to recognize that your feelings, including your apprehensions, are a natural response to the creative process. It's also important to dissect those feelings, get to the core of your anxiety, and rekindle your passion for the written word.

This ebook is designed to turn your writing anxiety into writing confidence. Let's explore the emotions that surround your creative writing, and work on some daily practices to help you develop confidence in your writing and in yourself as a writer.

# Creative Writing Anxiety: What It Is and How to Overcome It

Where does your writing anxiety stem from, and how can you manage it productively? Let's start to explore these questions with the insights of Writers.com instructor Giuletta Nardone.

## Understanding Writing Anxiety

### What is writing anxiety?

Many people would like to start writing, but they never get started because the critical voice that lives in their head—which we all have—tells them they're not good enough to write, that no one wants to hear what they want to say. So they don't bother.

People with writing anxiety might even get physical symptoms if they try to write, or to over-edit: perspiring, trembling, shortness of breath, pacing, and so on.

“

People with writing anxiety might even get physical symptoms if they try to write, or to over-edit.

”

## What is the opposite of writing anxiety?

Enthusiasm, excitement, exploration: knowing you want to dive in, feeling free about that. A good feeling.

## What causes writing anxiety?

These things start when we're quite young, perhaps because of our educational system, where things are right or wrong. I once taught a tween, and we did a creative writing exercise. After it was done, she wanted to know if she had the right answer.

That's kind of the opposite thing from what you need to be a writer. You need to explore, and you don't know what the right answer is when you start, because the right answer is the right answer for you.

Creative writing is about exploring: going through the different layers of your life, of your memory, coming up with something that you want said. And if you're suffering from perfectionism, which is very common, it can be difficult. I've worked with people who would never finish a project, because they had to be perfect. Most of my stories, even the ones I've had published, I don't think were perfect.

I think too, people are afraid to fail, what they label as failure. There isn't really such a thing—again, it's just about exploration. It's getting things off your chest, learning about yourself. Sometimes people heal through writing. There are so many reasons to start writing. You've got to give yourself permission to start.

### What experiences have you had with writing anxiety in your own writing?

For myself, an example is not writing but public speaking. When I was in college, I kept changing majors, because I was terrified to give a presentation. If I'd walk into a class and if giving a presentation was on the syllabus, I'd leave.

I knew I had to get over it by taking a speech class.

I was terrified. It took me a while to sign up for it—"I don't want to do this." Then I did sign up for it. The thing I feared in my life ended up being the best thing that ever happened to me. I keep saying, "What would have happened if I didn't sign up?" Many years later, I wrote an essay about taking the class, and sold it to the college where I took the class. I got a lot of good feedback from people with similar fears.



## How do you recommend writers work with writing anxiety?

Write. It may sound contrarian, but you have to do the thing you're afraid of.

That's always hard for me. I was afraid to hike into a canyon, so I went to Bryce Canyon with my husband and I took little baby steps the whole way down. I made it down and it was really beautiful, and I was glad I did it. I think I could do the Grand Canyon.

So just write. Hopefully take a class, with some guidance. You've got to start. The tough part is to start.

## Overcoming Writing Anxiety

We've explored some of the foundations of writer's anxiety. Now, how can we begin to manage our fears? Writers.com instructor Dennis Foley has some outstanding advice for working with writing anxiety in all its manifestations.

## Strategies for Coping with Writing Anxiety

At some point in the process of writing a novel, you will suddenly be gripped by an overwhelming sense of worry if you can even pull it off. It happens to all of us.

The first instinct is to run. Bail out. Find something else to write. It's all a bad idea. It won't work. What was I thinking? I can't do this. My story is weak, contrived, and populated by phony characters even I don't believe. I am a fraud. I'm sure to embarrass myself.

If you feel like this, you are in the club, and you are on course. You can read private letters from writers like Steinbeck, who had the very same feeling with each bestselling novel. In spite of this sense of dread, he stuck with it, weathered the anxieties, and turned out novels that generations of readers have enjoyed.

**This is not a whale you have to eat all at once.**

There is a little trick that works every time we feel overwhelmed by the pressures of having all the answers and the skill to write a novel.



It is simply one small bite at a time. No matter what the collective anxieties offered by your internal critic, you can always count on making progress a minute at a time.

Stop worrying about doing it right and completely as one comprehensive action. Break everything down to as little as a minute's effort. Set everything else aside and focus for a minute on what immediate decision or problem faces you. Just a minute.

It makes no difference whether you are deciding on what dialogue to pull out of a character's mouth or what diabolical act your antagonist commits against your protagonist — just focus on the smallest decision, one at a time. Make a decision and move on.

### What if I make the wrong decision?

You can count on making many wrong decisions. It is all part of the process of finding the right decision. You can't know if it is right or wrong until you commit to something and then evaluate it in context on another day.

## What if it was the wrong choice?

Not a problem. We have the luxury of being able to pluck and replace words, sentences, paragraphs, and entire scenes that don't seem to work at first. This is the truth about novel writing: We don't write novels, we rewrite them.

There is a lot of trial and error in our novel writing. We need to get used to filling a blank spot with a word, sentence or paragraph and moving on. Only after we have finished a first draft and see what we have can we start making decisions on what to add, what to cut, what to change and what to move.

## We were poorly served in school.

We all spent years in school and college, and even our work lives being expected to get it right the first try and to do so with time pressure.

“ This trained us to shoot for the perfect answer on a test, a term paper or a business report the very first time we try. ”

We were never given a chance to revise and rewrite anything in school. The answers we gave on tests were final, no do-overs, no improvements or fixes allowed.

## So how does this make us anxious?

We still write novels like we took tests or finished book reports in school — as if whatever we write has to be right the first time. We need to change our approach when writing novels.

In an age where the change of a word, paragraph or scene can be done with a few clicks of a keyboard, we are relieved of having to handwrite whole new versions of our manuscripts with a quill pen to accommodate changes (improvement) in our drafts.

We no longer have the time pressure we had in school. No one cares how long it took us to write a novel. They only care if they like our stories or not.

## Strange brain process occurs.

When we take a moment to focus on a single decision, we put our subconscious in motion. Regardless of what preliminary decision we make, our brain keeps percolating and searching to improve on that decision.

Wait for it. Embrace it. Expect an improvement to drop into your conscious mind (idea, answer or solution) at some time in the future. It will happen.

Then your option is to accept and incorporate the new idea or stick with your preliminary one.

Whatever you chose, don't feel pressured to do it right the first time. You can improve a crappy draft of a line or paragraph or scene. You can't improve a blank page on your computer screen. So don't wait for perfect. Go with your best shot first and improve on it later.

“Don't wait for perfect. Go with your best shot first and improve on it later.”

**Relax, breathe, lower your preliminary standards and expectations.**

Watch what happens when you do this. Suddenly you find yourself writing without that anxiety that haunted you all the way through school and your work years. You don't have to get it right the first time. You just have to get it down to later make it better.

Make this fun. Make it an engaging challenge for your imagination and not a “Produce on-demand, now.” endeavor.

## How to Find Your Writing Confidence

To make the most of your writer's journey, let's take the next step, and explore practices we can adopt to begin writing with real confidence.

### Writing With Confidence

Creative writing anxiety is a natural response to the creative process. Writers tend to be both emotional and analytical—traits which make for great writing, and also for a degree of insecurity. And overcoming the blank page requires a lot of mental fortitude. As Sidney Sheldon once said, "A blank piece of paper is God's way of telling us how hard it is to be God."

So even the best writers worry that their next work isn't good enough, or that they've peaked as writers. However, great writers have also learned the skills to build their writing confidence.

Similarly, it's important that we don't simply let the challenge overwhelm us, but ask ourselves how we can find greater confidence in our own writing.

## 5 Steps to Nurture Your Writing Confidence

Whether you're a poet, fiction writer, or essayist, this guide is designed to help you become a more confident writer. The five steps below are all things you can do starting today.

### 1. Cultivate a Confident Mindset

Self-confidence in writing starts with a healthy approach to the process. Two ways to build a confident mindset are to stay goal-oriented, and to control your internal dialogue.

#### Work Toward Realistic Goals

When creative writers lose faith in their work, it's often because they forget what they're working toward, or they set unrealistic expectations. For example, a writer might set out to finish a full-length novel, but end up getting lost in the details: this character doesn't feel right, this plot doesn't make sense, etc.

Additionally, that novel writer might not have realistic goals. They might expect to finish their novel in two months, or expect to write a chapter a day.

“To feel more confident as a writer, create realistic goals with concrete checkpoints.”

Like anything else, creative writing is work. With work comes measurable goals and an emphasis on the big picture. To feel more confident as a writer, create realistic goals with concrete checkpoints. If you're writing a novel, maybe try writing a chapter every two weeks; if you're writing a poem, try finishing a draft one week and editing the next.

Your writing confidence depends on a healthy mindset. You'll find that writing is much more enjoyable when you give yourself room to breathe.

### Control Your Self-Talk

Building confidence is hard when your internal dialogue is overly critical. When you write, a part of your brain is occupied with the blank page, and another part is analyzing the words you put down. When that part of the brain tears down the words as they flow out—"This doesn't make sense." "Who am I to write about this?" "No one will enjoy this."—you create a habit of impulsively disparaging your work.

This is a problem that even successful writers have. However, to create a healthy writing habit and feel confident in your work, controlling your internal dialogue is crucial. Be aware of your self-talk, and try to respond to those critical comments you have about your writing. Take this chart, for example:

### Instead of this...

I'll never get this piece right.



### Say this:

I can make this perfect in the editing process.

This piece isn't working, it's doomed to fail.



This is only a first draft, it doesn't need to be perfect.

Who am I to write this piece?



Who am I not to write this piece?

I'm no expert at this. I'll never get it right.



I can become an expert with practice.

Whether you're a poet trying to find the right word, an essayist struggling to finish a memoir, or a fiction writer stuck on the next plot point, don't let negative self-talk interrupt your creative process. Everything you need is already inside of you.



## 2. Make Writing a Daily Habit

Developing your writing confidence is a daily process; so is creative writing itself. Often, a writer leaves the page for too long, comes back to their work, and loses confidence in themselves to finish a project or start something new. Either they've lost the creative spark that drove them, or they haven't flexed their writing muscle in a bit, so now they're ridden with creative writing anxiety.

“ Try to find some time—even just 10 minutes a day—to put your thoughts on the page. ”

Building confidence in creative writing takes time. An athlete who didn't go to the gym wouldn't feel confident in herself; neither would a musician who doesn't practice his instrument. Writing is no different, so try to find some time—even just 10 minutes a day—to put your thoughts on the page.

## 3. Address What's Making You Doubt Yourself

Writers struggling with self-doubt tend to avoid their work. It's only natural.

If you think you can't rise to the challenge of creative writing, then the process of getting words on the page will feel painful, and writers will inevitably procrastinate.

Here's a little secret about procrastination: we don't do it because we're lazy, we do it because we expect negative emotions out of the task we're avoiding. Sometimes, being more confident as a writer involves addressing those negative emotions head-on.

Ask yourself why you expect to fail at your writing project. Is it because you don't think you're an expert? Do you think you lack the skills, or the experience, or simply the time to write? On top of controlling your self-talk, this type of self-awareness is a therapeutic tactic called Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), and when you have these conversations with yourself, you give yourself the mental control to overcome your creative writing anxiety and build up your confidence.

## 4. Keep Yourself Educated

The question of expertise is universal among writers. This only makes sense: it takes a lot of knowhow to talk about the world, and when the English lexicon exceeds half a million words, creative writers of any genre are bound to feel daunted by their own work.

“One of the best pieces of advice for writers is to always keep reading.”

This is why one of the best pieces of advice for writers is to always keep reading. By paying attention to craft and understanding what makes good pieces of literature so memorable, you can implement new writing tactics and skills in your own personal work. All creative writing is a conversation between other writers and the greater canon; as a participant, reading other works is essential, and will help you build your writing confidence.

Additionally, there are some books that every writer can read to feel more confident in their work. These are our top recommendations:

- [The Elements of Style](#) – Strunk & E.B. White
- [Zen in the Art of Writing](#) – Ray Bradbury
- [On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft](#) – Stephen King
- [Steering the Craft](#) – Ursula K. Le Guin
- [A Poetry Handbook](#) – Mary Oliver

## 5. Fake It Till You Make It

Writing confidence isn't something you build overnight, it's something that must be practiced and cultivated. Our last piece of advice is not only to harness this confident mindset, but also to display confidence in your writing. When you talk about your work to other people, don't just mention how hard writing is—talk about why the work is ambitious or exciting for you.

“When you talk about your work, don't just mention how hard writing is—talk about why the work is ambitious or exciting for you.”

Publicly believing in your work does two things. First, it creates a habit of positive self-talk, informing the ways in which you view your own writing.

Second, it influences other people to talk about your work with confidence, creating a positive feedback loop that makes you more confident as a writer. Be confident in your writing even if you don't feel that way, and eventually, it won't be an act – you and your peers will know that you're the real deal.

## Writing with Confidence: An Ongoing Journey

Self confidence in writing isn't easy, but with these tips, you'll learn to appreciate your work the same way your readers do. Doubting yourself is natural, but don't let it get in the way of your writer's journey—your words are valuable, you just need a little faith.



## Meet the Authors

### Giulietta “Julie” Nardone

Giulietta “Julie” Nardone has been writing funny essays, stories, speeches and plays since she was a teen. In college, she gained a reputation for writing “the funniest speeches on campus” and was called “Nutty Nardone” in high school. Giulietta’s stories have appeared in magazines such as Psychology Today and Spirituality & Health as well as anthologies like Chicken Soup for the Soul. Her witty essays have appeared in The Boston Globe, The Christian Science Monitor, Skirt! Magazine, Underwired Magazine, The Art of Spiritual Surrender, Flashquake, Rollins Magazine, Nail Polish Stories, The MetroWest Daily News, The Delta Optimist, Common Ties, and on NPR. When she isn’t writing, she’s painting with acrylics, designing cool logos, hiking in state parks, acting in local theater productions, and singing at karaoke nights. She lives in Massachusetts with her husband, Alfred Hitchcock movie collection, and two comedic cats.

# Meet the Authors

## Dennis Foley

Dennis Foley started his writing career in Hollywood where he worked as a writer and producer for many years. He has written for major motion picture studios as well as network television and has worn many hats as screenwriter, freelancer, staff writer, producer, consultant, or technical advisor on a wide variety of television shows, episodic series and motion pictures in addition to working as a novelist. He has published four novels and a memoir.

Dennis is a nationally recognized writing instructor and frequent guest speaker and lecturer at writer's conferences, workshops and college campuses around the country. He taught fiction writing at the UCLA Writer's Program for fifteen years and continues to teach online through Writers.com and locally at [Flathead Valley Community College](#).

Dennis holds an MFA in Writing from Vermont College and is a member of the [Writers Guild of America](#) and the [Authors Guild](#).

## Meet the Authors

### Sean Glatch

Sean Glatch is a poet and Stranger Things superfan. He is a Best of the Net nominee, a Louder Than A Bomb champion, and a Southern Shorts Award Winner in scriptwriting. Sean acts as the literary editor for Tongue Tied Mag and the Editor-in-Chief of the Cypress Dome, the literary journal at UCF.

Sean currently resides in Orlando, FL, where he's working on a poetry book about queering pop culture monsters. Sean's work is forthcoming or featured in Rising Phoenix Press, Ghost City Review, Bombus Press, 8Poems, and L'Ephemere Review. He spends most of his day thinking about his next cup of coffee.



## About Writers.com

Writers.com is a community of poets, novelists, and storytellers who share a passion for the craft. We help writers achieve their artistic vision with intensive, personalized, and fully remote workshops, taught by writers with decades of experience in the industry. We accept all writers regardless of genre, style, or background. Writing doesn't happen in a vacuum, so learn more about our community, and let's get writing!

Follow Us on Social Media



[Join the Writers.com Community Page on Facebook](#)