



**Courting the Muse
Practical and Spiritual Tools
for Writers Block**

Tawny Weber
September 2004

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Course Syllabus

Days 1-3

- ⑩ Pre-writing, training the Muse Setting the scene Creating a habit
Spiritual – visualization, affirmations

Day 4 Questions and Answers

Days 5-8

- ⑩ Writing, courting the Muse Things to do while writing... Spiritual –
Working with the planets
Aromatherapy and Crystals Using spiritual tools as characterization
tools

Day 9 Questions and Answers

Days 10-12

- ⑩ Post-writing, comforting the Muse Contests, Editors and Agents... the
many faces of rejection. Keeping the momentum and Playtime in
between Spiritual – Meditation and prayer.

Days 13-14 Questions and Answers

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Intro...

This workshop isn't so much about the craft of writing... it's more about the art of making the most of your writing process – whatever that process is to you.

My goal isn't to teach you MY process, it's to give you an array of tools and ideas to use as you see fit, in order to—again--make the most of your own writing style & process.

That said, I'm gonna be a wild-woman and just assume everyone already has that writing style figured out. Or at least that everyone here is already a WRITER. Nope, we won't address plotting –vs- pantsing, POV or hooks. Instead we're going to talk about things like setting as it applies to your workspace, dialogue as it applies to your self-talk, and tension as it applies to the less-than-uplifting aspects of our writing path.

The format of this workshop is fairly casual, because that's my style. I'll be asking a lot of questions, throwing out steps to follow if you like that kind of thing, and participation is strongly encouraged. If you're like me, the kind who loves to take workshops but rarely participates <G> that's fine too.

Since going it solo is never as much fun as playing with others <g>... all feedback, opinions and comments are welcome (especially the good ones <g>). So why don't we start by introducing ourselves. I guess it's only fair that I go first.

As most of you probably know--especially since I begged friends to sign up so I wasn't here talking to myself--my name is Tawny Weber.

On the writing side, I've been writing for 3 ½ years now, and am still amazed at how much I don't know <g>. I write hot, sexy category stories targeted at Harlequin Temptation and Blaze, as well as more complex romantic comedies targeted at Next and the single title market. I'm a 2004 Golden Heart finalist, and have a few contest finals and wins that make my Muse feel good.

On the spiritual side, I make my living as an Intuitive Consultant. Which is a fancy term for a hodge-podge of skills I've amassed over the years. I've been reading the Tarot for over twenty years now, and am a Reiki Master Teacher and Certified Hypnotherapist specializing in metaphysical hypnosis, along with few other tidbits and titles.

I'm really looking forward to this workshop and getting to know everyone – especially those of you I didn't bribe to be here <G>... so – your turn. Tell us about yourself!

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Day One -Pre-Writing... Training the Muse

Over the next three days, we're going to look at what you can do to court the Muse before you actually sit down to write. The first thing we're going to look at is Setting the Scene.

Setting the Scene... where do you write? How do you write? Take a few minutes and take stock of your setting. Do you write at a desk on a PC? Do you write at the dining room table on a laptop, in your comfy chair with your Alpie? Where ever it is – that's great! It works for you, so it's perfect. As long as it actually works for you.

But, hang on... just for the sake of this workshop -ask yourself if it really does work for you?

Do you have everything you need readily available? Files, notes, pen, paper, chocolate? Once you sit down to write, can you let the Muse free or do you have to keep stopping to get something? Frustrated Muses make for frustrated writers <g>. Are you comfortable? If it's important to you, is your chair ergonomically correct (mine isn't, I sit cross-legged in a high backed office chair – but that works for me). Do you have the level of privacy necessary for you to effectively produce? For some, that might be a closed door – others a coffeehouse filled with the white noise of chatting caffeine guzzlers. Again – what works for you?

Step one – is your writing area a practical set up for you? Is it the ideal set up for you?

If it is – great... skip ahead to Step Two.

If it isn't – why? In an ideal world, what would you change? Would you have a private place to write? Would you have a desk? Would you have an office outside the house? Would you have a window overlooking a garden? A small cubby with no distractions?

Take a minute, grab a notebook and pen, or open a new document and write out a description—as short or as detailed as you like—of your ideal workspace.

Quick side-note here... it's a proven fact that if you write something down, there is a much higher chance of it becoming a reality. On the practical side –any goal setting guru will make you write out your goals. There is a story about a college graduating class, of which only a few wrote down their goals – twenty years later, those few were financially richer than the entire rest of the class. Just because they

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wrote down goals? Probably not. But that step of actually verbalizing on paper what they wanted out of life helped define where they'd put their time and energy.

On a spiritual level, when you verbalize something, it creates a possibility —an energy— that you're sending out to the Universe. Goals are the same, it's like you're putting in your request to the Universe and as long as you act "as if", the Universe will work in tandem with you to meet that request.

So – write down your ideal space.

Done?

Great ☺ Then take a look at what you have to work with and ask yourself how you can start working toward that ideal space now. Be creative – you're all writers, I know you're creative!

For instance, if you ideally have privacy to write, and you live in a house sans privacy, can you write in the bathroom? Only one bathroom? Can you write with headphones on? Can't stand music – what about an environmental CD or tape? The important thing is to take a positive (as in, yes, I can make this happen as opposed to Oh no, I'll never have that) look at what you wrote and brainstorm (another great writing tool) ideas to begin making it a reality.

If you'd like – go ahead and post examples of your ideal and what you can do now to take steps toward that ideal.

Step Two -You've already mapped out your ideal, and figured out what you can do NOW to work toward that ideal. So—take another look at your workspace. Is it tidy, messy, visually-appealing or a guilt-ridden nightmare that makes you shudder with shame? Is it a place that welcomes your Muse or one that repels?

What can you do to increase the welcome? I'll list a few ideas, can you come up with more?

**Put away the clutter. File papers, clear unused "stuff", organize your space.

**Beautiful flowers in a lovely vase (if you use fresh flowers, please change them out as they wither. Nothing less appealing than dead flowers, except maybe if you're writing dark paranormals and that kind of thing helps inspire the Muse.)

**Inspiring photos or landscapes. Could be book covers (yours or authors you

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admire), pictures of yourself at writing conferences or with other authors or writers, character inspiration, any place or person that makes you feel good.

Personally – I have a lovely picture of Johnny Depp <g> he definitely inspires me. I also have a hard-cover by one of my favorite authors, with a twist. At one particular point, I was feeling rather discouraged and told my husband I felt like I would never be published. Usually he sympathizes and listens and makes me feel better when I'm in a funk. This time, he got up and left the room. I, of course, sulked. He came back a few minutes later with a hard-cover of my long time favorite author, but he'd put blue painters tape over the name and wrote mine in... and told me I'd get there as long as I didn't give up. So that particular book sits right over my monitor and inspires me like nothing else in the world.

**Feng Shui. Your house, your office or just your writing space or desk. This subject alone

could fill a workshop, so I'll just recommend a few of my favorite books:

The Western Guide to Feng Shui, Room by Room and
The Western Guide to Feng Shui by Terah Kathryn Collins
Move Your Stuff, Change Your Life by Karen Rauch Carter
Feng Shui for Dummies by David Daniel Kennedy

So... day one, the practical look at your writing space. Does it inspire your Muse or repel creativity?

Day Two -Creating a Habit...

Sounds nasty, huh? Aren't habits those things we're always trying to break? Or things like exercise, that we know we should do but can't stick with long enough to be a habit <g>.

Okay-so a writing habit.

Does a habit of writing have to be defined as X hours a day, X days a week writing? Is it a one-size-fits-all process? No way.

My habit won't look like your habit. Nobody can define the habit that will work for us except US.

But one thing that all our habits should have in common is that they have a positive effect on our writing production. Because, lets be honest, if your main writing habit is procrastination, you won't get where you want to go very fast.

Step One -ask yourself how you write. How long, how often. Do you set daily page

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goals, or weekly hour goals? Do you write in spurts or slow, steady streams? Do you spend weeks on research, more weeks on plotting/outlining, then dive in?

Take a few minutes to really define your writing habit. And if it's currently overshadowed by procrastination – ask yourself what your writing habit has been when you weren't procrastinating <g>.

If you've produced a completed manuscript, you know what it took you to get it done. If you've completed more than one, you will have a clearer view of your writing process. If you are working on your first manuscript – GO YOU! <g> In that case, look at your process so far.

Okay –know what works best for you to write productively?

I do. I spend about two weeks outlining and plotting, then write a minimum page count weekly. I know that a weekly count works for me, because it gives me leeway for work and for weekends and family. I set a goal finish date, and track my pages daily. Obsessive? Probably <g> but that is my process. Someone else's might be to jot notes on a yellow pad on the subway ride to work, then spend Saturday mornings transcribing the notes and writing out the scene.

Now – how does this apply to Courting the Muse? The Muse is much easier to court if it knows to show up. Bottom line, if you know your writing habits and stick with them, you are creating an emotional and mental environment that invites your Muse to stick around – that EXPECTS your Muse to stick around. Better than chasing it down, eh?

Like any job, when you know your writing process and make it a habit, you are creating an expectation that the Muse show up and work.

Want to share your writing habit? What works for you?

Step Two – You know what your writing process is... take it a step further and work it. They say it takes 30 days of repetition to create a habit... how many days do you have in? How many do you need for this to be a habit?

What kind of things do you have to watch out for that might derail your habit? Don't judge these things or beat yourself or anyone else up <g> just be aware of what might derail you.

How do you get yourself back on track when you are derailed? Make a plan.

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Day Three -Self-Talk, Affirmations and Visualizations.

Most of us are actually familiar with self-talk – we use it all the time. It’s that running commentary in our head. When we repeat certain phrases, either aloud or to ourselves, they are called affirmations.

“This sucks.” “What made me think I can write?” “Give it up, the only way you’ll sell a book is to get a job in a bookstore.”

Okay – so those are harsh and it’s probably only me that says them when I’m in a funk <G>.

But what about...

“I suck at synopsis writing.” “I have to be in the mood to write.” “I’ll never sell this manuscript.” (finish this WIP, final in a contest, get an agent, etc...) or the worst... “What difference does it make if I write or not?”

In a roundabout way, those are actually affirmations too, albeit negative ones. So if our self-talk is regularly negative, that is what our Muse hears... over and over and over. And that tears down at our ability to write, to be enthused – to reach that next level. Most of us don’t even hear ourselves do this. So take some time over the next few weeks, and listen – just listen for certain phrases, or ask your CP, family or friends to listen for you. You might be surprised at what you hear.

Affirmations can be a very powerful tool to take your attitude and your writing to the next level, to inspire and empower yourself and your Muse. So -How do you do that?

By creating positive affirmations that work for YOU. By definition, an affirmation is a positive statement you repeat on a regular basis (many times a day is good.) An affirmation will only work if it’s in your voice – your words. I once worked with a woman on a weight loss issue whose previous Hypnotherapist had given her a tape to listen to with messages such as “I love lettuce; I want to eat salad more than anything else.” This message didn’t work because the client hated lettuce with a passion, and argued with the tape. To her, the affirmations were a waste and a frustration and actually created a block to her weight loss. Only you know your key words, the triggers that will motivate and inspire you.

Along with being personalized, like our writing, our affirmations have to be in OUR voice. So... this probably wouldn’t work for me – “You’re a bright,

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enthusiastic writer worthy of inspiration and happiness.” That’s not my voice, not my personal speaking (or writing) style... but “You Rock” will totally work for me <g>.

They have to be written in the present tense, not future – so “I am a multi-published author” will work, “Someday I’ll sell a book” won’t. Not only was that second example pretty wishy-washy, it focused on that nebulous “someday” that has no real energy or time-target.

Some daily affirmations might look something like:

I am positive, empowered and filled with positive energy. My Muse provides the inspiration for me to reach my writing goals today. My creativity and knowledge are ample and abundant. I have the energy and drive to meet my daily writing goal. The energy of the Universe aids me as I work to meet my goals. I am a positive, creative writer and am not influenced by the negative feedback of others. I rock!

Yours will likely look different.

Step One -Create a list of 6-12 writing affirmations that mean something to you. Remember; keep them positive, in your voice and in the present tense.

Feel free to share them, but while you work on those, lets move on to Visualizations.

Visualizing – what is it? In its simplest form, it’s the ability to imagine. Hey, we’re writers, we imagine GREAT. So – how do we apply that to courting the Muse?

By creating a scene in which you are the heroine (or hero). In this scene, you have reached your writing goals, your personal goals, etc...

Imagine it – it could be The Call, or a huge party to celebrate your first sale, or your first appearance on the best-seller list, or you won the Rita.

Imagine the people that will be there, the sounds, textures, scents and tastes – flesh the scene out and make it real.

The truth is, our sub-conscious minds can’t discern between what is real and what is imagined. So if you create this image and you visualize it daily, it becomes real to your sub-conscious and will soon find your conscious self working harder to create that reality.

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Step Two – Create a visualization. Like an affirmation, create it as a positive, in the present tense and use all of the senses to make it real. On a daily basis (I do it when I get in bed each night) play this visual through your mind, imagine it as vividly as you can.

Feel free to share your visualization.

Day Four – Q&A

Day Five -Practical things to do while writing...

You already know how to write, so I'm not addressing that <g>. Instead, I'll talk about some things you can do during the process to buoy your confidence and keep your muse coming back to play.

Let's say you've already worked to set the scene and created a pleasing writing environment. And that you've worked on the habit of writing and know when and for how long you'll write on a regular basis – that right there is over half the battle. Your Muse knows where and when to show up.

Perfect, right?

Sometimes. And other times, even though we've taken the pre-writing steps, it just doesn't go that smoothly. Similar to writing out a detailed plot, once in awhile when we get into the actual writing, the story just takes other necessary twists. So what do you do if you sit down in your perfect environment at your habitual time and ... nothing happens? It won't flow, the words bog, or the characters just won't cooperate?

There are a few things –

Most important is to take out those affirmations and read over them. Remind yourself how great you are, that you are a wonderful writer who has the talent and perseverance to finish this WIP. It's much easier to push through if you are gentle with yourself and your Muse.

Turn off your internal editor. Just let yourself write, without judgment. There are some programs or groups that help with this. Because they require a certain page count, it's easier to push yourself to JUST WRITE.

Survivor Writers, which requires 15 pages a week posted or you are kicked off the "island." (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SurvivorWriter/>)

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Club 100 requires that you write 100 pages for 100 days, or start all over.
(Club100writerssubscribe@yahoo.com)

Book-In-A-Week's allow you to push your writing into high gear and strive for a goal. Many groups or chapters hold regular BIAW's (FTHRW holds one monthly on their Procrastination loop) and the camaraderie and accountability really motivate and push that Muse.

Timer writing (my personal favorite), is where you set the time for a short period – say 30 minutes – and just write. No email, no IM, no getting up to do anything. Just write. By setting that limit, your Muse knows she'll be free soon. You are both at ease, knowing your commitment is set and measurable.

Brainstorm, change scenes, character interviews, re-read a previous chapter.
Read a writing how-to book, take a workshop, talk to other writers.

Each night before bed, read over your work for the day and as you go to sleep, imagine the scene, the story, the characters. Allow your subconscious mind to offer input in the dream state – but like Lucid Dreaming, you need to specify before you go to sleep that you will remember the answers when you awake. And have a notepad and pen right there so you can jump on those ideas as soon as you open your eyes. I recently attended a workshop by Eric Maisel that described a process called Sleep Thinking, in which you go to sleep asking a question about your story – and let your subconscious work it out in your dreams. Try it!

Pull out any reviews, contest feedback, awards, CP comments – ANYTHING that made you feel good. And read it, really read it. Let that euphoria, that feeling of validation pour over you. You can even add that to your pre-writing ritual--read over something that empowers you!

Exercise (was that a groan I just heard?) Seriously... it's hard to generate energy while sitting still. And no matter how fast those fingers are flying, the vast percentage of our body is in stationary while we write. Science shows that exercise generates energy, improves our emotional state, to say nothing of our health. Make exercise a part of your writing routine. It could be a short walk before you sit down to write, it could be a full-scale kickboxing match each morning. Whatever works for you – get that blood pumping to the brain, your energy flowing and give your body a healthy gift.

Most of all, focus on the positive. Keep writing.

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Step One – find your validation. Go through and decide what makes you feel empowered to write, makes you feel like a strong writer. How can you best use it? Make a list if you need to. Can you post it next to your computer? Can you put it in a binder? Can you add it to the affirmations you are now saying daily? Look at your routine-does it include movement or exercise? Can it?

Day Six – Spiritual things to do while writing...

Working with the planets... Where is that darned Mercury now?

First off, I need to say that I'm not an astrologer. Astrology has a foundation in science and mathematics, and I have never quite been able to master it all <g>. But that said, I have a basic grasp of the fundamentals so here are a few ways they apply to the writer and her Muse...

Did you ever notice how people cringe when they hear the planet Mercury is going retrograde? What does it mean? And does it *really* matter?

Here's the deal... Mercury, the closest planet to the sun, rules communication. In its many forms, communication covers not just our writing but things like conversations, the mail delivery and computers. Negotiations and contracts, phone calls and deadlines. So when the planet is retrograde – or appears to be moving backward – these areas tend to become bogged, broken or behind.

That's not to say when Mercury is retrograde we should just shut off the computer and send our Muse on vacation and hide away. Hey, you've worked hard to create a writing habit, to get in the groove – no way some planet billions of miles away is gonna mess with that, right? So what do you do? Write, but be gentle with yourself during this time if you run into snags. Revise if possible, polish. Double check all your facts and if you're mailing anything off, confirm the address and give yourself plenty of leeway for the package to arrive.

When is Mercury retrograde? The next time this year will be from November 30 – December 20. Not the best time to overnight those Golden Heart entries!

So what other ways do the planets affect our writing progress? None quite so globally, but each of our astrological profiles will affect us specifically. We all know our sun sign and most of us have, at one time or another, checked our horoscope. This is like reading a back cover blurb – it gives a great overview of what's going on, but doesn't tell the whole story. Unfortunately, I'm not qualified to tell the whole story either <g> but do recommend you explore at the very least your Rising sign and Moon sign, as well as have a clue how your chart is laid out. You can find sites

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online that will cast your chart for free, or pick up some good books on the subject. One I love is THE ONLY ASTROLOGY BOOK YOU'LL EVER NEED by Joanna Martine Woolfolk.

And for the best monthly horoscopes I've found so far, do check out the Astrology Zone, Susan Miller's site -<http://www.astrologyzone.com>
The one heavenly body that has the strongest affect, in my experience, is the Moon. New waxes to Full, then wanes. This energy affects the tides, and our emotional states (ever hear that truism about the full moon bringing out the "crazies"). We respond to the push and pull of energy and can use it to our writing advantage. The dark or new moon is a great time for planning, for plotting or character charts – for planting the seeds of ideas. Use the waxing moon – from new to full – for butt-in-chair-hands-on-keyboard writing. The energy will carry you full steam ahead. Use the Full Moon, its power and magic, to make those calls, send out important queries, empower your manuscripts before mailing. And the waning cycle from full back to new is perfect for revising, for processing contest feedback and critiquing.

Step One – Think back over the month of August... did you run into any evidence of Mercury's retrograde? Take some time to chart your personal writing energy, and then the path of the moon to learn how this heavenly body affects your process. Take a peek at your horoscope for the month and see if you find any truth in it. Do you have any astrology sites you've found empowering that you care to share?

Day Seven – The power of Aromatherapy and Crystals

My desk is arranged specifically for writing. On the left corner, in the Wealth area according to Feng Shui, is a tabletop fountain of rose quartz and tumbled amethyst. I have quartz crystal, citrine and rose quartz arranged in front of my monitor, a smoky quartz in my area of Fame and Reputation and a lovely pendant with a moonstone hanging over my Helpful People area, to name just a few of the crystals on my desk. Throughout my home are crystals and stones and I use them in my Reiki practice.

When I write, I light candles and use an aromatherapy burner to fill the air with fragrance. The candles are specific colors depending on what I'm working on, the scent specific to my particular need.

Science has shown that scent and color trigger reactions in people, and can be used to create sought-after states of mind. Why not use this to our advantage? Create a serene, inviting environment to write. Light up some red candles and use a lush, sexy sent for that love scene. Use the burning flame to push you to write that dark moment. Surround yourself with nature's gift of crystals and pull in their energy to enhance and empower your writing.

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How do you choose what to use?

First decide what energy you want to create, what energies you need to bring in. Choose your crystals carefully. I don't recommend buying them without first touching (no internet purchases) because stones have an energy and you'll do better to see if it feels "right" before you buy. Just hold it, and notice if you like it. Or don't like it <g>. Does it make you feel good or bad, strong or weak, or neutral?

Here is a small list of crystals and oils and the properties associated with them.

Crystals –

Garnet – Healing and purifying, helps move past blocks, protection and passion (deals with first chakra, the root center) Carnelian – Increasing self-confidence and the ability to communicate, magnify talent,

success (deals with second chakra, the creative center)

Citrine – Mental healing, enhancing self-esteem and inspiration (deals with the third chakra, the power center) Rose Quartz – Love for others and for the self, romance and harmony (deals with the fourth

chakra, the heart center)

Sodalite – Self-perception and goal work, communication and confidence (deals with the fifth chakra, the communication center) Amethyst – Intuitive abilities, "hearing" the Muse, Spirituality (deals with the sixth chakra,

the psychic center)

Clear Quartz – Amplifies energy, both yours and any other crystals, connects to the higher self (deals with the seventh chakra, the spiritual center) Smoky Quartz –

Balance, releasing negativity, protection and grounding. Oils – (check before using any oils, as some scents can be a problem during pregnancy or

for anyone with epilepsy, among other issues.) Gardenia – Romance and love

Lavender – Relaxation Lemongrass – Invigorating Lemon Verbena – Improves

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concentration Peppermint – Energizing Sage – Cleanses energies Ylang Ylang –
Aphrodisiac <g>

Step One – Just give it a try. Even if you don't get into the metaphysical aspect... you'll be enhancing your writing atmosphere, which will please your Muse.

Day Eight -Using spiritual tools as characterization tools (Tarot & Astrology)

The Tarot is an ancient means of divination and a fabulous tool for writers. The study of the Tarot is both extremely simply and fascinatingly complex. But for the workshop, we'll peek at the simple <g>.

In the last fifteen years, the variety of Tarot decks has increased. Some are true to tradition and follow the Rider-Waite format, others veer off with the author's vision. You can find decks that incorporate art, myth or fantasy, and even animals. There really is a deck for everyone, and if you're in the market – you should visit a store or a website and peruse the various decks to find one that appeals most to you. If you're a beginner though, I do suggest you find one that follows the Rider-Waite format because it will include the traditional archetypes.

The Tarot is divided into two main parts-the Major Arcana and the Minor Arcana. The Minor represents our day to day happenings, while the Major covers archetypal lessons we all encounter on our life's journey. Interestingly for writers, the Major Arcana follows the Hero's Journey.

Learning to read the cards is a course in itself (or a few) and not the focus here. But you can, without being a fluent reader, still use the cards in many ways to aid your writing. Each deck comes with a book of definitions. That book and the deck itself are all the tools you need to get started.

Here are some ideas:

Pull a Major Arcana and Minor Arcana card for your heroine and read the definitions. The Major represents her Internal Conflict, and the Minor represents her External Conflict. Do the same for your Hero and brainstorm from there.

Randomly pull a card and read the definition. Ask your character how they'd handle this in their life.

Let the Major Arcana help you decide a theme.

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Use the cards to do readings for your characters and plot. The book you get with your deck will have at least one spread and directions on what each position means... play with it and see if it sparks any ideas.

These are just a few things to try <g>. The Tarot is based on archetypal symbols that will speak to your Muse (and your sub-conscious) triggering an expansion of plot ideas or exploration of the depths of your characters.

Step One – If you have a deck, try one of the suggestions and see how it sparks the Muse.

Astrology...

As you might use the major Archetypes as a foundation to your character creation – you can also use the astrological signs as a blueprint to map their basic characteristics.

Read any basic description of the signs and you'll get the key buzzwords...

Aries – Courage, active, energetic, optimistic, selfish Taurus – Dependable, affectionate, patient, stubborn, greedy Gemini – Clever, skillful, versatile, intellectual, superficial Cancer – Loyal, sympathetic, patient, kind, temperamental Leo – Exuberant, self-assured, witty, authoritative, overbearing Virgo – Practical, neat, organized, intelligent, hypercritical Libra – Easygoing, diplomatic, artistic, idealist, self-indulgent Scorpio – Passionate, intense, competitive, loyal, obsessive Sagittarius – Independent, ambitious, generous, philosophical, irresponsible Capricorn – Self-Sufficient, determined, patient, cautious, unforgiving Aquarius – Friendly, inventive, creative, generous, visionary, argumentative Pisces – Intuitive, emotional, generous, sensitive, escapist

A basic astrology book will not only flesh out these buzzwords, but give you a description of the personality traits, habits and vices associated with that sign. Better yet, it'll also give you information on its most and least compatible signs. Obviously keen on making our characters suffer as much as possible, we can use this to make the hero the polar opposite and push the character into facing their fears.

For example... our heroine is Pisces.

We know she's intuitive and emotional, a true romantic. Her polar opposite is Virgo, who has little patience with her airy-fairy ways and refusal to deal with what he sees as major issues. Ooooh, conflict right there <g> huh? You'll know her issues will deal

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with escapism and to overcome her EC, she's going to have to stand up to something she's always run from in the past.

With a good astrological book, you will get quite a bit more information and be able to really deepen the motivation, issues and conflicts of your characters. This also, even for pantzers

<g> gives you a very loosely structured guideline for your characters to follow so you know when they are acting out of character.

Step Two – Pick any sign (your own if you want to take the easy way out <g>) and create a heroine based on that sign's dominant traits. Then look to its polar opposite and create your hero. Play with it, and see if this is a tool that amuses your Muse.

Day Ten -Post-writing, comforting the Muse

Contests, Editors and Agents... the many faces of rejection.

They say rejection builds character. I don't know about that, my character tends to pout more than bulk up <g> but rejection does solidify my determination. I've had the gamut... lousy contest feedback, painful agent rejections and miserable editor rejections. And while there is probably a lot to learn from the feedback, what I've discovered is most important is how you treat your Muse during the process.

Do you beat yourself up? "Another contest down the tubes and no final. I suck. This manuscript sucks. I should just give up."

Or conditionally beat yourself up? "Eh, contests are so subjective, if the judges don't get it, that's their problem. But the editor/agent rejection – what's the point of continuing? I'm through, washed up. I suck. This manuscript sucks. I don't have a chance at this house, and it's all I've been focused on for the last year. I wasted all this time." Etc...

Any of that familiar? What do you think it does to your Muse to hear it? Do you feel like diving into the WIP after chanting this a few dozen times? Probably not.

I think one of the healthiest things I've heard in regards to rejection is to give yourself a day. Wallow, indulge, let yourself sink in the misery and pain of it. Then get out of that bed the next day and move on. No put-downs, no misery, no continuation. One day, period.

Is that enough time to get past the pain of it? No. It really isn't. But it is quite

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enough time to allow yourself to be paralyzed by the rejection. So move on, work on your WIP (which is why I recommend always having something in the works. Never rest on your laurels), shift your focus. Give yourself time and distance. Then, maybe a week later, look at the feedback again. See what you can get from it. It's only a rotten experience if you don't learn something from it, if you don't find something to use to your advantage.

If it's a contest, look for a pattern – give your Muse something to work with. If it's an agent or editor, is the door still open? How can you turn this to your advantage?

Remember, your Muse isn't going to show up for long if it's abused. And every time you rip apart your work, your writing, your talent or offer a dismal forecast on your chances of success, you're abusing your Muse. You're planting seeds of doubt. And whatever we plant, whatever we focus on is what we create.

Let me say that one again...

Whatever we focus on is what we create.

What are you focused on? Be honest, even if it's only with yourself, but really look into your heart and ask what it is that you are focused on regarding your writing? The rejections, the odds of getting published, the feedback from your CP's, contests or editors? Or the fact that you're working darned hard to get yourself out there, that the more you push yourself out there, the better your chances of success, that you're learning something from each experience and growing as a writer.

These are our badges of honor <g>. Proof that we're working writers.

Step One – Look over your rejections pile. It could be CP comments, contest feedback or form rejections. It could be detailed letters or open invitations to resubmit. What can you glean from them? What did you learn from your badges of honor? How can you use the experiences, the information to HELP you instead of paralyze you?

Day Eleven -Keeping the momentum... never let your Muse down by giving up.

We all have our personal writing process. I don't mean the 'before' part... the pre-planning. Nor do I mean our habit of getting those words to paper. I mean the telling of our stories. Some of us write from page one through The End in a single continuous process. Others dabble with a few pages, or chapters, of one manuscript then shift to another, gracefully juggling multiple WIPs at one time.

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I'm not going to address that process except for one tiny question...

Is it working for you? Are you giving your Muse the freedom to create, or stifling her? Are you shoving her along a narrow path, or changing direction so often she's dizzy? Are you nurturing your creativity, or letting a non-working writing process keep you from successfully launching your stories? When you run into a snag in your story, do you abandon it, or work through it?

Are you letting your Muse get a workout by really digging deep to delve the depths of your plot possibilities, or are you teaching bad habits by avoiding conflict (not in your story, in the process of writing it.)

We all have our own process, and those processes do evolve the longer we write. They might even change year to year or manuscript to manuscript. But taking a good, honest look at your process and ask yourself...

Is this nurturing or inhibiting my Muse?

So... what about those times when the manuscript just won't work? Do you keep trying to push through it? Do you toss it aside and work on something else? Or figure you'll just wait until the Muse shows up and tells you what to do, and go play computer games in the meantime?

What does that method teach your Muse? What habit are you instilling?

Okay, I admit it, there is a time when we just have to move on. A manuscript that's played out the contest circuit and bagged a rejection from a line it was specifically written has limited options. Is it giving up to set it aside?

First, ask yourself if you've considered all the options. Could the category story be expanded, rewritten with strong sub-plots and be queried to the single title houses? Could it be reworked for a different line? Could any of the elements (characters, plot, setting) be lifted and used in a different manuscript? Have you asked people you trust, CPs, mentors, agents, what –in their opinion– makes the story stand out? Not what's wrong with it – what makes it stand out? What works? How can you use that?

Do you honor your writing and your Muse, even when you choose to retire a manuscript?

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As you can see, it all depends on how you treat your Muse in the process. Do you acknowledge all the manuscript did for you? Did it hook you up with an editor? Did you gain contest success with it? Did you garner an opening with an agent? Did you discover characters you love, an inspiring plot? A new writing skill? Give the manuscript – and your Muse – credit.

Find a way to honor each manuscript, after all-you gave it life. A process I like is charm bracelets. Purchase a charm to represent each finish manuscript and wear it with pride. Or a special gift to yourself and your Muse, a small memento. A massage for writing The End. Some form of nurturing and pleasure goes a long way toward training that Muse to reach The End.

Step One – Take an honest look at how you treat your Muse. Does it honor the process, or is it enough to scare the Muse into hiding? How do you reward yourself? Do you? Can you?

Playtime in between...

Can we write full tilt with no break endlessly? Well, maybe some can, but most of us can't. We need those little breaks in between to recharge, renew and refresh. But how can we take a break and still keep our connection to the Muse?

Here are a couple ideas;

Pick up *The Artists Way* by Julia Cameron. Maybe you can't follow it all the way through, but read it for ideas that DO work for you. Like playdates, or journaling/morning pages.

Do some other form of creative expression... paint (a wall or a picture), craft, scrapbook, dance, sing. Any form of creativity will still engage the Muse.

Work on a writing related activity... your website, write an article, polish your bio and resume, clean out your contest files, organize your writing files, write a newsletter and create a mailing list.

Take a class or workshop... we never want to stop learning and reaching. It could be a class specific to writing, or something that will improve your life and hence, your writing. Just be careful here not to become a full-time student <g> and not write.

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Step Two – What are some ideas you have or things you do to refresh and renew the Muse?

Day Twelve -Spiritual – Meditation and prayer.

Self-Confidence and a rounded life, don't put too much pressure on your Muse.

What is meditation? In its simplest form, it's emptying the mind of thought. Sounds easy enough, right? Its actually one of the most difficult things to master, because our minds don't want to be empty <g>. Go ahead and give it a try... first glance at the clock (one with a second hand) and note the time. Then close your eyes, empty your mind. Let all thoughts and images empty, just disappear. How long can you go? How long was it before the random thoughts, various questions, self-talk filtered in? Our minds simply don't want to be empty.

So why meditate? Again, to simplify, because it allows us to become aware of the messages we're giving ourselves and to modify them. It grounds and centers us, which in the hustle and bustle craziness that we all live in is a rare gift. It is a tiny piece of serenity that will ripple out to all areas of our life. Okay, so meditation is a great thing, but it's hard to do, right? Hey, I've heard that about writing too <ggg>. Don't let that slow you down... it is an easily learned tool. It just takes a lot of practice.

One of the easiest forms of meditation is seeded meditating. If you give your mind something to focus on, it doesn't feel empty and won't rush to fill with thoughts, messages and self-talk. A seed is a phrase or an affirmation. For instance, "I am a gifted writer." or "Love" or "Massive positive energy."

Set a timer if it has a gentle tone, or the snooze on your radio/CD player on soft music for 5, 10 or 15 minutes. You want to have an "end" to the session, but don't want an abrupt sound jarring you from meditation. Turn off the phones or put them in a different room, and ask anyone in the house to not interrupt the process.

Choose your phrase and settle into a comfortable chair (don't lie down, you mind, once relaxed will signal your body to sleep, which isn't the purpose here), and close your eyes.

Take a moment to just listen to the thoughts, notice where your mind focuses, what messages barrage your thoughts. Don't judge them, just notice and be aware of what kind of self-talk you generate.

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Now focus on the phrase you chose. Repeat it in your mind. Let that phrase become your total focus. In the beginning, thoughts will intrude. Don't judge them, or yourself, simply push them away and refocus on the phrase. Allow your body to relax, your breath to flow deeply and just focus on the phrase.

In this state, your breath will steady, your body will relax and your energy will balance.

You might receive messages, impressions or inspiration. If you do, set it aside to run with after the session, but honor this time by finishing.

When the timer gently dings, the music starts, the signal comes to end the session, take a deep breath and slowly open your eyes. Don't jump up and run... but gently take stock of your body, your energy. Notice anything your mind is now bringing to your attention.

If you do this on a regular basis, daily or at least weekly, you'll find your stress level taking a nosedive, your energy increasing and a stronger feeling of balance that not only benefits your writing life, but your entire life.

It's been said that while prayer is talking to the divine, meditation is a way of listening for the answers. Our minds and lives are usually so busy and active, this is a special way to stop for 5, 10, 15 minutes a day and just listen for guidance, direction or peace.

Step One – Give meditation a try. Even 5 minutes, just try it and see how you feel? Can you do this for a week, and see how you feel?

Prayer...

We probably all have a handle on prayer. What it is, how we do it, how it factors into our lives. This might be different for all of us, and I'm not going to open that door <g>.

Instead I'm going to ask you to look at one particular aspect of prayer...

Gratitude. Blessings. Thanks.

Take a moment and think about your blessings. Sometimes when we're in stress, or muddling through a difficult time, finding those blessings can be a little difficult – but do try to work up a list. Sometimes it's hard to find that silver-lining, but often our biggest life lessons come through painful times. If we are in the habit of being aware of our blessings, of being in gratitude, it's a lot easier to find that silver-lining. (Please note; I'm referring to normal day-to-day life, not life-altering, painful

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events. Those are outside the scope of this workshop.)

So... make your list of blessings. It could be a mental list but it will be stronger if you actually write out down.

I'm a little on the anal side, so I categorize my blessings <g>. I start with my physical blessings, my family blessings, my relationship blessings, my security blessings, my spiritual blessings, my writing blessings, my Muse, my... well, you get the idea.

So you have a list, now what?

Give thanks. I end each day by giving thanks to the Divine for bringing the blessings or opportunities to my life. You might choose to give thanks in the morning, before meals, or at specific times related to the blessing (for instance a prayer of thanks before writing for your talent, skill and inspiration.) You need to find the method that works for you.

By living with the "Attitude of Gratitude" you focus on the positive in your life – on all the good stuff instead of the negative. What we focus on, we empower and increase.

Spiritually, we've been blessed with much in our lives, and as Miss Manners would say, it's only polite to show our gratitude.

Step Two – Create your list of blessings and give thanks. Your list will be ever-changing as your lift shifts, so it's an ongoing process. Find a time, place, ritual of giving thanks that resonates with you and make it a habit.

And on that note... I'd like to give thanks to all of you for taking time out of your busy lives to cyber-attend this workshop. I hope you found something here that will empower and inspire you and your Muse!

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