



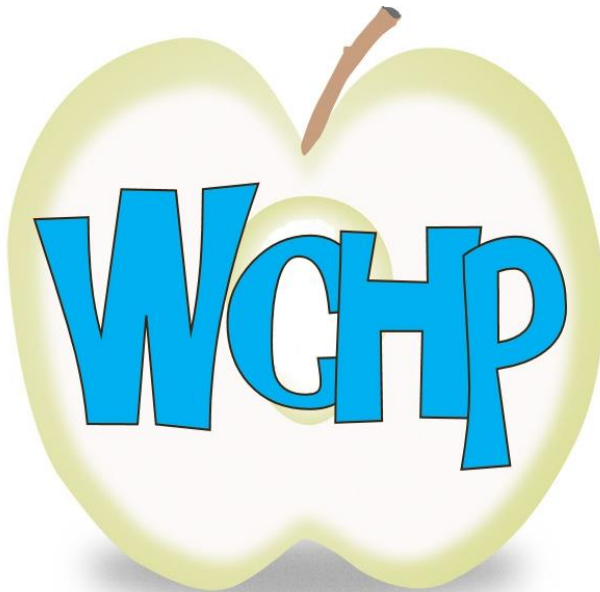
Brought to
you by
Hunter Emkay
and COLIN



Writer's

Core Habit Pack

Exercises to Control Your
Inner Critic (and Muse)



FREE
EBOOK



About:



Hunter Emkay is a writer of thrilling fiction and blogs at

<http://hunterswritings.wordpress.com>

In April 2013, Hunter started to write an A-Z blog series on **Core Habits for Writers**, only to find that certain posts were too wordy. This is the result – an ebook pack of exercises freely shared with other writers.

This writer's core habit pack contains several exercises designed to control and call our inner critics and muses when required.

Colin, who is *working graciously as soon to be ousted as* Hunter's inner critic, decided to look over the work.

Please join Hunter (and Colin) at the blog, or stalk Hunter @



Hunter



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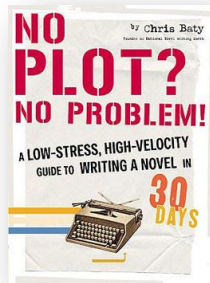
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Many of the exercises in this ebook effectively work in dual functions – use the exercises to:-

1. Control the inner critic voices or that of a hyper-active muse
2. Call on an inner critic or muse when you need them

In the accompanying blog post [C is for Controlling your Inner Critic \(and Muse\)](#) you will find why we have inner critics, and why we need to control them, but not fully kill them.

Critic Control Exercises



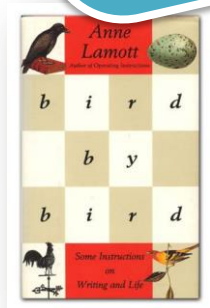
In essence, this is a visualisation exercise, one I first noticed when reading **Chris Baty's** [No Plot, No Problem](#) years ago. Baty is the founder of **National Novel Writing Month**, or [NaNoWriMo](#), the annual marathon challenge to start and finish a 50,000 word novel each November. The book, *No Plot, No Problem* is a companion to the marathon, but also provides some excellent basic writing craft guidance.



The success and promise of NaNoWriMo is that you will write words, but they will probably be bad words. This is an example of the generally accepted **writer's maxim** that we should:

WRITE FIRST, EDIT LATER

which, in turn, is often related to **Anne Lamott's** famous quote in the book, [Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life](#), about "shitty first drafts."



A key to NaNoWriMo is the ability to turn off that inner critic right from the start. In *No Plot, No Problem*, Baty suggests we "lock the inner critic" away for the term of the first draft. He calls these things "**Inner Editors**".

There are many permutations to Baty's "Lock your Inner Editor away" exercise - many writers advice us to send the critic away for a day – if not a day, how about an hour?

Baty's example is interesting in that he provides an actionable button in the book. An emblem or symbol for readers, but the visualisation involved helps to sink in the actions you want to take in your mind. Since then, the boards and support articles on NaNoWriMo have filled with other devices like this to help us to individually visualise taking control of our issues with writing. *Plot Bunnies*, for instance, are also kennelled.

"Mostly, people come away from NaNo realizing that writing can be more fun if you stop trying to get it perfect on the first go-round. You can get it perfect in the rewrite. The first draft is all about making wonderful messes." [Chris Baty. Source.](#)



“

I'll need to confiscate your Inner Editor... Because this month, you'll leave your Inner Editor here with me at the fully licensed, board-certified No Plot? No Problem! Inner Editor Kennel – where it can spend its days carping with other Inner Editors, happily pointing out typos in the newspaper and complaining about the numerous plot holes on daytime television.

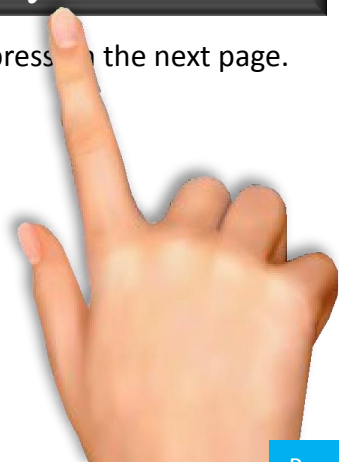
It will be very, very happy here. And you can have the beastie back in a month's time, after you've written your book...

No Plot, No Problem,
pages 106-107.

Baty even offers you a

Take my inner editor

button to press on the next page.



Critic Control Exercises



1. Interviewing

No, not in a two person psycho thing where you put on voices (or hats), and switch chairs between playing your writerly self and a little evil critic person (although it might be worth videoing that, and trying for some YouTube love).

Do it on paper with a series of starter questions.

- Let the interviewee (your devil) take control of the interview and lead it where they want
- But—if you feel there's still something they're hiding from you, take on a stronger interrogation position. Turn on the spotlights, and turn Bad Cop, even Badder-Cop on them. Don't let them out of the hot seat until they've come clean.



2. Journaling.

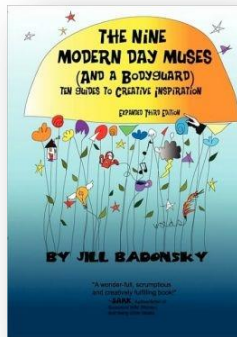
Keeping a daily writing journal allows your inner critic a safe but constrained passage to the outside. Let them hold forth for a while, get a load off. Then shut the book.



A logical exercise to analyse and accept the inner critic. Get to know it, have a little pow-wow. Find out what it's worried about, and analyse what this tells you about your work at the time. Good advice for life, not just writing.

Really listening to your inner critic will give you an understanding of what motivates you, and what fears you live with.

Critic Control Exercises



1. Personalise your Muse

This whole premise of personalisation of muses has, of course, gone on for eons. But **Jill Badonsky** took the Ancient Greek muse concept and modernised it in her book, [*The Nine Modern Day Muses \(and a Bodyguard\): 10 Guides to Creative Inspiration for Artists, Poets, Lovers and Other Mortals Wanting to Live a Dazzling Existence.*](#)

In this book, Badonsky breaks creativity concepts into personalities, and names them accordingly. *Aha-phrodite*, for example, reminds the reader to pay attention - crucial to idea discovery. *Spills* is the muse permitting imperfection, *Audacity* gives us courage, confidence, and liberation from opinions. *Albert*, the bodyguard, gives the ability to think and be different. For the rest, you can read of them at Badonsky's [website](#), or purchase the book.



Some people may find the following methods a little juvenile. And for some, these don't work.

For me, they work temporarily, but I find I often have to rename or visualise my demons (and muses) and change them around to re-energise the results. You can do these individually, or together.

2. Name Your Inner Critic

Many writers swear by putting a silly name onto their inner critics to tame the beast. Fiction writers long have known the value of selecting the correct name - for their book titles, settings, and characters. Naming (and shaming) our inner critics gives them less power, and the process of developing the correct name for this creature also often drills down to exactly the real problem the naggy thoughts are trying to tell us about.

Naming, by it's nature also means that you start personalising and to some extent visualising the critic. Is your critic or critics (yes, I have several) a male, or female (mine change)? Or neither? If it were to speak, what voice would it have?



3. Cartoonise / Monsterise your Inner Critic

Once you have a name for your IC, the next step is often one of putting a face or body to the new person in your life.

Across the web, I've found that when writers do this, and blog about it, they inevitably use a cartoon monster image. Since "*Monsters Inc*" the western population of the world now sees many monsters as still a bit scary, but deep down - beneficial and looking after us. We now fetch similar images to represent the monsters within us that require control.

Other images used can consist of cartoony devils, or perhaps the proverbial cheeky monkey on the back. Gremlins are popular too. At one point I had a wickedly evil cat image tacked up with a red stop sign around it. At another, I had a little sackcloth voodoo doll (sans pins, as I had a toddler in the house).



Search the web to find a representative image. Many can be found at **image stock exchanges**, online which can be purchased at a reasonable price. You can see on the next page what I did with one such image.

Critic Control Exercises



Original and Intimate Demons

In a [blog post of November, 2012, I discussed](#) one associated concept I had discovered. In an article published in the [October 2012 issue of *The Writer*](#) (a British magazine), the author **Craig English** had proposed that there are two types of writing demons (inner critics) –

Original Demons – these are the synaptic discords which have lived in us from childhood. Things like the big FAF (Fear of Failure).

Intimate Demons – these are relevant to the work project at hand. We don't have them all the time, but strike them according to the project need.

English's article goes on to suggest how to deal with these:

- original demons “*need to be sat down with a cup of tea and biscuits, got acquainted with*”;
- intimate demons need to be “*discovered – wrestled with to get them to reveal their secrets*”.

He doesn't state it as such, but giving the demon, once recognised, a humorous name, helps immensely (in my post I borrowed some of the names English used in the article, and added my own. If you want to see these names, look in the section below)



Meet Colin Flat-Monster...

Right now you will find me working on my laptop (writing this post) with Colin trying to overlook the work.

Colin is a cut-out yellow monster (bought from stock images) and sits overlooking my computer monitor. Coincidentally, he looks like Yellow M&M.

Because Colin is behind my monitor, as much as he might like to peer down and criticise my work, he can not. The best he can do is watch my fingers on the keys.

Below are examples of four of my own **original demons**.

- **FAF Fairy** – Fear of Failure (who hasn't this particular demon?)
- **Fraudalingus** – I constantly feel a fraud, because I'm not published
- **PubeNessa** - Public Nakedness Alert - I don't want you looking at me (or my work)
- **Hairy Monkey Butler** – the inner critic and perfectionist. Also can be called NoGo-e – Not Good Enough.

During that particular writing project I also discovered two **intimate demons** that also remain –

Sex Scene Discomfort and *Action-Scene Avoidance*, the last particularly worrying for a thriller writer.



Critic Control Exercises



Another visualisation exercise, this one involves designing a special or secret relaxing place in your mind, and sending your IC or Muse to live there. You get to visit them whenever you want.

Think of them as a secret mistress, or whatever, and *you pay the rent*. Don't make it a prison, or they'll want to break out. Make it the most luxurious, comfortable, relaxing and safest place in worldly (or outer-worldly) existence.

The Perfect Inner Critic Resort

Creativity
Tip

1. Visualise the perfect spot to go to relax and just be in – it could be a meadow, a flower field, a river-bank*, a giant castle sitting on a beanstalk (mine was at one point kind of similar to that last one – don't laugh!). Build the place with real detail – what are the textures, sounds, smells of the place?
2. Now, move your inner critic or muse in. (No, I don't think it's a good idea to have them both sharing the place, but if you insist...). Remind them they will never go wanting regarding food, clothes, M&M's (unless they are an M&M?), or any other need or want they may be using to protest with.
3. Visit them regularly. Lie down, shut your eyes, put on some Vivaldi, and visualise **the journey** to see them.
4. When you get there, make yourself at home, and start asking them for advice. Let them feed you grapes while they're at it (no? just me, then).



The colour green has lately been found to signify – and better yet, enhance creativity and relaxation.

So that's why we are told to take a walk in nature to resolve any blocks. Even simply hearing the word "green", apparently works. Green, green, green, green. There you go.

Critic Control Exercises



Free Falling

– a writing technique designed to bedazzle your mind.

1. Zoom your writing document down to a point where you can no longer read the words (subject to your eye prescription, this is normally around the 40% mark for MS Word).
2. Some variations – take your glasses off, if you wear them for computer work, or turn your computer monitor off to create a black screen.
3. Once you know the cursor is on the word document, start writing.

You cans -

- time this, also.
- look at the keyboard if you must
- not worry about the resultant mess on your document, in fact...

... don't bother re-reading it. The exercise is designed as a stream of consciousness to really get out some thoughts, without worrying about what it looks like. Whatever is important will remain in your mind afterwards.



Here's an interesting set of exercises.

There are a couple of writing techniques that stop your inner critic in its tracks, by keeping it(her, him?) blind to your writing, similar to how I metaphorically do the same thing with my Colin Flat-Monster cut-out (see 3 – Monsterise your IC).

Note: in the **B is for BPS** post I recommended handwriting an exercise, as the speed of handwriting tends to slow us down allowing us to think, and process through the RAC systems of our brains. In the case of free-writing to daze and blind-side our inner critics, I would suggest that typing at speed might be a better way to go.

10 Minutes of Gibberish

Via a 2010 [Copyblogger post by Catherine Caine](#):

If you're looking at the blank screen with mounting horror (*Have I forgotten the English language entirely?*), open a new document and pound out *anything*.

- A history of cheese
- The lyrics of your favorite song
- A stream-of-consciousness piece that starts with "Daffodil Philomena carousel elf-wine fodder marmalade"
- A cake recipe
- An imaginary shopping list
- Endless lines of *All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy*

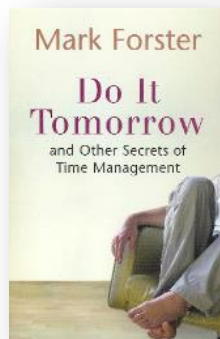
Don't force it to make sense! Just let it flow out with no judgment or expectations. When there's no pressure to get anything Right, for many people the mental vapor-lock vanishes. They can go back and start writing the important stuff.

Free Writing

– free writing is a commonly used form of writing for journaling.

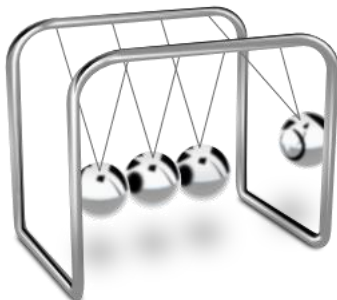
1. It normally involves a **timed writing** experience – set a timer (there are lots of good free ones available on the web, or use an alarm clock, your smart-phone, or an egg-timer) for a set period of time (20 minutes is good).
2. Then write. Write anything, write quickly. Turn off spell-check, grammar check, anything else. If you can't think of anything to write, write: "I can't think of anything to write." Repeat this, if you still can't think of anything to write (do not use copy/paste – that's cheating). If your mind is blank, write: "Blah, blah, blah, blank...whatever".
3. Keep your hands typing / writing until the 20 minutes are up. (At the very least, your inner critic will come out a bit bored and dazed by this).



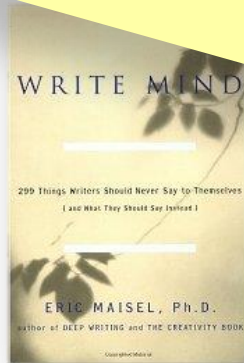


Trick your inner critic into believing you are not actually working on your novel or work, by chunking it into very small pieces. An example (via a [Lateral Action article](#) which prescribes this from **Mark Forster's** productivity book, *[Do It Tomorrow:](#)*

1. Trick your inner critic into thinking that you're not really going to write a novel, by firstly just gathering the materials needed and setting them out on your desk.
2. A few minutes later, you tell your inner critic that you're just going to work on creating the profile for a main character.
3. Continue to work on the project in timed bursts – create a scene, come up with names for characters, decide on a setting, etc.
4. Working on chunks of small work is much easier than the scary concept of “write a novel”. Setting no time or other limits on these small chunks of work makes the work appear much easier and more manageable.



You want to write more often and more deeply: you want to create some beautiful things. To meet these goals, you must improve how you communicate with yourself and strive to acquire a right mind or a better mind – or, to be a little light-hearted about it, a “write mind.”
- Eric Maisel, *Write Mind*



The same Lateral Action article mentioned left also points out writing guru **Eric Maisel's** book, [Write Mind: 299 Things Writers Should Never Say to Themselves \(and what they should say instead\)](#).

[Dr Maisel](#) suggests using Affirmations (discussed in A is for Affirmations in this blog post series) to swap in for negative thoughts.

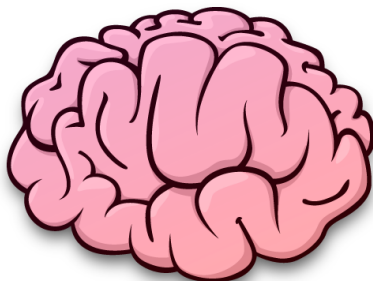
He calls these positive affirmations a “right mind statement”. Here are some examples -

X **Wrong Mind:** *“There is far too much going on in my life right now to write”*

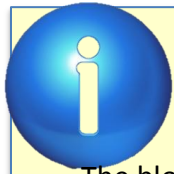
✓ **Right Mind:** *“I will write first thing every morning”*

X **Wrong Mind:** *“Somebody has the answer, and if I read enough books on writing and attend enough workshops, I will learn to write well.”*

✓ **Right Mind:** *“I learn to write well by writing.”*



Further Reading



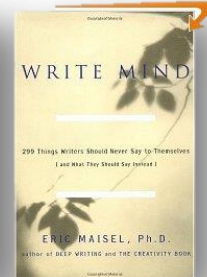
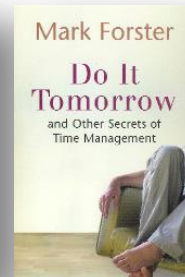
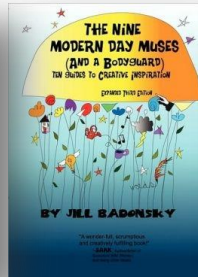
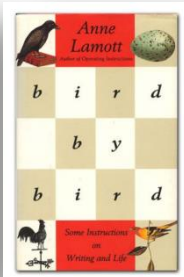
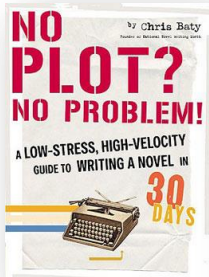
This ebook was originally given away as a freebie collection accompanying a blog post entitled “C is for Controlling your Inner Critic (or Muse)”.

The blog posts in April 2013 are themed from A to Z, as part of the annual [Blogging from A to Z challenge](#) that many writers and other bloggers participate in. My posts for the month were themed towards core habits I found useful to form as a writer.

For many more posts and exercises on similar core habits for writers, please read the blog posts found in April 2013 on <http://hunterswritings.wordpress.com>



Books Mentioned in this CCE Pack



Other articles, posts and websites mentioned, or influential

- [NaNoWriMo](#) – National Novel Writing Month marathon challenge
- **Jill Badonsky's website.**
- [NBC](#): Scientific studies prove the colour green improves creativity
- Marelisa Fabrega, **Lateral Action** : [Four Ways to Silence your Inner Critic](#)
- **Eric Maisel website.**
- **Archetype Writing** : [The Writer's Inner Critic Part I: Know Your Enemy](#)
- **Carolyn Kaufman, PsyD, Archetype Writing**: [The Writer's Inner Critic Part II: A Cognitive-Behavioral Approach to Dealing with the Inner Critic \(or: How to Stop Awfulizing and Start Writing\)](#)

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