



This Is the Creative Life; That's Resistance!



Research or
Resistance?

It's not always easy when to tell you're resisting your creative work and when you're in the throes of the creative process. A certain amount of what looks like procrastination – one of the more popular forms of resistance – is a normal part of the creative process. (see sidebar)

There are times when you've done all the research to cultivate an idea, but you just can't get all the pieces to fit together. Every writer and artist I know gets frustrated when we can't make the writing/art work, but this is exactly the challenge that makes the 'a-ha' moment so satisfying. The incubation we do at these times is what it makes it possible to reach that 'a-ha' moment.

During this incubation stage, you need to distract your conscious mind with some other activity to allow the creative part of your brain to play with the pieces until they fall into place. It may look like procrastination, but it's actually an important part of the process.

The key point is that the creative process has at least six stages and in only one of those stages do writers have their fingers on the keyboard, or musicians or actors perform, or painters have brush in hand. And that makes it more challenging to discern what part of not-writing, not-performing or not-creating is normal and what part is resistance.

You can't go by how it feels since you could be uncomfortable in either scenario. And some forms of resistance are sneaky enough that you might think you're just incubating until weeks

The Creative Process

Depending on whose model you're looking at, the creative process has somewhere between 4 and 24 stages. Betty Edwards offers one of the clearest descriptions in her 5-stage model in *Drawing on the Artist Within*.

- 1. First Insight:** the first glimpse of a creative possibility or a creative solution. It's vital to ask open-ended questions in this stage.
- 2. Saturation:** the research stage where you start answering the questions you posed in First Insight. It's important to immerse yourself in information from a wide variety of sources.
- 3. Incubation:** when you've gathered so much information in Saturation, you can't keep track of it all. You need to quiet or distract your conscious mind so that your unconscious can create new connections and associations.
- 4. Illumination:** the "a-ha" moment where the pieces come together in an exciting new way.
- 5. Verification:** when you make the insight of Illumination tangible so you can share it with others. Writers write, painters paint, scientists publish their findings.

In *Dancing in the Dragon's Den*, I added:
6. Hibernation: when you've used so much creative energy in repeating the previous 5 stages, you've run dry. You need to rest and drink in the beauty of art and the natural world to restore your creative energy.

have gone by and you realize you can't even remember what it was you were supposedly incubating.

How do you distinguish between normal incubation and actual resistance? Here are some of my observations; please send comments about how you tell when you're in the throes of the creative process and when you're resisting your writing or other creative work!

In Process or Resistance?



When the research books and printouts pile up and your notes and drafts are getting so thick you can't find your desk, that's the writing life. Alternatively when the sheet music, art supplies, and other accoutrements of your creative work pile up so much you can't find your way through your studio or creative space, that's the creative life.

But when you have so many other projects, priorities and appointments, you can't find your way to your desk or studio for weeks, that's resistance.

When you've put in your writing time and it seems that all you did all day was shovel dreck, but you tell yourself tomorrow is another day, that's the writing life. When you practice or rehearse for hours and it still sounds awful, but you know you'll be back until you nail it, that's the performer's life. When you spend the day painting over what you just painted, but you trust your vision is getting clearer, that's the artist's life.

But when you can scarcely bear to show up for your writing/rehearsing/painting because the Saboteur is so loud and vicious even the Bush Administration would call it torture, that's resistance.

When your house is spotless, your spices are labeled and sorted alphabetically, your socks are sorted by color and function and this is normal for you, you're channeling the spirit of Monica Geller or Martha Stewart and need therapy (or an exorcist). But when your house is spotless, you've started ironing the sheets and your partner comes home and says, "Who are you and what have you done with my partner?" that's resistance.

When you have a medical procedure that requires mild anesthesia and you don't write/rehearse/create that day, that's life. (When you're able to write about the discomforts of said procedure in a way that makes people laugh out loud, you're Dave Berry. Check out <http://www.miamiherald.com/living/columnists/dave-barry/story/427603-p3.html>)

But when a routine appointment with your oral hygienist means you don't write/create for three days, that's resistance.

Beyond Resistance

One excellent way to get past resistance is to identify which stage of the creative process you're stuck in. Has incubation morphed into procrastination? Has research become its own form of avoidance? Might you be stalled in First Insight, in other words do you get great ideas, but never do anything with them?

Sometimes you just need to push through the stage you're in. Sometimes you need to back up and make sure you completed the previous stage. For example, some people get stuck in Saturation (research) because they didn't ask enough open-ended questions in First Insight. Other people get stuck in Incubation because they tried to skip over the research.

For more information about the creative process and what it means to writers, check out The Writing Habit class (offered at the Open Book on Tuesdays, June 17 thru August 11, 5:00 to 7:00 pm OR at the Woodbury Library on Wednesdays, June 18 thru August 12, 1:00 to 3:00 pm.)

For more suggestions on how to move through resistance, check out the Writer's Resistance class (at the Open Book on Mondays, June 16 thru August 10, 5:00 to 7:00 pm.)

For a way to simply relax and enjoy the creative flow, check out the Enter the Flow class (at the Open Book: on Tuesdays, June 17 thru August 11, 7:30 to 9:30 pm.)

For more information on these and other great classes at the Loft this summer, check out the Loft Open House on Thursday, May 21 from 5 to 8 pm. Or contact Rosanne at 612-722-4139. To register, go to www.loft.org or 612-879-8999.