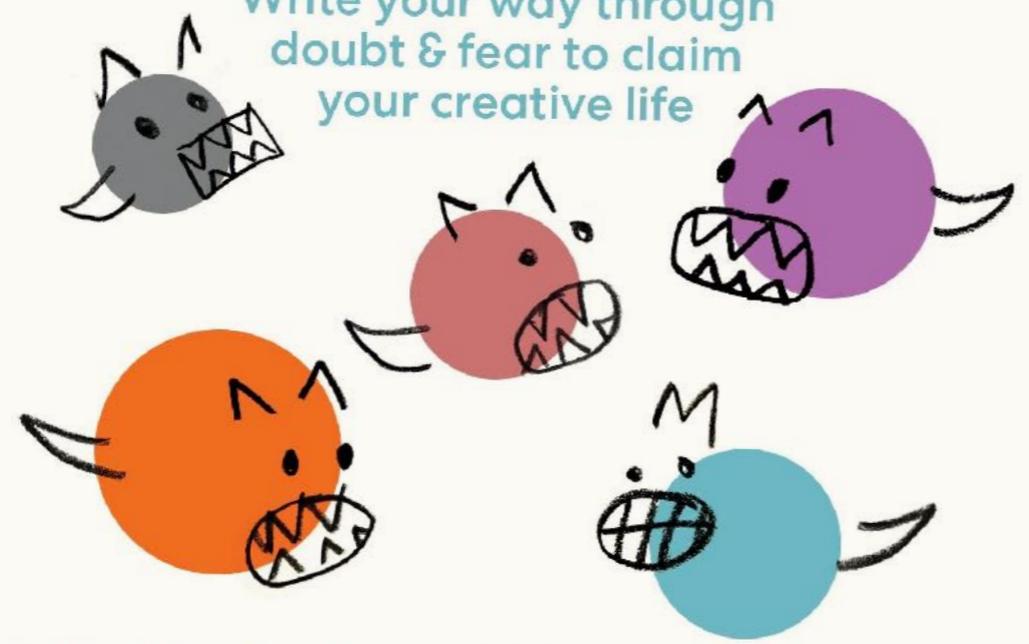




Seven Creative Gremlins

Write your way through
doubt & fear to claim
your creative life



Nicola Jackson & Teresa Wilson

Workbook





THE

Unstoppable Artist

CREATIVE CURIOSITY FOR LIFE

This workbook is bought to you by The Unstoppable Artist, helping you to master the art of creative living.

theunstoppableartist.co

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Please note: Sections marked * indicate you will need a notebook or journal.

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Welcome

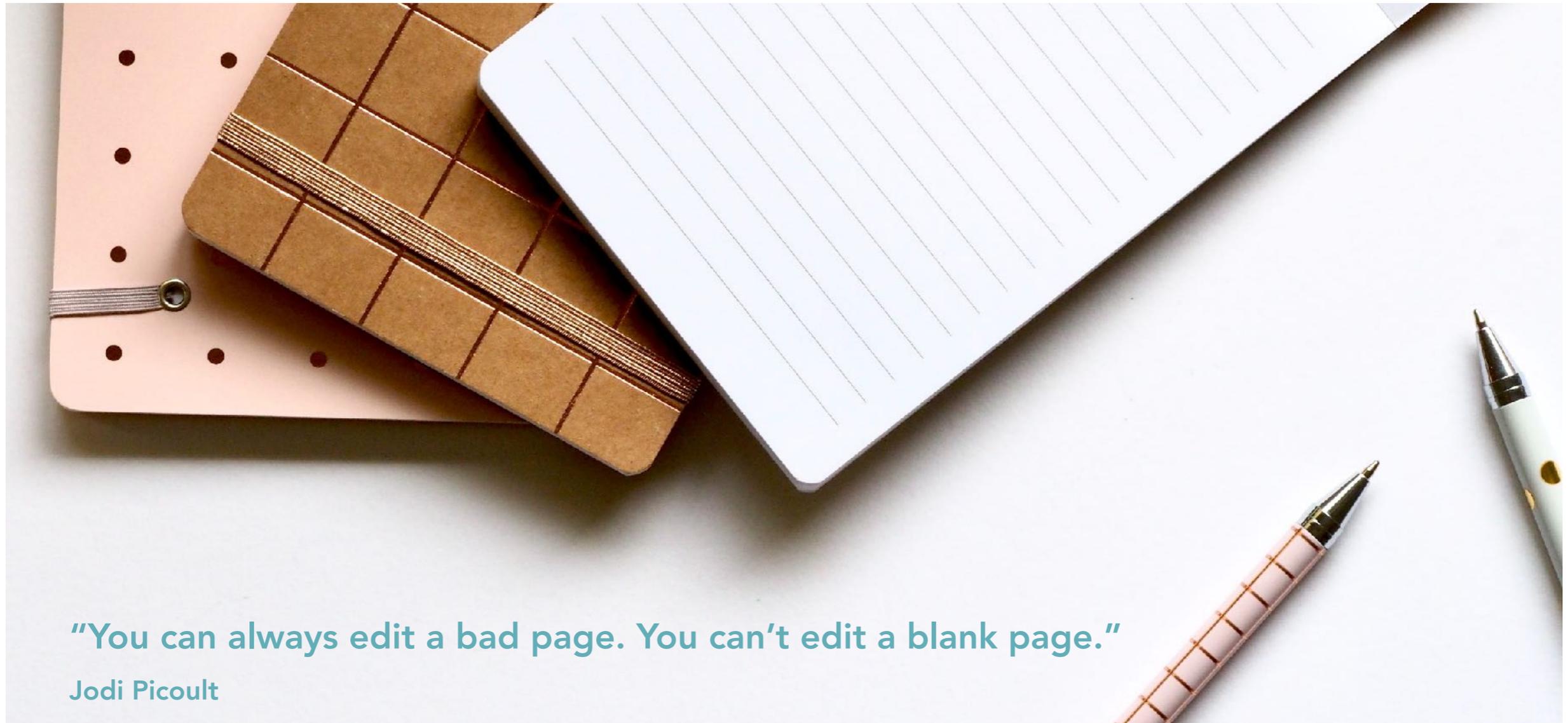
It's Time To Write.

You've read *Seven Creative Gremlins* and downloaded this Workbook. You've probably identified with some of the challenges to creativity that we've outlined, and taken on board the suggestions about how you can circumnavigate your Gremlins to claim your writing life.

Agreeing with the theory is one thing; but what about practice? Have you, in fact, done any actual writing?

If yes, then that's amazing! Well done you! Consider this workbook your reward – some extra tips and support to help you get the most from your writing sessions.





"You can always edit a bad page. You can't edit a blank page."

Jodi Picoult

But if not? Well, don't worry. We get it. The practical bit is hard. We ourselves have read dozens of personal-development books, nodding our heads in agreement, swearing our lives have been changed, whilst studiously avoiding the exercises and promising we'll return to them when we have more time. (Reader, we never did.)

Which is where this Workbook comes in. Just as in *Seven Creative Gremlins* we joined you on your creative journey

from the beginning to the end of a project, in this Workbook we'll guide you through one writing session – from setting a time and date in your diary and countering the negative Gremlins that inevitably arise, to actually getting words down on the page and stoking your motivation in order to develop a strong and lasting writing habit.

Because if there is one thing we know, it's this: **The only way to be a writer is to be writing.**

Step One

**Planning
To Write**

Planning To Write

Make A Date With Writing

The first thing we're going to ask you to do is to book in your writing sessions ahead of time. Why? Because this allows you to deal in advance with the issues likely to arise, meaning they won't derail you when you actually sit down to write.

Remind yourself of the importance of routine as set out in Chapter Two of *Seven Creative Gremlins* and then put a date in your diary when you can realistically get your writing done. Then, as the time for the writing sessions approaches, just notice what comes up. Listen, without judgement, to the reasons you might be giving for not doing what you said you



wanted to do. **Make a note of them in your journal.** Don't be hard on yourself, it's not your fault. It's just your Creative Gremlins at work.

What comes up is incredibly valuable information: this is what you are up against if you want to make writing a part of your life. See if you can work out which Gremlin is shouting the loudest. Try to log specific language or phrases that you notice. The moment you write their voices down, you have the separation required to understand: I choose to write, it is my Gremlins who are trying to stop me.

Planning To Write

A Game Of 'What-if'

As the time for your writing session approaches, you may find yourself plagued by What-ifs:

- What if I'm no good?
- What if I have no ideas?
- What if I can't do it?

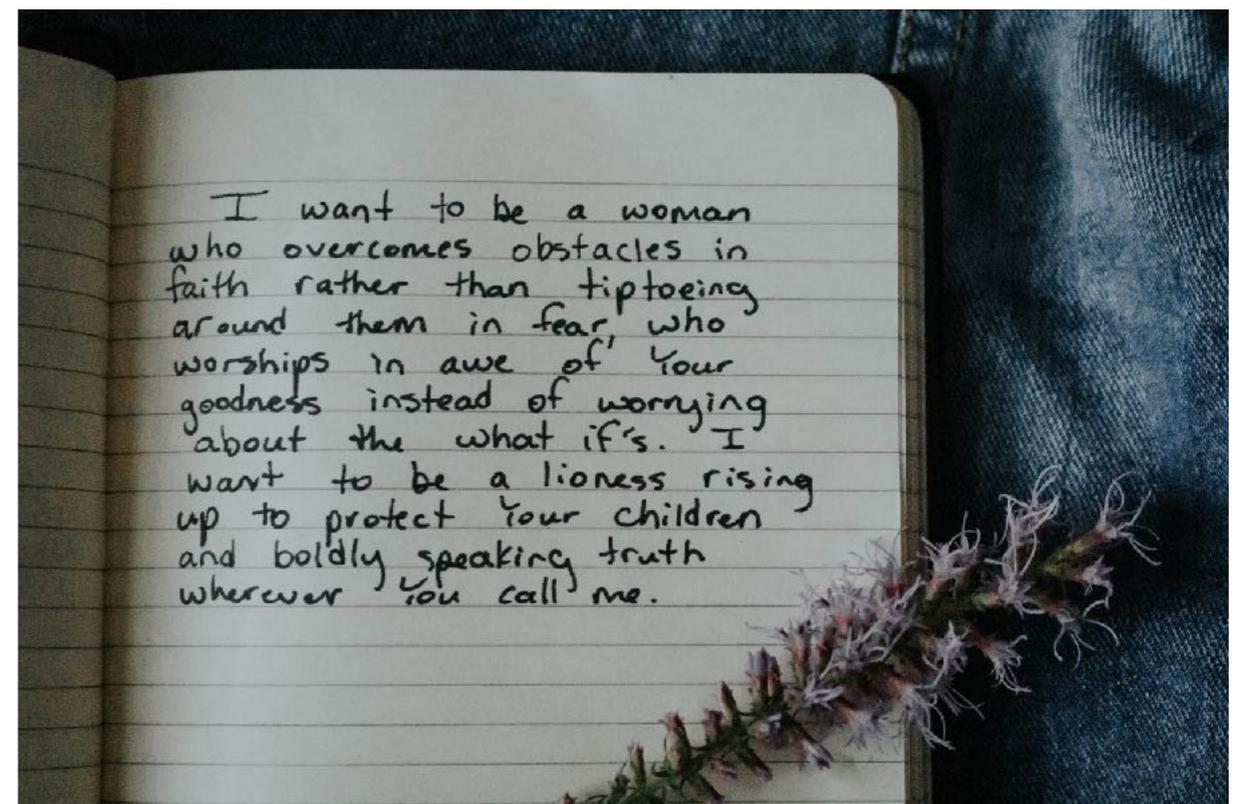
When you become consumed by these future-facing fears, you're projected to some imagined hopeless future where everything you do is terrible.

The good news is, you can easily play the 'What-if' game to your advantage by offering an opposing (and equally likely) scenario:

- What if I'm great?
- What if I have loads of ideas?
- What if having a go is good enough?

The more you practice this, the easier it will become. **Get into the habit of writing out these positive 'What-ifs' long-hand in your journal** to really lock the impact into your brain.

Soon, every time you catch yourself negatively 'What-if-ing', you'll instinctively balance the scales with a more positive probable outcome that nurtures your inner artist instead of scaring it to death.



Beating The Blank Page



Many writers worry that they won't have any ideas and will just be sitting there starting at a blank page/empty screen for an hour. Actually, in our experience, once you commit to writing the ideas show up in their dozens. And the more you write, the more they appear. But in the beginning it can be useful to give your writing some parameters in order to ease those anxieties. One example is a writing prompt.

If you already have a piece of work planned for this writing session, then use this prompt as a five-minute warm-up.

If you don't know what you're going to write? Then use this prompt as a way in to your story and spend your session exploring it.

How to use these prompts:

Choose a number from one to eight. Done that? Okay. Now find that number from the list of prompts below – this is your writing prompt for today.

- **Set a timer for five minutes.**
- **Start with the prompt and see where it takes you.**
- **Remember, what you write doesn't have to make any sense; there is no way to get it wrong.**
- **Keep your hand moving, don't cross out, and don't worry about spelling, punctuation or grammar.**
- **If you get stuck, just keep returning to the prompt.**

- 1.** Write down the words: **I want**. It can be one huge thing, or many little things, or many huge things, or something you don't want, or anything at all.
- 2.** Write down the words: **I remember**. It can be something from childhood, something that happened this morning, one big memory, or lots of memories.

- 3.** Pick up the nearest **poetry book or novel**. Flick to a random page. Close your eyes and point at the page. The line you land on is your writing prompt. Start a story from there. If it doesn't make any sense, that's fine – make it dialogue and have your character frustrated and confused.
- 4.** Picture yourself in **twenty years time**. You've achieved everything you wanted. Write a letter to your current self, explaining how you did it.
- 5.** Write about your memories of **childhood food**. Try to remember where you were, the smells, the tastes, how you felt.
- 6.** Think about **something you hate**. Why do you hate it? How does it make you feel? Be as persuasive as you can to describe just how bad it is.
- 7.** Think about something that you really hate and **write about it like you love it**. Be as persuasive as you can to convey how much you really do love it.
- 8.** Write about **a first**. It can be a first anything. First job, first kiss, first great loss, first day at school, first writing session!

Step Two

**Preparing
To Write**

Permission To Play



“Play is evolution's solution to uncertainty.” Beau Lotto

When it comes to writing, sometimes we can take it all far too seriously. We may even find ourselves trudging to our desk with the sigh of the suffering martyr. What serves us better is remembering how to play!

When we play, we embark on our creative endeavours with a relaxed curiosity and a ‘willingness to mess up’ mindset. When we play, there’s no way to get it wrong. Play benefits our work, and it also helps us to develop a tolerance for the discomfort of uncertainty. **Play is not frivolous; it’s a powerful tool in any writer’s toolkit as it is evolution’s way of supporting us to discover what is not known to us yet.** And the great thing is, we already know how to do it! We don’t need anyone to tell us *how* to play. There are no books to read or diagrams to consult. Just a willingness, a letting go.

It may be a while since you’ve let yourself go and just played. So to help you, we’ve shared some warm-up suggestions on the next page.

Dance. Sing. Or better yet, dance and sing.

If you're feeling heavy as you approach your work, stop and put on a piece of music that's guaranteed to get you moving. And really move.

Leap. Cavort. Flail. Flap your arms and yodel and make yourself laugh. Who said creativity had to be so serious?

Get crafty

Step away from the computer and get some crayons out. Surround yourself with felt tips and sticky back plastic. Get hold of some pebbles, and run your hands through them, make piles out of them, group them. Get some paper and cut things out. Make paper dolls. Write a few words from your work in progress and cover them in glitter.

Cheerlead yourself

Imagine you confide in a friend about your creative fears. Is it likely that they'd say: **"You're right. Everyone else is better than you. You suck."** (If so, please find yourself some new friends.) A good friend wouldn't say these things to you. So why do you say them to yourself? The best way to counteract this is to become your own friend. In fact, not just a friend, but a cheerleader. Come up with a cheer. Make some pom poms if you like. Create some rousing affirmations to pump yourself up before you begin your writing. Make a habit of being on your own side.

WORD BY WORD
I GET IT DONE
I RULE!
I RULE!

Establish Writing Rituals

Your writing time is precious and uniquely yours. The best way to celebrate and protect this space is to create some rituals around it.



1. Find your special place

We all have a place that works best for us when writing. For some that's a nook in the house with the door closed, for others it is a bustling café. Choose the location that best gets your creativity flowing and make that your writing place.

2. Use a scented candle/oil

As well as creating a sense of ritual and setting a calming mood, a familiar scent will, over time, send a message to your muse that you're ready to write! If at home, light a candle. In a café? Dab a favourite essential oil on your wrists before you begin.

3. Create a moodboard

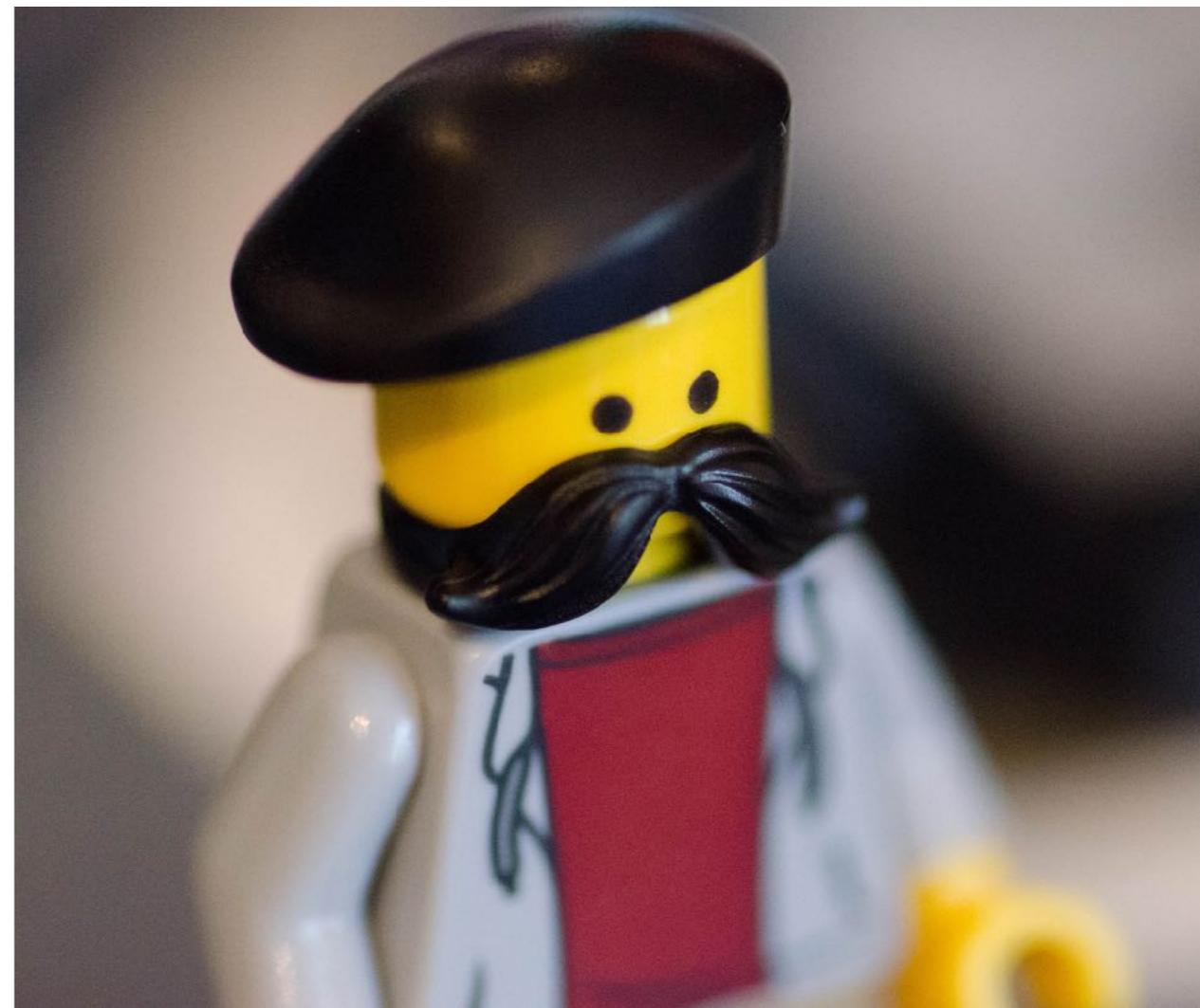
Are there any images that represent the themes of your work in progress or that simply inspire you to create? Put them on the wall or have them next to you as you write.

4. Make a soundtrack

Music is incredibly evocative, which is why many writers create a soundtrack to their story and listen to it over and over. If playing music while you write distracts you, play your soundtrack beforehand to get you in the zone.

5. Dress up

We're not suggesting you buy a writing hat (though we *really* love the idea of a writer's beret) but associating a particular item of clothing with your writing practice can help you arrive more quickly into your writing 'zone'. It may be a comfy cardigan, a watch, or maybe even something you've bought yourself as a reward for taking your writing seriously. Just make it your thing and start each session with the ritual of arrival.



Step Three

Writing

Positive Intention

Now the time has arrived, you're going to do some writing! Before you begin, we'd like you to pause for a few moments. Take a pen and paper (it's important you do this longhand and not on a screen, so **grab your journal**) and answer the following questions:

- **What is my positive intention for how I want to experience this creative session?**
- **How do I want this session to be?**
- **How do I want to feel?**

We should emphasise here that we are not talking about far-away goals – “I want to write a bestseller!” – but simply about this session. In fact, this activity is designed to take the mind away from pressure-filled hopes, expectations and end results and to bring it right back into the present.



So you might come up with something like:

- **I want to enjoy myself**
- **I want to have fun and be playful**
- **I want to experiment and not judge myself**

Now you have your positive intention, close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and simply visualise yourself experiencing those things. This is a really potent way to be in the moment with your writing. **Which is where the power is.** Then open your eyes...and begin.

Set A Timer

As enthusiastic as we know you are about writing, it's wise to assume that you're probably going to experience some element of distraction. The kind of focus that writing requires takes practice.

So try **The Pomodoro Technique**.

Pomodoro divides your work into intervals, separated by breaks. It demands pure focus, but for a limited time. This can be useful if you find it hard to get going without a deadline or without anyone expecting anything from you. It can also help combat distraction. (Yes, **Procrastination Gremlin**, we see you there!)

Not only does this chop bigger tasks down into manageable pieces, it also creates a sense of urgency that can stimulate the 'good stress' (eustress) that helps our brains to focus.

How It Works:

- Choose a task to be accomplished (e.g. I am going to work on this chapter/short story.)
- Set the timer to 25 minutes.
- Work on the task until the timer goes off.
- Take a break. (Five minutes works well but adjust this to suit you.)
- Every 4 Pomodoros take a longer break.



Turning Criticism To Praise



Now you are actually doing some writing, that's when your **Gremlins** will really up their game, discounting any feelings of self-worth or pride. So, just as you did with the 'What ifs', we're inviting you to raise your awareness of the game – and then change the rules. If you catch yourself discounting, stop, **reach for your journal**, and write down some positive praise instead.

This new kind of thinking can be revolutionary for your creativity, but bear in mind it will take practice if you've become accustomed to putting yourself down. **Studies say it**

takes on average at least 66 days for a new behaviour to become automatic, so if you find it tricky at first to self-praise, don't give up. Eventually, it will become second nature to praise yourself.

'I only have a measly twenty five minutes in which to write.'



'I have twenty five minutes - I can do a lot in that time.'

'I hate what I'm writing, it's terrible.'



'I'm getting words and ideas down, isn't that amazing!'

Reward Yourself



However long you managed to write for, whether you got one word down or one thousand, whether you feel it was a work of genius or a pile of rubbish, **we insist that you now reward yourself**. Seriously. This is important. DO IT. This isn't self-indulgence. It is so important to recognise your efforts as you go along, to nurture and encourage yourself. **This is about training your inner writer to feel good about writing**, to understand that just showing up at the page is an amazing achievement that deserves recognition. It's helping your brain associate writing with pleasure, a

source of dopamine hits! The reward is up to you. It could be a chocolate bar, a bubble bath, a film, a walk in the park or a coffee. But whatever it is, savour it. You're celebrating yourself. Bring your awareness to how good it feels to have done this thing. You turned up at the page. You wrote. You're a writer. And if you find yourself skipping this stage, and refusing to reward yourself? Well...maybe revisit the **Tyrant Gremlin** for a reminder that, if you don't make this journey pleasurable and nurturing, why on earth would your creativity want to join you?

Step Four

Keeping Momentum



Keeping Momentum

Get Bored

On your continuing journey as a writer, there's so much to discover – about the kind of artist you're going to become, what inspires you, how you're going bring your ideas to the world through your unique perspective.

How to start? **By getting bored.**

Creativity loves emptiness. That's where it does its best work. So schedule some time to do nothing. Walk with no destination in mind. Daydream. Nap. Stare out of a window.

When we are connected 24:7 to the internet/books/films/gossip/newsfeeds/family drama, our heads become too full up of other people's stories. But when we disconnect from all of that, we can finally hear the soft voice of our inspiration speak. Into these empty spaces, our subconscious will begin to make connections. Into this vacuum, stories will be born.



Keeping Momentum

Creative Date Night

Once you've established a habit of creating some empty space for your inner artist, it is time to seek out enjoyment and inspiration. This is often described as 'filling the well' and is an essential pursuit for any aspiring creative. How can you make art if you don't know the kind of art you love?

Put a literal date in the diary and stick to it. You might take yourself out, or schedule a night in – but either way, make it specific and make it special! Seek out exhibitions or films you might not usually go to. Go on a walk spotting inspiring street

art. Set time aside for books, magazines or music that excite, amuse or frighten you – anything that gets an emotional reaction is useful! Fill yourself up with words and colours, images and scents, melodies and sculptures, anything and everything that sparks joy.

And **make it a weekly or monthly ritual** that is both planned and anticipated. It's a small step from joy, to curiosity, to wonder, to creativity, as the work of other incredible artists eventually spills over to inspire and influence your own creative practice.

Fill The Book

Once you've got used to exploring all the things that inspire you, you can begin to collect material for your own work. And material is everywhere. **Keep a notebook handy**, or use the notes feature on your phone, and when you see or hear something that interests you (*the arresting blue of a flower in a passing garden, the phrasing of a phone call overheard on the train*) 'collect' it.

In this way, you let your unconscious know that, even though your stressed-out brain has got a lot to juggle in your average working day, there's always space for a thought, or a phrase, an image or a texture that could eventually become food for your writing. The key is not over-thinking, over-analysing, judging or critiquing at this stage.

By staying open (in playful curiosity) and organised (so you don't miss the moment), you become a collector of fragments, building a resource for your creativity to draw from.

Inspiration will do the rest, eventually finding connections that spark a something from a whole load of nothings.



Gather Evidence

As we've said many times by now, our Gremlins like to tell us a story from a skewed position. Their fuel is perception, not reality.

Once you understand that, you can start the process of challenging it. And what's the most powerful way to do this? **Gather evidence.**

The trick here is that no scrap of evidence is too small. **Keep your journal handy and just jot down** anything that you do, or anything anyone says, that can be even remotely considered a win:

- You wrote for ten minutes
- You had a new story idea
- You bought a writing candle
- Someone liked your blog post

Are you right now telling yourself that you don't have any wins? Really?

Well, that's just your Gremlins messing with you.

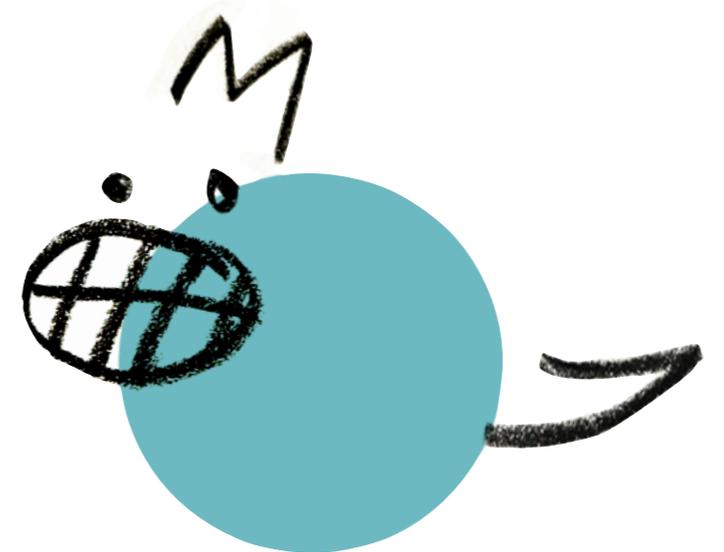
We happen to know for a fact that you have one win staring you right in the face. And here it is:

You downloaded this workbook and read these words. That's your commitment to your creativity.

So log that as your win. Do it right now. It's so important to counteract those negative Gremlins voices. It's so important to be on your own side.

And as you continue on your writing journey, keep on logging your little wins. Make it a habit. Own it. Celebrate every small effort.

After all, you're a writer now. And what's more, you've got the evidence to prove it.



Goodbye

Over To You!

Thanks for downloading the *Seven Creative Gremlins* Workbook. We hope it has been helpful for you and we're excited to be alongside you as you take these next steps on your writing journey.

If you'd like more tools and teachings to support you in living creatively, sign up for our newsletter at theunstoppableartist.co and have more creative inspiration delivered to your inbox.

For now, happy writing!

Nicola and Teresa.



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Because if there is one thing we know, it's this: The only way to be a writer is to be writing.

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Make a date with writing

The first thing we're going to ask you to do is to book in your writing sessions ahead of time. Why? Because this allows you to deal in advance with the issues likely to arise, meaning they won't derail you when you actually sit down to write.

Remind yourself of the importance of routine as set out in Chapter Two of *Seven Creative Gremlins* and then put a date in your diary when you can realistically get your writing done. Then, as the time for the writing sessions approaches, just notice what comes up. Listen, without judgement, to the reasons you might be giving for not doing what you said you wanted to do. *Make a note of them in your journal.* Don't be hard on yourself, it's not your fault. It's just your Creative Gremlins at work.

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If you already have a piece of work planned for this writing session, then use this prompt as a five-minute warm-up. If you don't know what you're going to write? Then use this prompt as a way in to your story and spend your session exploring it.

Choose a number from one to eight. Done that? Okay. Now find that number from the list of prompts opposite – this is your writing prompt for today.

THE RULES: Keep your hand moving, don't cross out, and don't worry about spelling, punctuation or grammar. It doesn't have to make sense and there is no way to get it wrong. If you get stuck, just keep returning to the prompt.

1. Write down the words: **I want**. It can be one huge thing, or many little things, or many huge things, or something you don't want, or anything at all.

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Dress up

We're not suggesting you buy a writing hat (though we really love the idea of a writer's beret) but associating a particular item of clothing or jewellery with your writing practice can help you arrive more quickly into your writing 'zone'. It may be a comfy cardigan, a watch, or maybe even something you've bought yourself as a reward for taking your writing seriously. Just make it your thing and start each session with the ritual of arrival.

Step 3: Writing!

Set A Positive Intention

Now the time has arrived, you're going to do some writing! Before you begin, we'd like you to pause for a few moments. Take a pen and paper (it's important you do this longhand and not on a screen, *so grab your journal*) and answer the following questions:

What is my positive intention for how I want to experience this creative session? How do I want this session to be? How do I want to feel?

We should emphasise here that we are not talking about far-away goals – “I want to write a bestseller!” – but simply about this session. In fact, this activity is designed to take the mind away from pressure-filled hopes, expectations and end results and to bring it right back into the present.

So you might come up with something like:

- I want to enjoy myself.
- I want to have fun and be playful.
- I want to experiment and not judge myself.

Now you have your positive intention, close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and simply visualise yourself experiencing those things. This is a really potent way to be in the moment with your writing. Which is where the power is. Then open your eyes...and begin.

Set A Timer

As enthusiastic as we know you are about writing, it's wise to assume that you're probably going to experience some element of distraction. The kind of focus that writing requires takes practice.

So try **The Pomodoro Technique**. Pomodoro divides your work into intervals, separated by breaks. It demands pure focus, but for a limited time. This can be useful if you find it hard to get going without a deadline or without anyone expecting anything from you. It can also help combat distraction. (Yes, Procrastination Gremlin, we see you there!)

Not only does this chop bigger tasks down into manageable pieces, it also creates a sense of urgency that can stimulate the 'good stress' (eustress) that helps our brains to focus. Here's how it works:

- Choose a task to be accomplished (e.g. I am going to work on this chapter/short story.)
- Set the timer to 25 minutes.
- Work on the task until the timer goes off.
- Take a break. (Five minutes works well but adjust this to suit you.)
- Every 4 Pomodoros take a longer break.

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Turn self-criticism into self-praise

Now you are actually doing some writing, that's when your Gremlins will really up their game, discounting any feelings of self-worth or pride. So, just as you did with the 'What ifs', we're inviting you to raise your awareness of the game – and then change the rules. If you catch yourself discounting, stop, *reach for your journal*, and write down some positive praise instead.

This new kind of thinking can be revolutionary for your creativity, but bear in mind it will take practice if you've become accustomed to putting yourself down. Studies say it takes on average at least 66 days for a new behaviour to become automatic, so if you find it tricky at first to self-praise, don't give up. Eventually, it will become second nature to praise yourself.

'I only have a measly twenty five minutes in which to write.'

'I have twenty five minutes – I can do a lot in that time.'

'I hate what I'm writing, it's terrible.'

'I'm getting words and ideas down, isn't that amazing!'

Reward yourself!

However long you managed to write for, whether you got one word down or one thousand, whether you feel it was a work of genius or a pile of rubbish, we insist that you now reward yourself. Seriously. This is important. **DO IT**. This isn't self-indulgence. It is so important to recognise your efforts as you go along, to nurture and encourage yourself. This is about training your inner writer to feel good about writing, to understand that just showing up at the page is an amazing achievement that deserves recognition. It's helping your brain associate writing with pleasure, a source of dopamine hits!

The reward is up to you. It could be a chocolate bar, a bubble bath, a film, a walk in the park or a coffee. But whatever it is, savour it. You're celebrating yourself. Bring your awareness to how good it feels to have done this thing.

You turned up at the page. You wrote. You're a writer. And if you find yourself skipping this stage, and refusing to reward yourself? Well...maybe revisit the **Tyrant Gremlin** for a reminder that, if you don't make this journey pleasurable and nurturing, why on earth would your creativity want to join you?

Step 4: Maintaining your writing momentum

Get bored

On your continuing journey as a writer, there's so much to discover – about the kind of artist you're going to become, what inspires you, how you're going to bring your ideas to the world through your unique perspective.

How to start? By getting bored. **Creativity loves emptiness**. That's where it does its best work. So schedule some time to do nothing. Walk with no destination in mind. Daydream. Nap. Stare out of a window.

When we are connected 24:7 to the internet/books/films/gossip/newsfeeds/family drama, our heads become too full up of other people's stories. But when we disconnect from all of that, we can finally hear the soft voice of our inspiration speak.

Into these empty spaces, our subconscious will begin to make connections. Into this vacuum, stories will be born.

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Creative Date Night

Once you've established a habit of creating some empty space for your inner artist, it is time to seek out enjoyment and inspiration. This is often described as 'filling the well' and is an essential pursuit for any aspiring creative. How can you make art if you don't know the kind of art you love?

Put a literal date in the diary and stick to it. You might take yourself out, or schedule a night in – but either way, make it specific and make it special! Seek out exhibitions or films you might not usually go to. Go on a walk spotting inspiring street art. Set time aside for books, magazines or music that excite, amuse or frighten you – anything that gets an emotional reaction is useful!

Fill yourself up with words and colours, images and scents, melodies and sculptures, anything and everything that sparks joy. And make it a weekly or monthly ritual that is both planned and anticipated.

It's a small step from joy, to curiosity, to wonder, to creativity, as the work of other incredible artists eventually spills over to inspire and influence your own creative practice.

Collect the book of you

Once you've got used to exploring all the things that inspire you, you can begin to collect material for your own work. And material is everywhere.

Keep a notebook handy, or use the notes feature on your phone, and when you see or hear something that interests you (the arresting blue of a flower in a passing garden, the phrasing of a phone call overheard on the train) 'collect' it.

In this way, you let your unconscious know that, even though your stressed-out brain has got a lot to juggle in your average working day, there's always space for a thought, or a phrase, an image or a texture that could eventually become food for your writing. The key is not over-thinking, over-analysing, judging or critiquing at this stage.

By staying open (in playful curiosity) and organised (so you don't miss the moment), you become a collector of fragments, building a resource for your creativity to draw from. Inspiration will do the rest, eventually finding connections that spark a something from a whole load of nothings.

Gather evidence

As we've said many times by now, our Gremlins like to tell us a story from a skewed position. Their fuel is perception, not reality.

Once you understand that, you can start the process of challenging it. And what's the most powerful way to do this? Gather evidence. The trick here is that no scrap of evidence is too small. *Keep your notebook handy*, and just jot down anything that you do, or anything anyone says, that can be even remotely considered a win:

- You wrote for ten minutes
- You had a new story idea
- You bought a writing candle
- Someone liked your blog post

Are you right now telling yourself that you don't have any wins? Really? Well, that's just your Gremlins messing with you. We happen to know for a fact that you have one win staring you right in the face. **And here it is:**

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You downloaded this workbook and read these words. You made that commitment to your creativity. So log that as your win. **Do it right now.** It's so important to counteract those negative Gremlins voices. It's so important to be on your own side. And as you continue on your writing journey, keep on logging your little wins. Make it a habit. Own it. Celebrate it. **After all, you're a writer now.** And what's more, you've got the evidence to prove it.

Over To You

Thanks for downloading the *Seven Creative Gremlins Workbook*. We hope it has been helpful for you and we're excited to be alongside you as you take these next steps on your writing journey.

If you'd like more tools and teachings to support you in living creatively, sign up for our newsletter at theunstoppableartist.co and have more creative inspiration delivered to your inbox.

Happy writing!

Nicola & Teresa.