

Stuck in a writing rut

Dear Annie: I used to write every day — mostly poems but also essays. I really want to get back into it, but my motivation has waned. When I used to write every day, I was deeply depressed, and writing was an outlet, a stress reliever. I still want to write, but I never seem able to get myself to actually put pen to paper. I don't want to believe that I have to be depressed in order to write. I know I'm also a good writer when I'm not depressed. I think that part of the problem is I'm scared of writing something bad, thinking that if I can't write a beautiful first draft, there's no point in writing at all. (Obviously, that's a rather toxic mindset.) Do you have any tips for how I could discipline myself to actually write something while not worrying about the outcome? — *Wrestling a Writing Rut*

DEAR ANNIE



ANNIE LANE
Creators
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Deadlines are your friend. If columns weren't due weekly, I would never finish them. I know it can be hard to meet self-imposed deadlines. One way to get external ones is to join a writing group or to take a writing class online or through a local college.

Perfectionism equals paralysis. Fortunately, the deadlines should help with this, too. When something is due, you have to make peace with the fact that it's not perfect. Done is better than perfect. Confront the fear of failure by writing a deliberately crummy story. Read it back to yourself. See that the world did not end because you wrote something lackluster. This might also help to infuse some levity into your practice, which can be wind beneath the creative wings.

"Gamify" the process. Look for writing prompts online. Set a kitchen timer, and don't pick up your pen until it dings, no matter what you're writing. Lastly, remember that the

only way to really fail is to not try. So get writing.

Dear Annie: I'm a teenage boy. My mom hates that I'm gay. She says that the whole family is disappointed in me. But it's only my dad's side of the family who hates me for it. My mom can't accept me for me.

I try to ignore her, but it will always be there. I've started drinking to block out the memories, but that only works for a little while. I have feelings of hatred toward her, but I care about her, too. I don't know what to do. I believe that God made me this way. I feel so depressed and full of rage. — *Black Sheep*

Dear Black Sheep: You are not alone. Please reach out to The Trevor Project, a wonderful organization dedicated to supporting and saving the lives of LGBTQ youth. You can call its hotline anytime at 866-488-7386. If you'd prefer to text, you can text "START" to 678678 between 3 p.m. and 10 p.m. Eastern time, or during those same hours, you can instant message with a counselor on the group's website, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org>.

TOMORROW'S HOROSCOPE

By Holiday Mathis, Creators Syndicate Inc.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). You want to change a bad habit. Certain cues trigger a chain of behaviors. If you can alter your environment to avoid that cue, this will be much easier than trying to change the avalanche of actions that follows the cue.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). Your day will be filled with opportunities for a happy flow of feelings, but it will be up to you to make pleasure out of the circumstance. "To make pleasures pleasant, shorten them." — Charles Buxton

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). Soon you'll be on the other side of this lesson. How will you know you're there? You'll no longer think about it. Just before the "over" phase of the healing comes is the "checking" phase when you think a lot about not thinking about it.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). The world defines you by what you do, but what you're seeing right now is all you haven't done. In today's case, you'll let that motivate you to step boldly forward.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). You can be tougher than you think you're being. It's something to be aware of today as certain people around you are easily shaken and much more concerned with your approval than you'd think.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). The higher pursuits of the mind and spirit call to you today including philanthropy and education. It should be noted that these pursuits are possible to access through the smallest moments and most mundane activities.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). You're in the process of figuring out how to get along with someone who is very different from you. It's not about ignoring the differences, rather finding the common ground, which is a vaster territory than it first seems.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). It's a day for replenishing your emotional fuel tank which you'll do with quality relaxation that may include getting together with people you care about for a truly fun evening.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). You're smart, sophisticated and because of these attributes, self-critical. One way to mute the voice of that inner critic is to throw yourself into the action. When you're busy handling things, the mental chatter goes quiet.

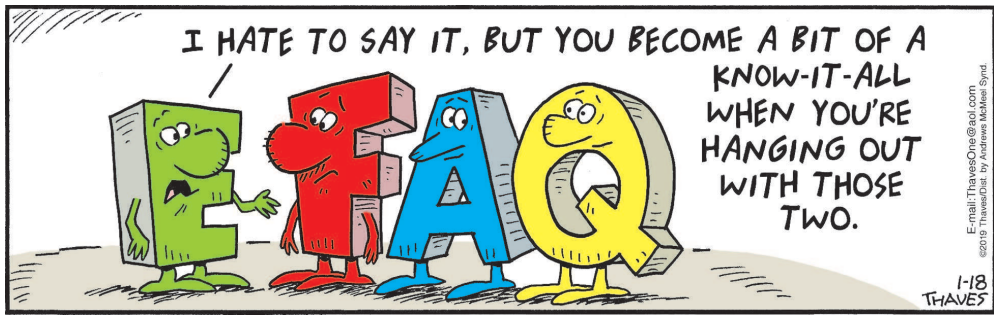
CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Love is supportive. People who don't understand one another's trajectory can nonetheless respect and make room for it. Side note: Fire signs have what you need and will offer it up once they know you need it. Just ask!

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). In the Chinese legend of the red thread, the gods tie a cord around the ankle of those destined to meet one another and eventually the tie, invisible to the human eye, brings souls together. Today's meeting has the feel of fate.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). Try thinking of things in terms of, "for me" or "not for me." It's simple, but the shift can be just the personal revolution that frees you from having to pass moral and value judgements all the livelong day, which is exhausting.

TOMORROW'S BIRTHDAY (Jan. 19). Your rational mind will become a servant to the amazing intuition that is your cosmic gift at the top of this solar return. Your understanding of what you need in relationships will deepen as will your ability to communicate it. You'll heal a bit of broken self-esteem, which leads to you making more money. Aquarius and Sagittarius adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 4, 40, 2, 10 and 28.

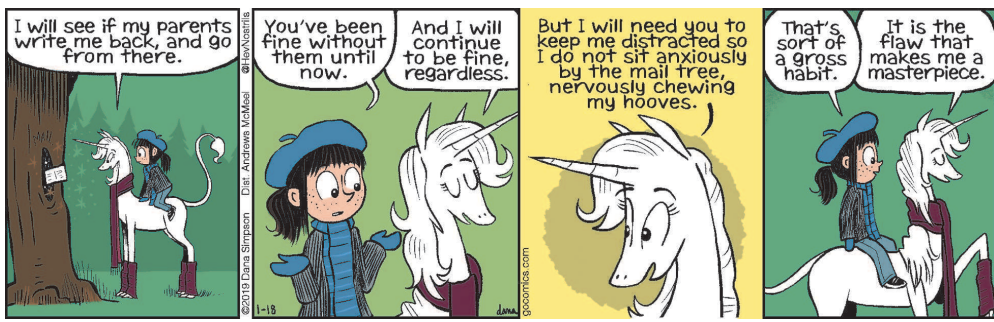
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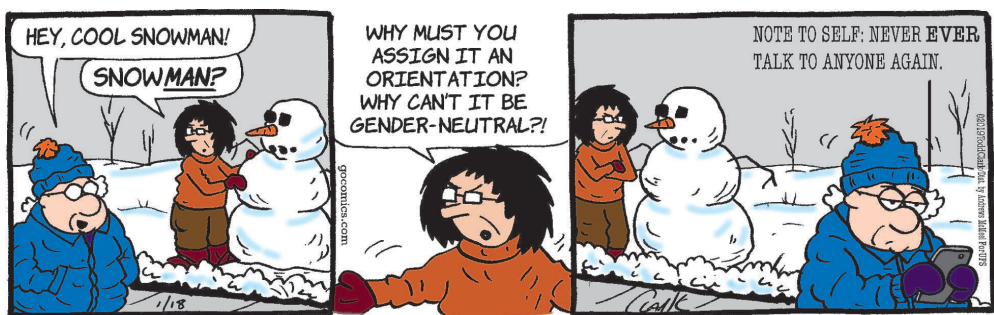
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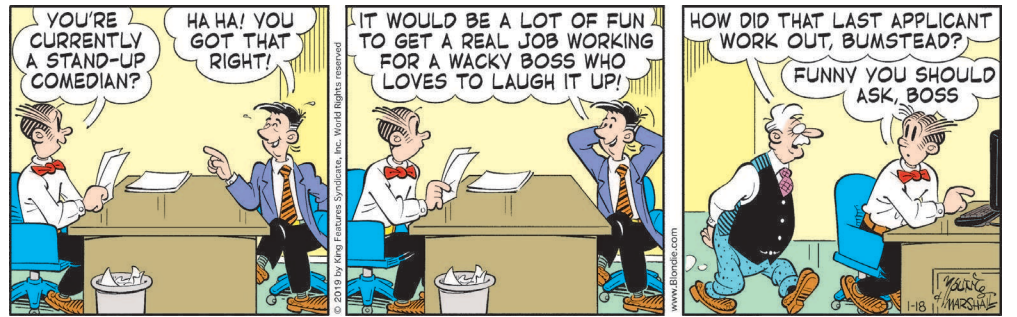
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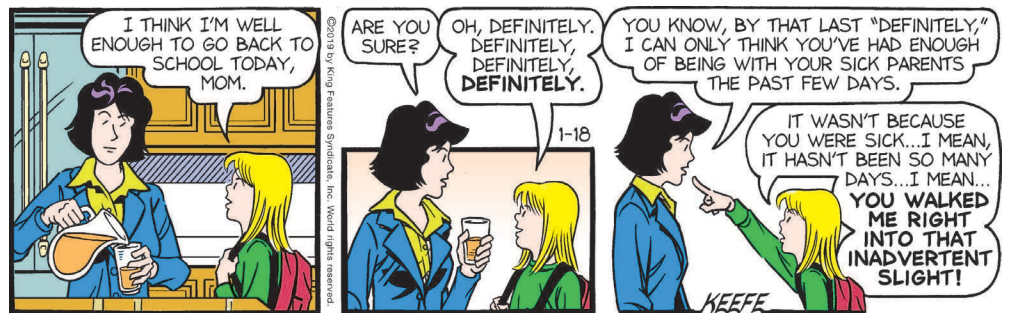
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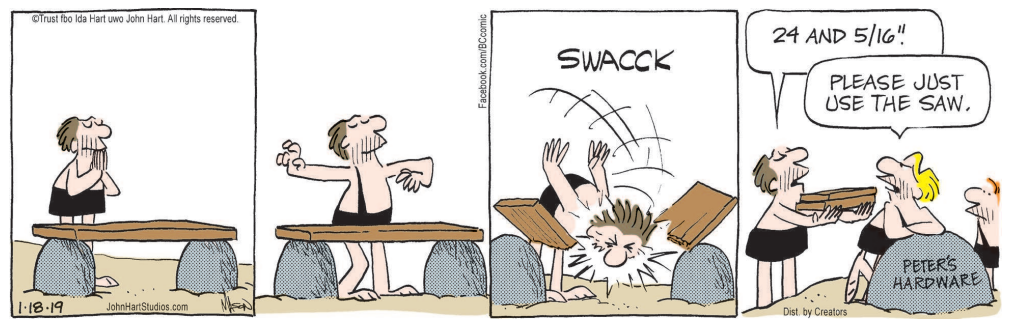
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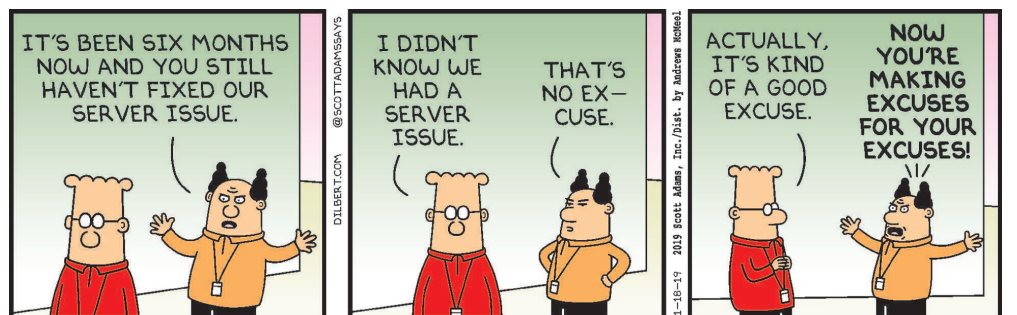
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