

# **Banish Writer's Block, Fear, and Doubt with Cognitive Therapy**

**By John D. Brown**

# My Introduction to Emotion

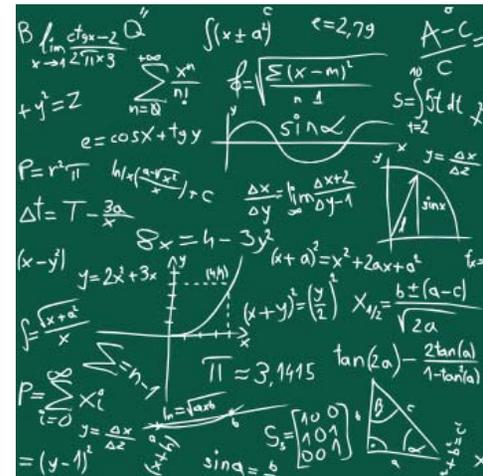


# 2 Different Brain Systems

Faster and Subconscious

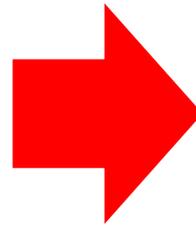


Slower and Conscious



# Process

Appraise Situation



Physical Response



# JB and the Snake



# JB and the Snake

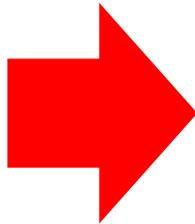


# JB and the Snake

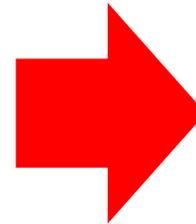


# So What?

Neutral  
or Positive  
Events



Block  
Fear  
Doubt  
Discouragement



No joy  
No stories  
No fun

# **The Good News**

**You can correct  
the appraisals  
with system 2!**

# 1: A Great Read

## Situation

Read someone else's story that's amazing.

## Thoughts

I should just give up. Can't compete. Never be that good. Can't come up with those kind of ideas.

## Feelings

Despondent, loser

## Distortions

- Fortune telling
- Labeling
- Unrealistic expectation
- All-or-nothing thinking

## More Realistic

They did an awesome job. I have had some cool ideas. I might not be able to do that yet, but I bet I can learn. What were they doing that worked so well?

# Truth

**Someone will always be better at this than I am. That's normal.**

**The problem with comparing myself to another author is that it's almost always apples to oranges.**

**We often learn by seeing what others do well. Their success is actually a gift.**

# 2: Stuck

## Situation

Can't seem to get an idea.  
Stuck.

## Thoughts

The story is stupid. I always struggle. I should be able to just flow through like author X. Maybe I just don't have what it takes. I suck.

## Feelings

Despondent, loser, frustration

## Distortions

- Fortune telling
- Labeling
- Overgeneralization
- False understanding

## More Realistic

Everyone gets stuck. Stuck is helpful, normal signal that I'm out of ideas and need to gather material, have written something that doesn't ring true, or that it's boring me. Which is it this time?

# Truth

If I read what successful authors say about their writing, I'll see that everyone gets stuck. This is a normal thing.

Writers block is a gift. It helps me see where the story is boring, doesn't ring true, or when I need to get more material.

When we know what the problem is, we can then begin to generate ideas to fix it.

# 3: It's Crap

## Situation

The story feels stupid.

## Thoughts

This is so dumb. No way can it compete. It has to be awesome. I should be able to do this. Why can't I get good ideas? Maybe I just don't have what it takes. I suck.

## Feelings

Despondent, loser, frustration

## Distortions

- Fortune telling
- Labeling
- Should statements
- False understanding

## More Realistic

It's not reasonable to expect a final product when you start. Pixar doesn't. They and other great story tellers often start with something that's only so-so and improve it.

# Truth

**Creativity flourishes when you value crap like farmer's do.**

**It's always easier to improve something, than start with a blank slate. So get something down quickly.**

**It is not reasonable to expect a finished product at the beginning of the process. It IS reasonable to expect a mess that gets better. Pixar does.**

# 4: We Started at the Same Time

## Situation

Someone who started writing at the same time you did or even much later is seeing more commercial success.

## Thoughts

I should be better than they are. What's wrong with me? Maybe I don't have what it takes.

## Feelings

Despondent, loser, frustration

## Distortions

- Should statements
- Mental filter
- All-or-nothing thinking

## More Realistic

Much of commercial success is beyond my control. And I don't know where she started, how hard she worked, or what factors came into play. I just need to look at how far I've come. As long as I keep writing and learning, I'll get better.

# Truth

**Not everyone gets the same opportunities. The best thing I can do is work hard and learn so I'm ready for those that come my way.**

**Everyone progresses at their own pace and in their own way.**

**The problem with comparing myself to another author is that it's almost always apples to oranges.**

# Truth

The odds for big commercial success are long. I can improve them with hard work and learning about the craft and business, but there are no guarantees how long it will take me. And I may find it's not worth the time. That's okay.

# 5: A Bad Review

## Situation

Someone doesn't like my story.

## Thoughts

Geez, I suck. How did I miss that. Why can't I do better. I'm not a very good writer. Not like author Y.

## Feelings

Despondent, loser, frustration

## Distortions

- Should statements
- Mental filter
- All-or-nothing thinking
- False understanding

## More Realistic

I have lots of good reviews. The story is working for many people. Is this person perhaps not in the audience for my book? I'm not in the audience for lots of books others love.

# Truth

**“No matter who the writer, his ideal intended audience is only a small fraction of all the living readers. Name the most widely read authors you can think of—from Shakespeare, Austen, and Dickens to Robert Waller, Stephen King, and J.K. Rowling—and the immense majority of book-buyers out there actively decline to read them” -Thomas McCormack, former CEO and editorial director of St. Martin’s Press**

# 5: Lots of Bad Reviews

## Situation

Most people seem to not like my story.

## Thoughts

They hate it. The story sucks. I'm a failure. Maybe I've lost it. Maybe all my successes were accidents and I never had what it takes.

## Feelings

Despondent, loser, frustration

## Distortions

- Mental filter
- All-or-nothing thinking
- Fortune telling
- False understanding

## More Realistic

Many of the best write a story that I don't like as well as their others. While I may have screwed up this performance, I can learn from it and do better. Also, some did like it.

# Truth

**It's just one performance. You can figure out what went wrong and fix it.**

**Many awesome authors have a dud now and then. That's what happens when you try new things.**

**It's okay to be sad for a minute, then look to see what you can learn.**

# 6: Don't Know Where to Go

## Situation

I can get some ideas, but I can never really get a “story”. I just can't seem to figure it out.

## Thoughts

Why can't I get this? I should be able to. I'm a failure. I don't know what I'm doing. Maybe I don't have what it takes.

## Feelings

Despondent, loser, frustration

## Distortions

- Should statement
- Labeling
- False understanding

## More Realistic

If I'm always stymied, maybe I don't know how stories or story development really work. That would make it tough. It's like trying to build a car without knowing what they do or how to build them. What can I do to learn it?

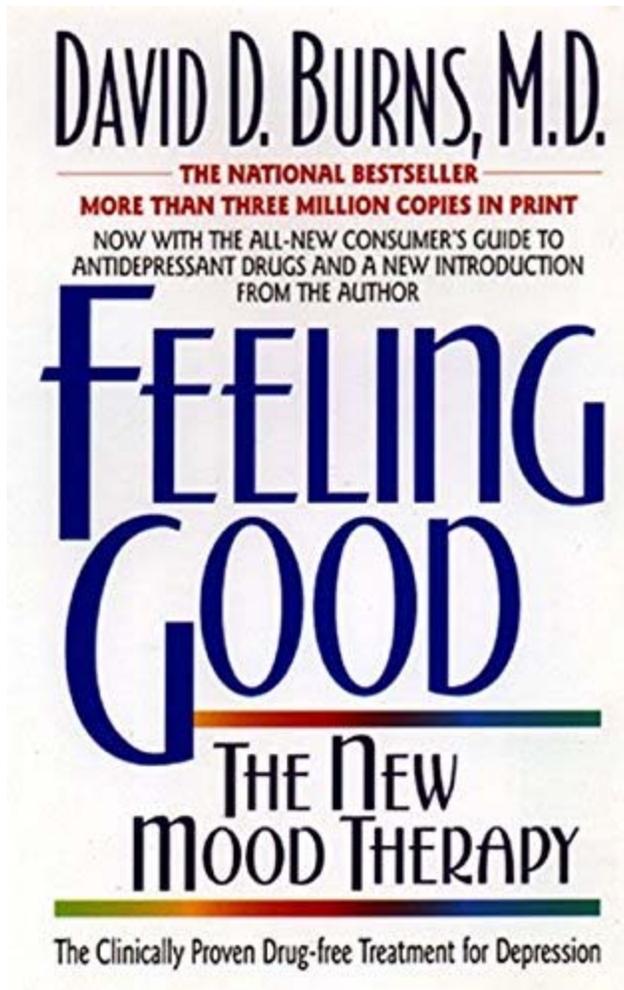
# Truth

When you (1) are clear about what stories do for the reader, (2) how they do that, and (3) have effective techniques for developing those things, the results will naturally follow. So focus on learning those three things.

# 10 Distortions

1. All-or-nothing thinking, perfectionism
2. Overgeneralization
3. Mental filter
4. Disqualifying the positive, minimizing
5. Magnifying mistakes
6. Labeling
7. Fortune telling
8. Mind reading
9. Should statements
10. Unreasonable expectations

# Next Steps: Learn More About The Process



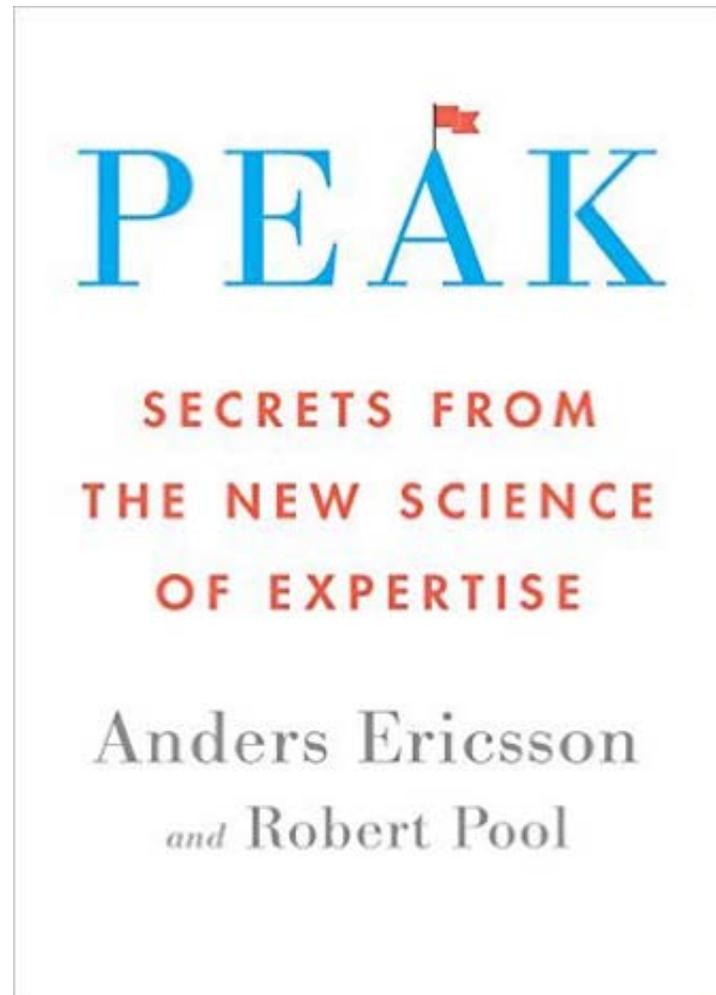
## **Next Steps: Learn What's Reasonable**

- **Read what successful authors say about their career.**
- **Talk to more-successful authors.**

# **Next Steps: Keep Focusing on Learning Craft**

- 1. What stories do for the reader (end)**
- 2. How they do that (means)**
- 3. Effective techniques for developing those means**

# Next Steps: Learn About Learning



# Next Steps: Learn Essentials of Business

