



Discovery Sessions

Become a writing machine:
55 prompts to help
content marketers break
through writer's block

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most important skills you can develop to be successful in business because content marketing helps you seduce the hearts, minds and subsequently, the wallets of your ideal customers – which is naturally the goal, right?

To be the **best** wordsmith your business needs, you have to actually write... but pesky old writer's block often gets in the way.

Not anymore.

With these 55 prompts, tips and ideas, you'll be able to not only defeat writer's block when it strikes, but you'll also prepare yourself for future rainy days when your creative juices simply aren't flowing.

I will show you how to tame the writer's block dragon using the SWORD method, a set of creative strategies to help you get words on the page.

But who am I and why did I create this guide? My name is Rosie Bell and I'm a location-independent writer, editor, author and lifestyle entrepreneur.

I run a successful writing business creating content and penning stories for media brands on both sides of the Atlantic like National Geographic, Lonely Planet, Forbes Travel Guide, BBC Worklife, and Condé Nast Traveler.

I have also been involved with content marketing at global advertising agencies and worked directly with clients on a freelance basis.

For professional writers, ideas are literally our currency, and running out of them can make one feel stuck and maybe even a bit scared. Getting ideas for what to write can be a hard, seemingly insurmountable task.

But over the years, the SWORD acronym I devised has helped me consistently dream up content ideas for myself and my various clients around the world.

If you'll be using content marketing to grow a brand or business, this will be useful for you too.

Let's get started.

THE SWORD METHOD

SWORD is a simple acronym for five tried and tested, writer's block-busting strategies which are:

- S: **Showing** people the things you know
- W: Thinking about **why** you're writing and for **who**
- O: **Observing** places, things and people around you
- R: **Recycling** ideas and creating **reserves**
- D: **Doing things** to actively thwart your writer's block

I developed this acronym to easily remember these five strategies which have come to my rescue throughout my career writing and creating content for major publications like National Geographic, Condé Nast Traveler, Lonely Planet, BBC Worklife, Atlas Obscura and Travel + Leisure.

Without fail there's something in there to pop juicy thoughts into your head and help you power through when the words simply won't come. Let's power through tips and examples now from each category.

SHOWING

The first strategy in the SWORD method is showing people things that you know.

Tip 1

If you're stumped for new ideas, dig into the trove of things you're skilled at and tell people about them.

Teach or educate people about the things you know. Talk about what did or didn't work for you in your business, mistakes you made or lessons you learned.

Advise and help others with the pearls of wisdom you have from experience. This is a rather easy starting point and guarantees you a unique take because nobody but you has this experience to present this way.

Don't think you're worthy of teaching? **Everyone** has wisdom to impart.

If you're great at calligraphy, make your post, book, video script or podcast episode about "how to get started with calligraphy".

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If you managed to get a celebrity to post about your product, talk about how you made it happen.

Here are examples of “showing” topics:

- Becoming an online business owner: An insider’s guide
- Explained: Breaking into advertising
- The best ways to get freelance clients
- How to get started with digital art
- My journey to copywriting success
- I made six figures doing XYZ, here’s how you can too.
- I’m the only person alive that has completed XYZ amazing feat. How’s how you can do it too.
- I forced myself to become an extrovert via knitting classes. Here’s how a hobby can help you overcome XYZ.

WHY & WHO

The “W” in the SWORD method stands for “why” and “who”.

You should think about why you’re writing. What is it for and also, who are you writing for? Who is your ideal audience? Your goals and your audience should inform your work.

Tip 2

Why are you writing? Choose one word from the brief you’re working on or the one goal have you for this piece of writing. What’s the purpose?

Is it to invoke a certain response like people feeling outraged, inspired, or moved? Or is to for you to be perceived in a certain way. Do you want readers to think of you as knowledgeable? Accomplished?

If you want them to think of you as accomplished, write about your achievements. Did a prominent figure write you an email or appear as a guest on your podcast or retweet you? Have you achieved something against all odds?

Tip 3

Who is going to read your work? Write for your audience. Who might they be?

THE SWORD METHOD

Think about what they like and what they might want to read. What do you think tickles them?

OBSERVE

The "O" in SWORD stands for "observing".

Tip 4

A little eavesdropping never hurt anyone so go on and listen to other people's conversations. What are people complaining about? What makes them happy? What intelligence can you derive from their throwaway comments?

Tip 5

Be mindful with yourself. Notice the places and things that give you a feeling of space, where you can breathe deeply, think clearly, and feel balanced. Is there a place where you usually get your best ideas? Or is there a spot where you write better? Position yourself there when you need to write.

RECYCLING & RESERVES

The "R" in SWORD stands for "recycling" or "repurposing" and creating "reserves" or a stock of ideas for later.

Recycling

Tip 6

Recycle your own story so you don't have to create a new one. These events already happened. The story wrote itself. Borrow from your own life and your environment.

What has happened to you? What have you experienced? My book "[Escape to Self](#)" is about my life experiences and it also positions me as a prominent voice in the life design space. There's bound to be something in your life to inspire, help, humour or educate someone else.

Think about your past and find a story people can relate to. Is there something peculiar or ground-breaking in your history? Did you make it to the Olympics? Did you move from country to country in a van? Your history is probably more interesting than you think.

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Tip 7

Recycle characters from your real life. People you know are rich sources of information. Think about how writer Carrie Bradshaw used to use her friends as inspiration for her weekly column in "Sex & the City" and eventually dedicated her book to her friend Charlotte.

Do you know somehow who is really inspiring? Could you use them as a case study or even interview them? Ask someone you deem to be successful or inspirational in your network for permission to share their story. You can also change these people's names to protect their identities.

Tip 8

Write a refreshed or updated version of something you've already written before. Perhaps add something you have learned since then or new information that's come out.

If you wrote about the top 20 wellness resorts last year, what are the top 20 wellness resorts this year? If you wrote about the hottest trends in tech last year, what are the hottest trends this year?

Perhaps you can take something you've written before but this time around, try to come up with a different perspective or standpoint or try to make it more interesting.

Tip 9

Create a content series. This is a great way to ensure you have a steady flow of things to write about.

Tip 10

Squeeze as many ideas out of the same topic or issue. For instance, in the case of travel, if you've written a weekend itinerary or how-to guide after a trip, you can then also write stories on the culture of the place you visited, one article about the characters, a comparison between that place and where you live, or a personal essay about one of your unique experiences there.

If you're writing about small business budgeting, you can write about how you met (or didn't meet) your budgeting goals last year, what you plan to do to meet your goals next year, or people who inspire you in the field of small business finance or budgeting best practices.

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Tip 11

Write your own version of a topic you've seen another person write or try to find a new way to tell an existing story. Add your personal experience to it or your opinion to jazz it up. Perhaps take a story that's gone viral and insert yourself into that piping hot conversation.

Tip 12

Use a quote from someone and construct a narrative around it. For instance, take a quote about business from Oprah Winfrey or Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, could you write an article about success and business around it or with that as a starting point?

Reserves

Another way to ensure that writer's block doesn't stop you in your tracks is to do a lot of idea generation before you actually have to and build up emergency reserves.

Having reserves is your way of preparing for a rainy day and preventing writer's block from thwarting your creative endeavours. It's always easier to build out of something, rather than nothing.

Tip 13

Pre-emptively create templates or outlines when you have to write similar things over and over.

Tip 14

If you know you're always going to have to write blog posts or social media captions, create some in advance so they're ready to go when you need them.

Tip 15

Generate a list of topic ideas that you may like to write about in the future and organise them by category.

Tip 16

Keep a dream diary. One day you might even be able to take inspiration from your dreams.

These are vivid films with no creative limits. Dreams do the thinking for you and you could come up with a masterpiece like Keith Richards did with "(I can't get no) satisfaction".

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Tip 17

Keep a travel journal. This content also just writes itself.

Tip 18

Keep any kind of journal. A journal is a place where you organise your thoughts and self-reflect. It also helps you write in your personal voice.

Tip 19

Create a reserve of nice things people say about your business or compliments you receive which you can look at when you're lacking motivation to write or when you're low in self-belief. This can do wonders for your self-esteem.

Such a list might help you realise or remember that when you hold back, you're denying the world your greatness.

It also gives you an idea of things that people believe you to have knowledge about that you can then teach or "show" others.

Tip 20

Write down snippets from conversations you have with people. They might find it irksome initially when you pause to write things down, but they'll love it when they know they were the inspiration for your next hot story, YouTube video or podcast episode.

Tip 21

Have a stock of interesting words that you come across that you might like to use in your own writing.

You can actually start from a single word and build a story around it. Follow a word a day app or newsletter and bookmark the words you'd like to insert into your writing one day.

Tip 22

Create general writing prompts that you can use to jog your memory or search online for others. There are literally millions out there.

Here are a couple of examples to get you started:

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- What's the best advice you ever received?
- Write something about the very last thing you watched, read or listened to.
- If you could wave a magic wand, what one thing would you change about your life or the world?
- Who is the most inspirational person you have ever met?
- What's the biggest problem you have that needs solving?

Tip 23

Another form of writing prompt is to pre-emptively make lists about your life. There are plenty of lists you can make to engage with your past (commemorative lists), your present (personal lists) and think about your future (goal-oriented lists). The content of each of these could form the basis of numerous articles.

Commemorative lists could be things like:

- What you've done that you're most proud of
- Your accomplishments
- Your happiest moments
- Best and worst decisions
- Your success timeline
- Remarkable people you have met
- Risks you have taken (that either paid off or didn't)
- Some of your happiest memories

Personal lists could include:

- Your strengths and weaknesses
- Quirky facts about you
- Things you're grateful for
- What motivates you
- Things that make you happy
- Your hobbies and things you like to do
- Ways you like to relax when you feel stressed
- Things you like about yourself
- What your definition of success is
- How you congratulate yourself when things go right
- How you show appreciation

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Goal-oriented lists could be:

- Your bucket list
- New things you would like to try
- Personal promises to keep to yourself
- Some of your fears and how you can overcome them
- Your priorities for life (this year and always)
- Skills you would like to develop
- A letter to your future self outlining your hopes and dreams imagining they came true
- How you can inject more pleasure into your life so you enjoy it more
- What your future goals are
- What you hope for and desire in life

DOING THINGS

The last tool in SWORD is doing things and actively trying to mine content ideas and make lightbulb moments happen.

Here are some things you can actually do to help get your creative juices flowing.

Tip 24

Scribble with your screen turned off. Writing with your screen turned off means you'll have to forget about perfection because you won't be able to edit or judge what you see. Let your thoughts guide you and just move your fingers. You can even close your eyes too and see what sensory impact that has.

When you're done, you can turn the screen back on or open your eyes and see what ideas jumped out of you.

Tip 25

Exercise or move. Walking frees your mind and gets your blood flowing and physical activity, in general, produces serotonin and dopamine which can leave you feeling euphoric and energised.

Tip 26

If you're sitting there and the words don't come, dictate into your phone just saying absolutely whatever comes to mind.

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Alternatively, just scribble down random, seemingly insignificant ideas for ten minutes and see what you come up with. Bullet pointing is also quick, easy and effective. Remember that one of the most effective ways to overcome writer's block is by simply writing.

Tip 27

Travel is notorious for opening up the senses. Go somewhere you haven't been before or look at a familiar place in a new way.

Tip 28

Physically change your state of mind by altering your environment. Switch things up and step away from where you're working at the moment the ideas aren't flowing. Your brain will have to wake up to adapt.

Tip 29

Use a different instrument to write. If you have been typing on your computer, try switching to pen and paper. This can actually impact your productivity and help alter your mindset.

Tip 30

Use a pen name. Maybe the thing that's stopping you from writing freely is fear of judgement or the social repercussion of your words.

Writing with a pen name or pseudonym can help you distance yourself from the writing particularly if the topic is controversial.

Create a separate user account on your site and write as if you're another person. Fear can eat up your imagination so using a pen name might just liberate you.

Tip 31

Think of areas of your business that you have struggled with. You can write or talk about the difficulties of being a player in your industry and specifically how you are navigating those challenges.

Tip 32

Create templates and checklists for your customers. If you're a money mentor, create a financial health checklist to provide value for people. If you're a life coach, create a survey, or toolkit to help people carry out self-reflection exercises.

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Tip 33

Go against the grain. If all your competitors are saying one thing, can you say something contradictory? If you read an article that says that the keto diet is the only guaranteed way to lose weight and keep it off, could you argue the opposite?

Feel free to test theories and established wisdom. Conduct your own experiment and write a report about the findings.

Tip 34

Write about things that set your soul on fire. This might seem a tad obvious, but when you write about topics you're not invested in, every word you put down is going to feel like a struggle. Also, the less invested you are in a subject and the less you know about it, the more research you'll have to do down the line.

To write compellingly, it helps to tackle things that you're interested in. If fiction books aren't your thing, you might not be able to bring the same vigour to a story about sci-fi authors. Readers can sense when you're being dishonest about your interests. Keep this in mind.

Tip 35

Make writing enjoyable. A major reason why you might not be able to sit down and write is that you don't associate it with an enjoyable activity.

If that's the case, try to infuse some joy into it. Put on a song you like, wear a special outfit or prop, or read out loud as you write in a funny accent if you must. Do whatever will help you truly relish your time with the keyboard.

Tip 36

Incentivize yourself to write. The feeling of accomplishment you'll get is a gift in itself, but you can further incentivize yourself to write by putting a reward on the table for finishing.

It isn't news that positive reinforcement is a huge motivator, so you can set goals for yourself and tie them to rewards – big or small. This can be anything from a sweet dessert, a walk in the park, a phone call with a friend or your guilty pleasure TV show.

Tip 37

Use a writer's block app.

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There are actually quite a few of these. They'll offer you random words or use AI auto-completers with word suggestions.

You might not create the perfect piece of prose with these but the results can actually be quite funny and it might get you out of your head (at least temporarily).

Tip 38

Look up statistics, facts or general truths and base your content around them. Turn data from studies into easily digestible content for your readers, listeners, followers and fans.

Tip 39

Investigate the charts.

This can be music charts, the box office, the book bestseller's list or any sales lists pertaining to your industry, niche or region.

What's capturing people's imaginations and attention and where are they spending their money? Is there anything interesting about this?

Could it be that the book at the top of the bestseller's list has been there for a long period of time? What does that suggest?

Which company is making the most sales in your industry? Who is winning the most awards? What type of product is flying off shelves? What has fallen out of favour? Do you love or dislike the movie that's sold the most ticket sales?

Looking at the charts and sales figures will help you tap into the current cultural zeitgeist.

Tip 40

To find content, look at search trends. Use [Google Trends](https://trends.google.com/trends/) to discover what people are searching for and then craft your opinion around any of those topics.

Tip 41

Go to known idea stations like Quora and Reddit to see what people are talking about.

Look at the questions that are being asked on Quora and perhaps try to answer them via your writing. Also, read the article comments on popular websites.

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Tip 42

Use [Answer The Public](#) to see the top questions that people around the world are asking about a specific topic. This site provides a wealth of information about those searches and places them into eye-catching visual graphics.

Give people what they are looking for by answering those questions via your content.

Tip 43

Talking to people is a great way to get ideas. Most projects emerge organically out of conversations you have.

Have deep conversations with people. Ask your most opinionated friend (or someone you know loves to talk) for their advice on something. Anything at all.

Also, while you're venting to confidantes, pay attention to what you hear yourself saying. Is there a strong opinion underneath one of your discussion points that you could turn into a social media post, blog article or episode?

Tip 44

Ask a complete stranger what they think about your industry or about your business (if they would have heard of it) and take note of their response.

Tip 45

Ask your actual customers what they like. Send out a survey via your email list and ask people who follow you for insights and topic suggestions.

Tip 46

If you have comments enabled on your blog, look at the posts that receive the most favourable remarks. Read reviews that people leave for you as well. What do they and don't they seem to like?

Tip 47

Analyse the data from your website using Google Analytics. Which articles perform the best and which aren't faring so well. Follow the numbers.

Perhaps you can write a follow-up article or write something related to the initial popular article, post or episode.

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Tip 48

Search on [Buzzsumo](#) to see a ranking of which articles are getting the most engagement and traffic for a particular topic or keyword.

You'll see what's popular in your industry and topics that it might be worthwhile for you to jump on.

Tip 49

Develop a writing habit. Give yourself a set time, day or duration where you write without fail. That way you have a mental note that nothing gets in the way of "Tuesday morning writing time" or whenever you decide to do it.

Tip 50

Bust industry myths. Tackle things that are generally believed to be true in your industry and set the record straight.

Tip 51

Carry out competitor research. Is there anyone you'd like to emulate or square up to?

Go to the websites of those businesses and see what they are talking about right now. What do they regularly discuss? And how do they do it? What's their tone? What do people think of them? What do they do well?

Tip 52

Sign up for your competitor's newsletters to gain insight into the types of things they are talking about.

You can also subscribe to get emails from thought leaders in your industry and any businesses you find inspiring that you might want to benchmark yourself against.

Tip 53

Make predictions about your industry. What developments are you expecting? How do you think your sector will change? What will be the impact of those changes, and what are you basing your predictions on?

Tip 54

Consume the kind of media you need to create and your writing will be so much richer.

THE SWORD METHOD

Read widely and listen to podcasts, and visit your favourite websites and blogs. Keep educating yourself on the world in general and the ecosystem of your given topic area.

Tip 55

Finally, it's good to remember that the best writing ideas come from actually living life and going outside, so take real breaks from working on your business.

It is said that "a writer is only as interesting as their life". Time away from writing is where the inspiration to write comes from.

When you unplug, you have the best chance for your mind to stop reacting and ticking to go deeper into your heart and the creative centres where inspiration and realisations live.

CLOSING

You've made it to the very end. Congratulations!

If you have enjoyed this guide, you might just love the online courses available at learn.discoverysessions.io. Each class has been designed to help portable professionals master the laptop lifestyle, travel, and work online.

If you'd prefer a live 1:1 with me to discuss all things location independence and lifestyle entrepreneurship, you can ask me anything during a private video call which you can [book here](#).

Thanks for downloading this writer's block-busting toolkit. I hope you enjoy using it as much as I enjoyed making it for you, and that it helps you market your business with great content that flows out of you like a leaky tap.

Rosie Bell



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