



7 ways to overcome the inner critic

There are many methods to overcome the inner critic. Try some of these. Experiment. Adapt them to make them your own. Add to the list and share new ideas on the Facebook Page or the comments section on the website.

1. Recognize it's only one voice!

In his lecture, *Against Self-Criticism* (2015), the psychologist Adam Phillips describes how we all experience what Sigmund Freud calls "ambivalent" feelings. Ambivalent here doesn't mean mixed but opposing or contradictory. Do you think the tension between voice that criticizes and the one that celebrates is necessary? See the "inner critic" as only one voice amongst many you have. You don't have to listen to that voice.

2. Celebrate yourself!

Make a list of things to celebrate in yourself. Read Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" for an example of how to celebrate the self. Make a habit out of celebrating. If you catch yourself getting too critical about yourself, start balancing the criticism with praise. Take up a daily practice of listing all the things in your day worth celebrating. You might find that once you get going, you can't stop!

3. Make a space in your home where the inner critic is not allowed in.

Designate a space in your home to only say kind things to yourself. Work creatively in this space in a loving way. Begin projects here. Write letters here. Decorate the space in ways that reminds you of the creative life force you breathe daily. Walt Disney had different rooms in his home for different stages of his work. Your special creative space doesn't have to be a whole room. Like a stage at the theatre, you might change the space in one room of your house in ways that trains you to keep the inner critic away. When you start a creative project, wave a magic wand around the space. Burn incense. Make a boundary of thorns at the doorway to keep out that critic. Or do something that works for you.

4. Pray and meditate

Meditation and prayer are practices that help you identify the voices of unnecessary criticism and speak to yourself and others from a place that is kind and clear. When you meditate over time, you might see that the inner-critic begins to bore you. The same voice repeats itself over and over. It's like listening to the worst song you've ever heard on repeat. Join one of my courses to explore in more depth how the contemplative practices of mindfulness and the creative life meet, and how contemplation can help you overcome the inner critic.

5. Take up a physical practice that increases your attunement to your physical presence and vitality and helps you digest the poison of the inner critic's voice.

In *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*, Haruki Murakami writes:

"Basically I agree with the view that writing novels is an unhealthy type of work. When we set off to write a novel, when we use writing to create a story, like it or not a kind of toxin that lies deep down in all humanity rises to the surface. All writers have to come face-to-face with this toxin and, aware of the danger involved, discover a way to deal with it, because otherwise no creative activity in the real sense can take place. (Please excuse the strange analogy: with a fugu fish, the tastiest part is the portion near the poison—this might be something similar to what I'm getting at.) No matter how you spin it, this isn't a healthy activity.

So from the start, artistic activity contains elements that are unhealthy and antisocial. I'll admit this. This is why among writers and other artists there are quite a few whose real lives are decadent or who pretend to be antisocial. I can understand this. Or, rather, I don't necessarily deny this phenomenon.

But those of us hoping to have long careers as professional writers have to develop an autoimmune system of our own that can resist the dangerous (in some cases lethal) toxin that resides within. Do this, and we can more efficiently dispose of even stronger toxins. In other words, we can create even more powerful narratives to deal with these. But you need a great deal of energy to create an immune system and maintain it over a long period. You have to find that energy somewhere, and where else to find it but in our own basic physical being?"

6. Learn to see the inner critic as lying at the edge of the sweetness.

Think of a food critic. The foodies with a real taste for delicacies often have highly critical taste buds. Will there always be poison lying next to the sweetest parts of creative work? Is the point never to bite into the poison, or to find ways to digest the poison in case you do? Maybe to taste the delicacy that lies at the gates of your own creative genius, you need to accept that the critic exists and not to get to hung up on his words. In the meantime, as Murakami writes, "find it ... in your own physical being."

7. Invent a character for that subpersonality, the inner critic. Create another one for the encourager, the subpersonality that celebrates.

Invent your own characters that take on those polarities of artistic energy. One criticizes you. The other praises. Learn to leave the critic far away from the gates when you embark on creative work. You want the muses of creativity to arrive at your doorstep. The critics might scare them away! (Especially at the beginning when ideas, like babies, are vulnerable). Keep a clear image of the character that celebrates you. Find ways to see her every day and invite her in daily. Give her the keys to your house.

Bibliography

Murakami, Haruki. *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*. Vintage, 2011.

Phillips, Adam. "Against Self-Criticism," *London Review of Books*, 3 March 2015,
www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8mcaCWGFmg

Whitman, Walt. "Song of Myself," *Leaves of Grass*, William Collins, 2015.

