



EVISCERATING

ENVY

Jealous thoughts invading your brain? Show that green-eyed monster to the door.

BY ANICA MROSE RISSI

Most writers, myself included, are highly competitive people. Our constantly climbing ambitions – both on and off the page – are a huge part of what drives us. Our dreams keep us going through the slog of our manuscripts' murkiest middles, and our belief in ourselves, and in the value of our work, helps us continue putting ourselves out there despite the rejections, disappointments, bad reviews, and vulnerabilities that this writing life entails. A strong competitive streak can power a writer's success – but it also can go

hand-in-hand with distracting or destructive envy.

Even the most celebrated authors sometimes covet what another writer has. After all, we're all human, and no writing career is easy, smooth, or perfect – even those that appear so to others. It's OK to feel occasional flashes of jealousy when other writers get what you want. But if those jealous sparks become a constant flame, you need to find ways to damp them, or you're going to get burned.

Feeling deeply envious of another writer's accomplishments or awards won't change a thing about how her (or your) work is received, but it can cause real harm to your mental health, productivity, and relationships. So give yourself and your writing a competitive edge by ditching envious thoughts and redirecting your time and energy toward more creative and fulfilling pursuits – such as finishing that draft.

First, let yourself feel it

When jealousy strikes, give yourself a moment to feel what you feel in exquisite, petty detail. Acknowledge your emotions – even wallow in them, if you'd like. Tell a friend. Write it down. Cry or rage it out. But when the allotted moment is over, stop. Shake it off. Find ways to distract yourself, boost your mood, and force yourself to move on. If the jealousy comes back, remind yourself that you already felt those feelings, and there's no point in cycling through them again. Dismiss your negative thoughts and make space for new ones.

Break down your envy and find its core

Intense jealousy is often a manifestation of anxiety. If that seems like it could be the case for you, unpack it. Identify and examine what triggers your anxieties, and equip yourself to address or avoid them. (Pro tip: If you have access to good mental health care, a therapist can really help.)

Make it useful

Put your jealousy to good use by paying close attention to what it shows you about what you really want. Turn envy into clarity by using jealous moments to get specific about your creative and career aspirations. Deliniate your dreams, both short- and long-term, and break them into small, specific, achievable goals and action points. Work toward them. Keep going.

Know your strengths, in detail

If you were to give yourself an award right now, what would it be for? What *should* a review of your best work say? Take note of your specific gifts and skills as a writer and remind yourself of the things you do best. Hold onto that knowledge and truly internalize it. Then flaunt and strengthen your talents on the page. Focus on the work – it's the one thing you can control.

Repeat after me: Publishing is not a meritocracy

There is no "fair" in publishing. It's important to recognize this fact and

believe it. It may sound disheartening at first, but it can also be freeing. You can't control how your work is received, so replace the quest for external validation with joy in the work and the process.

Yes, some cream does rise to the top, but other cream never even makes it into the cup. Hard work and talent are sometimes rewarded and sometimes ignored. All you can do is keep at it – and remember that success or failure within the industry is not a reflection of your worth, or anyone else's.

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Pay it forward

Other writers aren't your competition, they're your community. When you're frustrated by the publishing industry, or dispirited by the obstacles within its system, don't get mad at the other cogs in the machine. Instead, join forces. Support your peers. Be part of the solution. When you read work you love, shout about it. You are not the only writer who could use a little boost, and celebrating your colleagues feels much better than envying them.

Practice gladness for others until you feel it

Trick and train yourself into this habit: When you encounter news that might normally turn you green, force yourself to actively think, "Wow! Good for her. I'm glad for her." And move on.

It will likely feel silly and hollow at first, but if you keep it up, a positive reaction to others' good news will become automatic and more genuine.

Try it. It won't hurt, but it really could help. And what have you got to lose?

Diversify your social circle

Cultivate friendships with people who know nothing about publishing. Pursue interests and hobbies that aren't writing-related. Remember who you are, outside of all this. When the writing world eats away at you, step into another one. Give yourself a break, and reconnect with other things that matter. (My go-to: spending time with a dog who loves me regardless of what I write.)

Be fueled by the work, not the industry

Focus on the love of craft. Tap into the joy of creating something new. Cherish the thrill of a sentence well spun. *This* is why you're a writer, right?

Hold your similes and scenes to your highest personal standards. Revise and revise until you're satisfied with your work. Then raise the bar.

Keep your eyes on the page because your real competition is yourself.

Make it fun

Can't kick jealousy to the curb completely? OK. Make it a game.

Follow the lead of author Roxane Gay and allow yourself a secret nemesis (preferably someone outside your circle). Make a cartoon villain of them in your head, and be gleeful about their failures while shaking your fist at their accomplishments. Let the imagined competition rile you up, push you creatively, and inspire you to make bigger, bolder, more daring leaps. Write to win. When your nemesis shines, write harder.

Write the thing that only you can write

Don't let the bastards grind you down. Write your heart out, and make 'em all jealous. 🖊

Anica Mrose Rissi is the author of the Anna, Banana chapter-book series; the picture books *Watch Out for Wolf!*, *The Teacher's Pet*, and *Love, Sophia on the Moon*; and the young adult novels *Always Forever Maybe* and *Nobody Knows But You*. Follow her on Twitter and Instagram at @anicarissi.

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