

YOUR FLOAT PREVIEW

Trust yourself

Use simple tools

Honor your wisdom

Connect with the clan of writers

Find your strength

FLOAT



Why is it that sometimes everything seems possible, and other times, we're so stuck that we see nothing but obstacles? Is it that the stuckness comes from our inborn needs to connect with others – and to distrust them too?

The Paradox of Connectedness

We want to connect. Yet none of us can avoid the self-protective suspicion that eventually got humans to our position at the top of the food chain. Our species wouldn't have emerged, let alone survived, without an inborn alert system. We learned, before we had become humans, not to trust.

We also are born with a need for closeness, not just to reproduce the species, but to bond with and care for others. Maybe we're capable of connecting to a shared universal energy or awareness that some call the divine.

We can probably each remember peak experiences that illuminated our connectedness with all the beings on the planet, and perhaps beyond. Yet, day by day, each of us navigates a continuum of need, between mistrustful isolation and immersive connection. In fact, the Buddhists say it's the illusion of separateness that creates human suffering.

It's a paradox.

We empathize with our fellow humans who are invested in a creative project. We surge toward the joy of making something new and fine to enrich the lives of others – and scramble self-protectively for the back of the cave, as far away as possible from sharing, trusting, or seeking an audience. It's not always easy to negotiate a middle way, when we're in the grip of these powerful – opposed – impulses!

The FLOAT Approach

Why not acknowledge the paradox and gently connect with our own inner guidance? Why not discover a middle way? Why not practice becoming unstuck?

Clients, friends, and colleagues have shared their struggles with me. Wonderful authors and commentators have published their observations on the challenges facing writers. My task here was to collect, clarify, and arrange these materials in a framework. I call it the FLOAT Approach.

I invite you to use it whenever you want to become unstuck.

– A M Carley

Adapted from the author's Preface, **FLOAT • Becoming Unstuck for Writers** (Be Well Here, 2016)

Many books offer advice about overcoming writer's block, getting unstuck, and so on. This book does, too. What will feel different about the FLOAT Approach is that the process encourages you in two ways: first, to be gentle with yourself, and second, to honor your own wisdom.

We can get stuck between the hardwired human urges toward – as well as away from – connectedness with others (and even the cosmos).

The tension between these urges can be so uncomfortable that we just stop, temporarily disabled from negotiating the struggle, even when a project is important to us.

Then, even worse, we don't know how to solve the problem, or figure out possible options. The uncertainty adds an extra unwelcome layer of instability and distress.

Shame follows swiftly, for many of us. We tend not to let others know how bad it can get. This has the unintended and

unfortunate effect of magnifying our aloneness and sense of shame. We become uniquely miserable, worse off than everyone else. Not recognizing that they, too, are keeping their shame and misery to themselves, we conclude ours is the worst, most embarrassing, and most intransigent stuckness since time began.

We try things. We read about manning up and beating resistance to a pulp, putting our butts in the chair every day at 4 AM, or living dangerously. When those tactics don't work, only one conclusion remains: We are destined to fail.

Enough! You are not alone. There is another way.

What if you can use simple tools and your own wisdom to get insight into your stuckness? What if that helps you move forward again with your project and reconnect with the timeless clan of writers and storytellers? Shame, fear, and anxiety can blind us to our own renewable resources of insight and good sense. The FLOAT Approach invites your wise self to speak up and be heard.

Adapted from the Introduction, **FLOAT • Becoming Unstuck for Writers** (Be Well Here, 2016)

FLOAT is an acronym for a process to uncover your own insight and wisdom into your stuckness. The Focus / Listen / Open / Analyze / Tool sequence is illustrated here in the following Case History. Don't be too concerned with getting all the steps right. If you like, feel free to skip right to the available sample Tools in this Preview. These FLOAT Preview materials can be useful with or without applying the steps of the FLOAT Approach. That said, if you're curious about how it works, keep reading!

Case History • Zelda and the FLOAT Approach

Zelda was confident about the idea for her book of historical creative nonfiction, and knew her research was comprehensive and solid. She was proud and excited to have discovered new information in her field, which she wanted to publish before anyone else.

Doing all this work had skewed her normal social patterns. She'd invested every free moment in her research and writing. Withdrawing and working all hours had begun to seem normal. Many of her friends had dropped away, out of respect for her ambition, or out of disappointment.

FOCUS

Zelda asked, "What's up? Why can't this book get done?"

LISTEN

Zelda began to listen for what her wise self had to say. After a moment, Zelda heard, "You need some help." She waited, and received this: "Your ideas and research are great, and, working with a strong organizer, you'll be able to complete the manuscript with ease."

OPEN

These words surprised Zelda. She noticed she was recoiling from them, almost as if she'd been attacked by an enemy. Remembering to stay open to this message, Zelda sat quietly.

Part of her felt unsure. She began fussing about the next item on her research list. She fidgeted. After a few more moments, she began to see the truth of this message.

ANALYZE

Zelda realized she'd been separating from the rest of the world for too long. If she was honest with herself, she knew she'd feel better once she interacted with more people again. Also, it made sense to look for a structural editor. A stranger to the manuscript, who only wanted the book to be its best, would be such an asset to her project! Besides, it would feel great to be able to talk in depth about the book to someone who was also immersed in it.

Right. It wasn't a sign of weakness, or incompetence. Actually, Zelda saw, it was more professional because it meant she was not afraid to seek out the assistance this project required.

TOOL

Zelda looked for a Tool keyed to disconnectedness.

She felt drawn to the Tool called *My Buddy*, about working with an accountability partner. It was a medium-impact Tool, which she felt she could handle.

After a little reflection, she approached a colleague she had met a while back at a friend's book-signing event. Although that person was too busy, he in turn recommended someone who turned out to be a good fit for Zelda. The first item Zelda asked to be held accountable for was finding a good structural editor. The next thing she asked her buddy's support for was negotiating a deal with this editor. And the third thing she requested from her buddy was help pacing herself, because the edits she'd already begun to get back from her new editor were so thorough and sensitive that Zelda was concerned she'd forget to eat or sleep.

Trusting her ability to listen, and taking the chance to reach out for an accountability buddy, reconnected Zelda with her social self. It also restored her faith in the book project, which was improved immeasurably by Zelda's collaboration with her editor.

Practical Tips

Each time you use the FLOAT Approach, take a quick self-read, and notice where you happen to be.

Using the FLOAT Approach to gain some ideas and partial answers, you can choose from among a wide range of Tools to play with. See what works for you. You may want to keep a journal to jot down your responses, experiences, and any adaptations and tweaks you make.

Adapted from **FLOAT • Becoming Unstuck for Writers** (Be Well Here, 2016)



Check in with Yourself

To get the most out of the FLOAT Approach, you may want to spend a few moments observing your current situation. Where are you in life now? What are your expectations for yourself? For those close to you?

- *Have you recently changed your circumstances?*
- *Did you move to a new place to live?*
- *Have you added or subtracted a life partner?*
- *Are you switching jobs or careers?*
- *Has your financial picture changed?*
- *Are you mourning a death?*
- *Has your health been at the forefront of your attention lately?*
- *Someone else's health?*
- *Are you or someone close to you dealing with a mental or emotional crisis?*

Especially if one or more of those important challenges is active in your life, or was recently, you may want to go easy. Use this book for gentle suggestions, not for brow-beating yourself. Writing, when your life has become chaotic or super-stressed, sometimes just isn't in the cards. Consider agreeing to give yourself plenty of leeway in cases like this, to go forward as you can, wherever possible, and not to fret about the periods when it isn't possible.

So before berating yourself for not doing enough, and before throwing "should" and "ought to" and "what's your excuse" and other such mean expressions at your stressed, tired self, take a moment to pause. Consider letting up on the pressure, for now. Accomplish an act of compassion, rather than a few thousand words.

Take a few moments to check in. Where are you now? Pay attention to your answers, and let them guide you.

USING FLOAT TOOLS

Where are you, at the moment, on the connectedness continuum?

You may already know your answer. If not, try answering these questions:

1. Am I feeling thirsty for more contact and conversation with others?
YES / NO
2. Am I feeling like there's a good mix of alone time and social time in my life?
YES / NO
3. Am I feeling overwhelmed from too much interaction and empathizing?
YES / NO
4. When I'm writing, do I want to escape and just get somewhere by myself at the back of the cave so I can work?
YES / NO
5. Do I rely on feedback from colleagues every step of my writing process?
YES / NO

Consider the following when you look at your answers to the five questions on connectedness:

1. If YES, you may have gotten a bit under connected. Try starting with *Shout, Shout, Let It All Out*
2. If YES, this indicates you're somewhere in the middle of the connectedness continuum. Try any of the included Tools and see which ones work for you. Maybe start with *Candles & Incense and Chants, Oh, My!*
3. If YES, you may be feeling a little too connected lately. Try starting with *Notice*.
4. If YES, you may be taking a break from connectedness in order to concentrate. Consider beginning with *Candles & Incense and Chants, Oh, My!*
5. If YES, you may be feeling in need of reassurance. Try starting with *Don't Explain*.

Ask yourself where you are at this moment. If you're somewhere in between these choices, or if you want to answer YES to several of the questions, no worries. Choose a Tool and see if it's helpful.

Choose another one. There are no wrong answers. A selection of low-impact Tools from the book follow, to give you some choices as you play with the FLOAT Approach.

CANDLES & INCENSE & CHANTS, OH, MY!

Do you have some pet behaviors that you prefer, or must do, when you get ready to write?

Like the German poet Friedrich Schiller, do you keep rotting apples in your writing desk for their inspirational odor?

Or like the English poet Dame Edith Sitwell, do you lie in a coffin prior to beginning your writing day?

Do you have a lucky mug? A favorite soundtrack that sends the right messages to your creative unconscious? Six pencils – a certain kind – that must be lined up, sharpened, on the corner of your desk? A polished stone with a deep story known only to you?

Or is your good-luck token more practical? For instance, are you a writer who doesn't begin drafting until you've outlined the entire project? Or can you only start writing after you've covered three miles on the treadmill, or twenty minutes of Pilates, or a session of meditation?

Ernest Hemingway said the key for avoiding stuckness was to stop in the middle of something. That way, starting up the next day took no effort. Copywriting expert Colin Theriot swears by mindmapping his ideas in advance so that he can complete the actual writing in one sitting, which he measures in mini-sessions, each the length of one side of a vinyl LP.

Or do you give yourself a pep talk in the mirror like Al Franken's character Stuart Smalley used to do on Saturday Night Live? "I'm good enough, smart enough, and doggone it, people like me."

Rituals become habits we perform unthinkingly, routinely. The repetition primes our brains and helps us get into gear so we're ready to dig in on the important stuff. Rituals bypass stuckness.

NOTICE

Sometimes we ignore messages that we send ourselves. Pay attention to random experiences you have:

- *A song on the radio grabs your attention and you're not sure why.*
- *An overheard tantrum by a child in the grocery store triggers an idea that's too vague to pin down.*
- *Watching a river reminds you of something you can't quite recall.*

Do you have a place to jot down a few notes about these experiences, either on paper or into a device? Do you keep a voice recorder at the ready?

Trusting these little moments of enhanced attention can save so much time and convey such insights. For me, and several writers I know, it has been worth it to overcome the feeling of foolishness and dismissive self-talk that can surface at these moments.

- *Oh, that song's just silly.*
- *I don't know why I can't take my eyes off that kid. Ahh – forget it.*
- *This river almost reminds me of something. It's like the wackiest not-quite-a-memory just popped into my head. Nah. Better put it out of my mind.*

What if these moments are signals from your inner wisdom? What if you can learn to honor these glimpses of your own perceptual acumen?

If you choose to, you can see these noticed moments as supportive messages of encouragement from the universe.

Alternatively, you can slot them as potentially useful idea- and data-acquisition opportunities.

Either way, consider trusting yourself. When you notice something, consider going an extra step and examining why it has grabbed your attention. See if it's actually offering to help you.

DON'T EXPLAIN

Not just the title of a sad torch song recorded by Billie Holiday, the name of this Tool is a reminder. Oftentimes keeping your own counsel is the best way forward, especially when you find yourself stuck with your project.

You do not need to justify your stuckness to anyone, or defend against it.

Have you ever found yourself talking – and talking and talking – to the point of gibberish? It's some combination of frustration and shame, listing the reasons and excuses for your recent apparent lack of productivity.

“Oh, you know, I've been making great headway – it's one of those periods where most of the work goes on inside my head, you know? So it's one of the great things about being a writer...although sometimes, to be honest, it all gets to be too much and I can feel discouraged when I'm eating cold pizza, and kicking the toys out of the way as I stagger from the kitchen at 4 AM, except when I can't stop napping when I ought to be doing laundry although, come to think of it, I did come up with a really killer line the other day when I was talking on the phone to – wait – what was that line – well, it will come back to me later – can't think of it now and I'm not sure I had a darn pen handy when I wanted it – those pens disappear around here – I live with such slob – so yeah things are going, um, swell.”

Don't do that.

You do not owe anyone an explanation unless they are your coach, publisher, or agent inquiring about your progress on a project for which you have a valid contract.

Even to friends, colleagues, and writer group members; even to your accountability buddy or coach, you don't owe a detailed explanation.

You may be moved in some cases to share a brief comment about your progress, or, rarely, how you are feeling about your project. Something like, “Slow and steady.” Or, “More like the Appalachian Trail than a day hike, lately.” Or better yet, “Hey, I have a good joke for you!”

There's an important distinction to be made here.

A lengthy explanation is almost always a response to your own shame and defensiveness.

When you share how your project is doing, check yourself before speaking. Will you be motivated by shame to say too much?

SHOUT, SHOUT, LET IT ALL OUT

Telling someone what you're working on tends to focus your mind.

So ask to be interviewed about your topic, story, or book. If it's by a representative of the media or podcaster, so much the better. Afterwards, you can add a mention and a video or audio clip to your media kit. Even if your interviewer is a middle-school kid or a soft-hearted acquaintance, it's still useful.

First of all, we all benefit from practice talking about our work.

Beyond that, you are likely to feel a little more like a "real" writer when it's over, even if you don't feel the interview went so well.

Also, framing the work in language someone else will understand, out loud (not in writing), activates different parts of your brain that writing alone doesn't visit. This in turn helps build your overall understanding of the project and its significance.

Whether you are extroverted or introverted, expansive or shy, get to know your boundaries and remain within them.

If you ever want your book to become known by people outside your immediate acquaintance, you're no doubt already aware that you'll be doing your own marketing and promotion. This is true even if you have a contract with a major publisher – and is essential if you do not.

Each time you do an interview, each time you appear in a newspaper or blog, each time your website is linked from the website of an influencer you admire, you are building the infrastructure you'll need for the rest of your writing career.

All Tools and chapters in this FLOAT Preview are adapted from **FLOAT • Becoming Unstuck for Writers** (Be Well Here, 2016)

Hopefully this preview has given you Tools and ideas you can use toward becoming unstuck.

Do you like what you've done so far, and want more?

You've got choices!

- Pick up your copy of the book from which this preview is adapted. The print book is on Amazon. Ebooks are available online in MOBI [for Kindle] and EPUB [for Mac OS, Nook, and more].
- Join the next session of Anne Carley's online course, Thirty Days to Becoming Unstuck. More information available at the Chenille Books website. For a limited time, this course is free with the purchase of the book, **FLOAT • Becoming Unstuck for Writers**.
- For more inspiration from the professionals, visit chenillebooks.com/FLOAT-Resources. You'll find links to lots of successful writers and their wisdom on becoming unstuck.
- Contact us for more information and answers to your questions. If you're a writer looking to become unstuck, get in touch!

Here's to becoming unstuck!

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