

Writing from the Subconscious

Summary of workshop by Joni Sensel, www.jonisensel.com

Your subconscious is like a dog

- Give it attention and positive reinforcement.
- Feed it.
- Create a comfortable routine for it, including occasional rest.
- Tell it what you want it to do and expect results. Have faith in it.
- Practice. Have fun.
- *Let it do what you ask of it.* Muzzle the controller.

Helpers

- Physical relaxation (e.g., warm baths, herbal tea, deep breathing, meditation, the downshift after a workout)
- Repetitive activity that busies the left brain (e.g., doing dishes, painting walls)
- Rhythmic activity to entrain/slow brain waves (e.g., walking, rocking a baby)
 - Target 45 beats per minute
- White noise, theta-wave patterns, gentle music
- Peripheral visual flicker (or a candle flame on your desk), eyes above head-level
- Work when you're sleepy; try to walk that line
- Give it specific assignments (before bed or day-job or analytical activities)
- Create, furnish, inhabit a mental listening place
- Creative visuals: play with tarot cards, magazine clipping collages, marbles...

STOP THINKING. Let the *story* tell you.

Learning its language

Use your conscious and your critique partners to identify hidden messages in drafts:

- Found objects, trap doors, symbols
- Patterns (what do they point to?)
- Redundancies (which one is correct?)
- Chapters way shorter or longer (missing scenes? Out of place?)
- Character misnomers
- Abrupt changes in tone or voice
- Switch from statements to questions (or vice versa)
- Resistance or block. Attend to your feelings about the work. Negative feelings do not necessarily mean poor work!
- Identify life themes. Look for the story you're telling yourself.
- Visually map the draft as part of revision. Look for arcs, patterns, backtracking...

Resources to explore:

- Writing in Flow by Susan Perry
- The Artist's Way by Julia Cameron
- Zen in the Art of Writing by Ray Bradbury
- Fearless Creating by Eric Maisel
- Professional hypnosis. (NOT stage hypnotists. Ask a qualified hypno-therapist to help you explore your writing themes and motivators with you... or try past-life hypnosis for a wellspring of story material and fun).

Subconscious Efficacy Quiz

		<i>Score</i>
1. I sometimes write down my dreams.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
2. When taking multiple-choice tests, I frequently change my answers on reflection.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
3. I participate in, and enjoy, adrenaline or extreme sports.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
4. I trust my intuition more than my common sense.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
5. I am a better wordsmith or artist than storyteller.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
6. I secretly believe my writing/art may never be good enough.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
7. I read my own drafts and occasionally think, "I don't remember that line; who wrote that?"	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
8. I smoke, or I drink more than two coffees or caffeinated sodas daily.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
9. I am left-handed.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
10. I have nearly fallen asleep while working over my computer or art table.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
11. I have bad or traumatic childhood memories I'd rather not revisit.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
12. I have missed freeway exits while driving in areas I'm perfectly familiar with.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
13. I watch an hour or more of TV on many evenings.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
14. I usually create an outline before I write. (If you're an artist only, choose False).	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
15. I take anti-depressants or use recognized self-medicative behavior.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
16. I believe some physical illness may be somatic (influenced or caused by psychological issues).	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
17. I am male.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
18. I am good at, and/or my day job involves, math.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
19. I have had more than one lucid dream (you're aware at the time that you're dreaming).	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
20. I am or have been a regular runner, rower, or lap swimmer.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
21. I have a fairly consistent routine and/or rituals for my writing or illustrating.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False	
	Total	

Scoring (maximum = 105; see scoring key on next page)

70 & above: You're probably pretty in touch with your subconscious; just continue to become more aware and encouraging of its influence in your work.

40 to 65: You listen at times, but actively courting your subconscious might be useful.

Below 40: You're probably pretty controlled and logical. Try relaxing your control over your work and opening some dialogue with your subconscious (dreams are a good place to start), and see what happens.

Subconscious Efficacy Scoring

1. I sometimes write down my dreams.	T = 5
2. When taking multiple-choice tests, I frequently change my answers on reflection.	F = 5
3. I participate in, and enjoy, adrenaline or extreme sports.	T = 5
4. I trust my intuition more than my common sense.	T = 5
5. I am a better wordsmith or artist than storyteller.	F = 5
6. I secretly believe my writing/art may never be good enough.	F = 5
7. I read my own drafts and occasionally think, "I don't remember that line; who wrote that?"	T = 5
8. I smoke, or I drink more than two coffees or caffeinated sodas daily.	F = 5
9. I am left-handed.	T = 5
10. I have nearly fallen asleep while working over my computer or art table.	T = 5
11. I have bad or traumatic childhood memories I'd rather not revisit.	F = 5
12. I have missed freeway exits while driving in areas I'm perfectly familiar with.	T = 5
13. I watch an hour or more of TV on many evenings.	T = 5
14. I usually create an outline before I write (if you're an artist only, choose False).	F = 5
15. I take anti-depressants or use recognized self-medicative behavior.	F = 5
16. I believe some physical illness may be somatic (influenced or caused by psychological issues).	T = 5
17. I am male.	F = 5
18. I am good at, and/or my day job involves, math.	F = 5
19. I have had more than one lucid dream (you're aware at the time that you're dreaming).	T = 5
20. I am or have been a regular runner, rower, or lap swimmer.	T = 5
21. I have a fairly consistent routine and/or rituals for my writing or illustrating.	T = 5

Creating a story place — Guided visualization

The best way to use this script is to tape it in a slow, rhythmic voice (except for the very last paragraph, which should gradually speed up.). Better, have a friend tape it for you. Customize as you like (such as to create an outdoor grotto instead of a door, or focus on specific elements of your WIP.) Be sure to leave silence to visualize in. Then settle somewhere comfortable where you won't be distracted, listen, and see what results.

Get as comfy as you can in your chair, or sitting on the floor. Close your eyes.

Breathe deeply, and relax completely. Imagine that you are filled with warm, dry sand, fine golden sand, and a small hole springs in each of your fingers and each of your toes. Feel that heavy sand sliding out, draining out, warm and soft as it flows through you, and any tension in your body goes with it.

Your scalp feels looser, and your whole face can relax. Your entire head starts to feel easy and empty. Sand drains down from your shoulders, down through your arms, down through your hands, and out through your fingers to pool on the ground. Your arms are now soft and limp and relaxed. More sand drains down your spine, down through your chest, down past your ribs, and down, down, into your legs. The sand keeps flowing out, down through your hips, down through your thighs, down through your calves, down through your feet, and pools on the ground, until your whole body feels completely soft and relaxed. Inhale, and feel comfortable and relaxed.

Now imagine warm, golden light beaming on you from above, warming your skin, warming your heart, helping you feel cozy and warm. Know this golden light is filled with inspiration and love, and it surrounds you and flows through you and protects you.

Now picture in your mind a room in your house, a familiar room where you feel safe. Picture the walls of the room, the décor, and all the things that are usually in it. Hear normal, friendly sounds of this room. Smell the pleasant scent of this room. Put yourself in this room, and make it as real as you can in your mind's eye. If anyone is in the room with you, you can see that they're busy and safe, and paying no attention to you. You're free to do as you like in this room.

Now I want you to turn around in the room and discover a door you've perhaps never noticed before. It's always been there, but daily life may have blocked it from view. Perhaps this door is behind the furniture, or inside a closet, or simply in an out-of-the-way corner. It might be a small door, but it is large enough for you to go through. I want you to approach this door now. Move whatever you might need to move, so you can reach it. You *can* reach it. Move toward it now.

As you draw near this door, it grows larger, inviting, and although it's still closed, you realize it's not an ordinary door. It has hinges, and some kind of doorknob or latch, so it can be opened. But it also resembles the cover of a wonderful book. Take a good look and imagine its color, its texture, its weight. See any decorations or embossing on the door, or its grain, or the details of its hinges and handle.

Reach out your hand and feel the door's surface. Feel if it's warm or cool, smooth or textured. Feel how it wants you to open it up and pass through. This is your personal door, your doorway to greater creativity. And it's also your book. It's been waiting for you.

So give your attention to the handle or latch. It has one, it's right there, and it's waiting for you. Reach out and grasp it. Feel its texture, its temperature, its shape, how it can move. It's unlocked, and it *will* move for you.

Know in your heart that behind this door is a safe place, a kind place, where ideas wait for you, growing into wonderful stories. Your stories, your inspiration, may all be found behind this door, waiting for you.

I want you now to open the door. Move the latch or the handle, and swing it wide open. The door opens easily under your hand. Feel it swing, hear the sounds it makes as it moves.

This door opens on the world of a book, one you are working on now, or one you need to write. You can see past this door as clearly as you pictured its front. Take a step forward. Look down and watch your feet cross the threshold. Walk in. Take a few more steps forward, it's perfectly safe. You are completely inside your book. Now look up from your feet. Look around. What do you see? It might be a character you care about most. Where do you see them? What do they have in their hands? What are they doing? *[silence]*

What do you smell? What do you hear? What do you feel in the air? *[silence]*

See this character move. Where is he or she going? Get closer. What happens next? *[silence]* Remember, everything here is yours to tell stories about. Everything here *wants* you to know it. You can. Explore further now. *[silence]*

Now, very gently, open your eyes, pick up your pencil or pen, and write a few words about what you've just seen, felt, or learned. *[silence]*

When you're done writing for now, put your pen down. Close your eyes again for a moment. Listen to my voice. Come back out of your book, just for now, out past the door. You can return any time that you like. For now, hear my voice and feel your toes, feel your legs, feel your body. Feel the chair or the surface beneath you now. Feel your hands, arms, shoulders, and head. Wiggle any parts that want to move. Feel your breath moving in, flowing through, bringing your whole body and your mind together. Remember this room we in. Inhale deeply, feel rested, warm, and alert. Open your eyes and feel awake. Wide awake, alert, and cheerful and ready to move on with your day.

(Be sure to do something active and analytical between listening to the tape and, for instance, driving.)