

# HEART, SASS & SOUL



Journal Your Way to  
Inspiration and Happiness

**GRETA SOLOMON**

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## Praise for *Heart, Sass & Soul*

“*Heart, Sass & Soul* is an inspirational (and practical) guide to harnessing your creativity and using self-expression to create a better life.”

—**Karen Swayne**, features and health editor, *Prima* magazine

“In a world where we are often bombarded with other people’s stories, it is vital for our well-being and success in life to make contact with our own stories. *Heart, Sass & Soul* is the essential guide for how to create that meaningful relationship with self and then become the author and authority of your own story.”

—**Zita Tulyahikayo**, systemic coach and hypnotherapist

“Behold! You are holding a bright pearl of love. A guide that bridges between your inner being and its outer expression. This work is coming from a mature and ripe place, with deep personal and professional experience. How blessed we are to be gifted with Greta’s work which is profound and inspiring, yet light and accessible.”

—**Yair Sagy**, yoga teacher, healer, and facilitator at Armonia Alpujarra Healing Retreat Centre

“A welcome and stylish exploration of writing as a way of uplifting your life. Sensitive, sassy and creative.”

—**Malcolm Stern**, psychotherapist, author and co-founder of Alternatives

“Writing is a powerful tool in delving within, in learning who we are and what we need, and in building a beautiful life on our own terms. Greta Solomon’s *Heart, Sass & Soul* is an invaluable, accessible, and practical resource that helps us do just that. It is filled with insightful, inspiring, and interesting stories and exercises. And it is no doubt a reference that you will return to throughout your life, throughout different seasons, transitions, and phases. Because it’ll help you discover and rediscover who you are.”

—**Margarita Tartakovsky**, writer and associate editor at PsychCentral.com

“Greta’s wisdom and warmth shine through every page of this wonderful book. It’s like being gently but purposefully guided toward a more accomplished version of yourself through writing and discovering your voice and your inner light—the you that you’ve always known you could be! This book has really helped me not to waver or stumble with my writing, but to stride confidently forward.”

—**Anya Hayes**, Pilates teacher, MBCT mindfulness coach, and author of *The Supermum Myth*

“Keeping a journal has been a daily practice for me for many years. Journaling enriches my life as it helps to hone my craft as a writer. Writing down my thoughts clears my mind and helps me discover the topics that are really grabbing my attention. Greta Solomon’s book is the go-to guide on the art of journaling.”

—**Joan Gelfand**, author of *You Can Be a Winning Writer*

“Greta is to writing what Marie Kondo is to tidying. This is a marvel of a book which explores how you can find your creative voice and

help clarify your thoughts through the lost art of writing. Creativity is, Greta says, the missing piece of the wellness puzzle, and in this book she shows you how to tap into your own creativity and use it to overcome issues and express yourself more clearly. Through it, we can rediscover the cathartic power of creative writing.”

—**Georgina Fuller**, freelance journalist for national newspapers and magazines, including *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, and *Modern Woman*

“Greta Solomon reminds us of the value and importance of living a reflective, self-reflexive, and creative life, with enjoyable and gently challenging exercises, prompts, and wisdom, along with her own fresh and supportive voice.”

—**Deborah Alma**, emergency poet (prescribing poems from her 1970s ambulance) and author of *The Emergency Poet: An Anti-Stress Poetry Anthology*

“We all know that journaling can be a powerful self-care practice; Greta artfully shows us HOW. This is an insightful, inspiring book empowering us all with the tools of self-expression. Very liberating!”

—**Suzy Reading**, chartered psychologist, mind editor at *Psychologies* magazine and author of *The Self-Care Revolution*

“As a writer, I know firsthand how therapeutic it can be to order your feelings on paper (or on a computer). This book is a wonderful resource for people who want to go deeper and really explore both positive and negative emotions.”

—**Annie Ridout**, journalist and author of *The Freelance Mum*

## **Also by Greta Solomon**

*Just Write It! How to Develop Top-Class University Writing Skills*  
(McGraw-Hill, 2013)



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*For Krister, Savannah Grace, and Leonie Joy.  
With love, always.*

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# INTRODUCTION

When my mother was a young girl, she played the piano. And when her family moved, they took her beloved piano with them. But it wouldn't fit in the entrance to their new flat. They tried every which way to get that hunk of wood up the stairs, but it wouldn't budge. And in that moment, her piano playing life ended—it just didn't fit. Fast forward to around twenty years later and she was determined that her children would play the piano. Each of us duly went to lessons, but we never found the magic that she had experienced. That was her path, not ours, and we could never replicate the love and joy she felt for the music of the keys.

The path to self-love is difficult to navigate if it is littered with thwarted dreams and silenced music. It's no longer made-to-measure Valentino. Instead, it's more hand-me-down from an aunt two sizes too big, or from that whippet-thin cousin whose thigh is the size of your wrist. It doesn't fit. It tugs. It pulls. It itches. It scratches.

We can also pick at our wounds, compulsively, like the urge to pick, pick, at a scab until the freeing feeling of getting it off is replaced by the wincing rawness of unhealed skin. This is when we can become susceptible to criticism. Throwaway comments, insensitive observations, and downright nastiness can fester, and if there's no creative buffer, they can take hold. They can worm their way into your life, your psyche, your experience. Like a piece of wood made gnarled and moldy, it can seem as though your self-expression is tangled. The unwanted thoughts, fearful tries, and inevitable failures that are par for the course when expressing yourself can seem like clear signs that it's "game over."



## (UN)SPOKEN AGENDAS

Let's look at criticism for a moment, because if you're anything like me, you'll have heard a lot of it in your life, from a variety of angles. Here is some of the criticism I have heard:

- \* You're too quiet and sensitive.
- \* You don't know how to get along with people.
- \* You laugh too loudly.
- \* You have short legs (yes, really!).

But what is interesting is that for almost every criticism I've heard from someone, I've heard the exact opposite from someone else. I say almost, because unfortunately, no one has ever told me I have long legs!

Here is some of the praise I've heard:

- \* You're one of the most outgoing people I've ever met.
- \* You've got such drive and determination.
- \* You're really good at building relationships with people.

So, who is right and who is wrong? And what does it all mean? Well, it means that words come with an agenda. People say things to get us to behave in a certain way. For instance, "You're too quiet" could really be someone saying, "I'm not comfortable with silence." And, "You laugh too loudly" could mean, "I feel depressed and your laughter reminds me of how unhappy I am." But instead of stating a flaw or weakness in themselves, others flip it back as a criticism—hoping that you'll mold yourself to suit them.

So ultimately, the only thing that matters is what we believe. The stories we tell ourselves and the world hold the key to our individual happiness. If you live by other people's agendas, then it's likely that you'll behave in ways that don't serve your highest self.

Can you relate to this? To the need to please, to be liked, to be loved? You might feel that need so much that you take the criticism, and, like a sculptor, you begin chiselling away at yourself until—over time—your structure falls. You took too much away here and left not enough there, and now you're broken and in pieces. So, you have to try and put yourself back together. Except now some pieces don't fit you anymore. You're new and different, and not necessarily better. You wish you had never started chipping away at yourself. But now you can't stop chasing some illusion of perfection that was never there and can never be there.

## **WHERE IS THE TRUTH?**

When you embrace, believe, and embody criticism without questioning what's behind it, you can start to believe that you're not good enough. That's when your perception of the world becomes skewed.

A key sign is that you keep finding yourself in situations where criticism, bullying, and harsh words are commonplace. That's not necessarily to say that you are being bullied yourself, just that judgement, cattiness, and "calling people out" seems to happen all too frequently. Plus, if you're the one that people find fault with, you can start to feel less and less. Worse still, you may be left with no idea how to remedy the predicaments you find yourself in. And if there are no unfriendly people like this in your life, it doesn't mean you're off the hook. Maybe you have a critical inner voice, bullying you, pushing you around, and telling you you're not good enough.



Maybe you're telling yourself that you're a failed piano player who doesn't deserve to have music in her life. Maybe you're telling yourself that you're just not "good" at writing, you can't spell, and your grammar is crap. Maybe you're telling yourself that you want to write, you really do, but you don't want to dig too deep. What if your ex-boyfriend, grandmother, or childhood best friend sues you after reading the things you wrote about them?

That's not to say you need to believe you're the greatest, the best thing ever, and all superior. That's a fast track to an emotionally empty life. Instead there's a more optimal way—a middle path of love, one where you don't judge anything about yourself as good or bad and instead view it as information. Get to know yourself with an open heart and accept what you find. Then write what you find, express yourself, and take care of *your* needs first. Put fear to one side and create first.

Love and acceptance are gifts we desperately need to give ourselves. And they're essential for living a fully expressed life. In the coming pages, you'll find stories, ideas, food for thought, writing tools and techniques, and creative challenges and exercises that will help you to write your way to a self-expressed life. I'll coax you into expressing what you truly think and expressing what you truly feel. And I'll help you to write through the darkness until you pierce shadows of light.

I'll also look at the negative events that happen to us all, which are trying to guide us. The catch is that if you're not attuned to reading the signs and serendipities, the world will look bleak. But try to look a little deeper and a little closer. If you can squint your eyes and peer through the looking glass of life, you'll see that signs and serendipities abound. You'll see them dance across your eyes, pointing out the path to self-love.

## WRITING CAN CLEAR A PATH TO SELF-LOVE

So, WHO am I? Well, I'm not a love expert. (Who is? I think each of us is a work in progress.) But I *am* a writer, teacher, and creative writing coach. I've also lived a rich and varied life, and I'd like to share what I've learned. And it's perhaps surprising that I want to do this, as I grew up wanting to hide. In fact, I think "easily embarrassed" is a phrase that accurately sums up my early childhood.

But over time I became adept at hiding in plain sight—on stages and in auditoriums. I sang, danced, ran, jumped, and played music. I was Deputy Head Girl in middle school and Head Girl in high school. One friend nicknamed me "shiny happy person" after the REM song. Yes, I smiled a lot, and I had a shiny forehead—something I thankfully seem to have grown out of. I smiled and mixed, and all the while I hid. I mean, I was outwardly positive and friendly. I got along. But inside I felt that no one really understood who I was.

So, I wrote—songs at first. It was 1988, and I would listen to Madonna songs on repeat on my tinny cassette player and write down all the lyrics. Then I would pick them apart to figure out the structure and why this rhymed with that, and so on.

I became a little nine-year-old connoisseur of love songs. I wrote and wrote about love and loss, love and loss—the two themes that define most adult lives. But I also started to realize that writing could be powerful, because it could help me to speak up for myself. So I started to put my thoughts on paper in other ways. I wrote letters to my favorite magazines, *Hi!* and *Look-In*, and got such a buzz when they were actually published.



Here's an example of one where I gushed about my favorite TV program: "I think the *Wide Awake Club* is brilliant. The bed-making competition is fantastic. I think the WAC team must be rich, because they give such a lot of prizes away." I mean, it was hardly Shakespeare, but it gave me a taste for the power of words.

Since those days, I've written and written and written: two nonfiction books (including this one); a novel (currently unfinished); thousands of articles (some published in magazines, some stuffed in drawers, some languishing on old hard drives); morning pages (three pages of stream of consciousness writing, first thing—as inspired by Julia Cameron); poems; more songs; blog posts; press releases, newsletters, speeches, award entries, and articles as a director at a business-to-business PR consultancy; journals; affirmations; shopping lists (both literal and spiritual); and scribbles here, there, and everywhere.

I continued to ask for things. For instance, after I graduated from university, I wrote letters to virtually every women's magazine in London, asking for a work experience placement. A couple took me up on my offer, and that's how I became a journalist.

I realized that through writing, I could ask for things that I wouldn't dare to speak out loud. Better still, I could write things into existence: things that were never there before, except for wishes or dreams in my head.

Writing unlocked so many doors for me (and not just because I became a journalist who got paid to interview celebrities, go to events, and drink champagne at parties). I think it was because I continued to write to people and ask for what I wanted. And when there were very dark, difficult times, writing was a helpful friend. In the year that I turned thirty-one, my mother committed suicide, and I wrote reams and reams about my feelings, which allowed

healing goodness to flow. It was highly therapeutic, and those hours and hours of writing helped me to chart a new path.

## **A SAFE SPACE TO OPEN YOUR HEART**

Writing allows you to be quiet enough to listen for the signs and serendipities that can guide you toward your highest self. Bad stuff will happen, and we desperately need a way to make sense of it. Writing can help you do that.

I'll never forget the words of Yair Sagy, an openhearted healer and teacher I met while taking part in a juice fast. He said, "Your heart has remained open because you're a writer, because you've been consistently writing throughout your life." Yes, I hid everywhere—except on the page. It was all there, written in ink, and it showed me the way time and time again.

I don't know if you're also the type to hide. But I'll bet that you're the type who wants a little bit more. But to get "more," you've got to go within. Writing is my way of doing it. For some, it's yoga or meditation, or painting or sculpting. For others, it's a weekly trip to a farmer's market and then back home to cook up a delight. Maybe for you it's a wonderful pick and mix of this and more.

For me, writing brings me back home. I love writing. I love words, their potential, and the goodness they can bring into life. They can heal, help, and harmonize. They can find a way when there is no way.

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**But what if you feel blocked and stifled? What if you write, but you never really say what you need to say?**

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Well, I've been there.





For my first six or seven years of being a journalist, I couldn't freely express myself when writing. There's a quote by "Red" Smith that I love. When asked about how he got his newspaper column done every week, he said, "You just sit at your typewriter until little drops of blood appear on your forehead." That's how it was for me too.

I was "good" at writing, but it came at a huge price for me. It simply wasn't easy. My block (or my writing personality) was governed by fear. (We'll look at this more in Chapter 1, and you'll figure out which kind of writing personality you have.) I used to leave all my writing until the last minute and only get it done through fear: fear of losing my job or of losing my colleagues' respect. There was so much strain and pressure that it was exhausting.

There was one time where my writing personality worked against me in a big way. My first journalism job was at a businesswomen's magazine. It was the kind of place where you worked for a year or two as a deputy editor straight out of journalism school before moving on. While looking for my next gig, I was invited by IPC Media (now part of Time Inc.) to interview for a position at a new women's lifestyle magazine that was launching. I was invited to a trial day, and all was going well until I was asked to write a sample feature. And I just couldn't do it. I kept crossing out and rewriting sentences. I couldn't decide on the angle, the introduction, or anything for that matter. In the end, I submitted a paragraph. Yes—just *one* paragraph. I will never forget the look on the editors' faces. I can laugh about it now, but at the time it was mortifying.

Ironically, my next job (which I got a few weeks later) was in the same building. I was hired as a features writer at another women's magazine, covering someone's maternity leave. I was twenty-three, and on paper it was the *dream job*. I should have been having the time of my life. But I didn't feel authentic, and I felt creatively

blocked. I didn't have the easy flow of ideas that I have now. I didn't feel that I had a voice. And I felt like I was on a conveyor belt, churning out articles. I just didn't feel creative.

So when my contract was up, I went freelance as a journalist, cranking out articles for newspapers and magazines in my force-driven way. But crucially, I decided to explore my creativity and see where it led. I enrolled at a London drama school and starred in adverts and short films. I became a travel writer and explored health and wellness. I did voice and improvisation classes. I wrote lots of songs and poems and got some of them published.

All of these experiences helped with my self-expression. But things really shifted for me four years later when I began studying lyric writing at Berklee College of Music.

The first thing we learned was a technique called object writing, which is something that songwriters use to help them get raw material for songs. And it was life-changing. I will introduce you to this technique later in this book and show you how you can put it into practice in your everyday life. What's for sure is that object writing opened me up and I was finally able to write freely and expressively. And this way of writing crossed over into my journalism work and all the other writing work I did after that.

After undergoing such a transformation, I realized that I wanted to train as a life coach and teacher and teach people to write. I started off tutoring students. I taught them object writing and other self-expression and writing techniques I'd learned while earning my lyric writing diploma. And it was a big hit. I got a reputation for turning C students into A students *because* they became self-expressed writers. And I turned my methods into the book *Just Write It! How to Develop Top-Class University Writing Skills*. I found what I was supposed to do and realized that I loved helping people



to better express themselves in writing. And that's what I have been doing ever since.

The crucial thing is that I feel completely free and able to express myself in writing both privately and publicly. In your own room and own space, you ought to be able to write freely. Cry. Laugh. Feel the feelings. And sometimes you need to write something that is raw and not for public consumption, something that wouldn't please your eighth-grade grammar teacher or your boss, but that pleases you.

But if you do want to shape your writing into a finished piece, then that's great, and I'm going to share some tools and techniques that will help you do that. In fact, creative self-expression is cyclical, and if you can add technique to heart and soul, you can keep going deeper down through the layers. I'll also share my tips for going a step further and creating personal, creative blog posts. Plus, if you're already an accomplished writer, the stories and lessons in this book will help you go deeper and inspire you to access your writing space from a position of love.

I'm committed to doing all I can to help you to better express yourself in writing and live a full, rich, creative life. As such, my vision for *Heart, Sass & Soul* is about more than the words you'll read in this book.

# HERE ARE THREE WAYS THAT YOU CAN GO EVEN DEEPER IN YOUR SELF-EXPRESSION

## 1. Stay in the Loop via Social Media and Connect with Other Readers

Expressing, connecting, and sharing go hand in hand. If you feel called to do so, please share your insights on social media while you read. Tag me @greta.solomon on Instagram and @greta\_solomon on Twitter. Use #HeartSassSoulso that other readers can find you.

## 2. Sign Up for Journey Beyond Journaling

This is a free, five-day writing challenge designed for people who yearn to write more. If you feel your voice has been suppressed in some way—this is the challenge for you. Visit [www.gretasolomon.com/challenge](http://www.gretasolomon.com/challenge) to receive daily videos and creative exercises that you can complete in ten to fifteen minutes. These will support you in releasing mindset blocks, getting in your body, awakening your senses, and opening your heart. You'll kick-start your writing and creativity and begin to see what's possible for you—beyond the pages of your journal.

## 3. Go Deeper with My Online Program in Writing for Creative Self-Expression

This is a completely tried-and-true, seven-week course in mindset, creativity, and craft. Using videos, audio recordings, and worksheets, I guide you to break through the blocks that hold you back. Through writing workouts, coaching questions, tasks, challenges, and tutorials, you'll wake up to your writing potential. Plus, you'll learn practical tools and techniques for writing articles



and blog posts. By immersing yourself in this material, you'll begin to uncover your voice and learn how to use it. Find out more about this unique, life-changing program here: [www.gretasolomon.com/online-course](http://www.gretasolomon.com/online-course).

As my course participant, Janet said, "When I was young, I loved to write stories and wrote constantly as a way to express the angst of my teenage years. Unfortunately, this led to shaming, because those very personal journal entries were read by someone who used them to ridicule and criticize me. You are the first person to name and identify the damage done by this kind of shaming. After working through your course, I am recognizing that I am well on the way to healing that tender, violated part of my inner world. There has been a remarkable, gradual fading of the critical inner voice. Now, I have a structure to work within and techniques to practice, and it has given me a sense of direction and purpose."

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**This is my desire for you too—direction, purpose, and the safety of having practical tools and techniques to guide you on your journey.**

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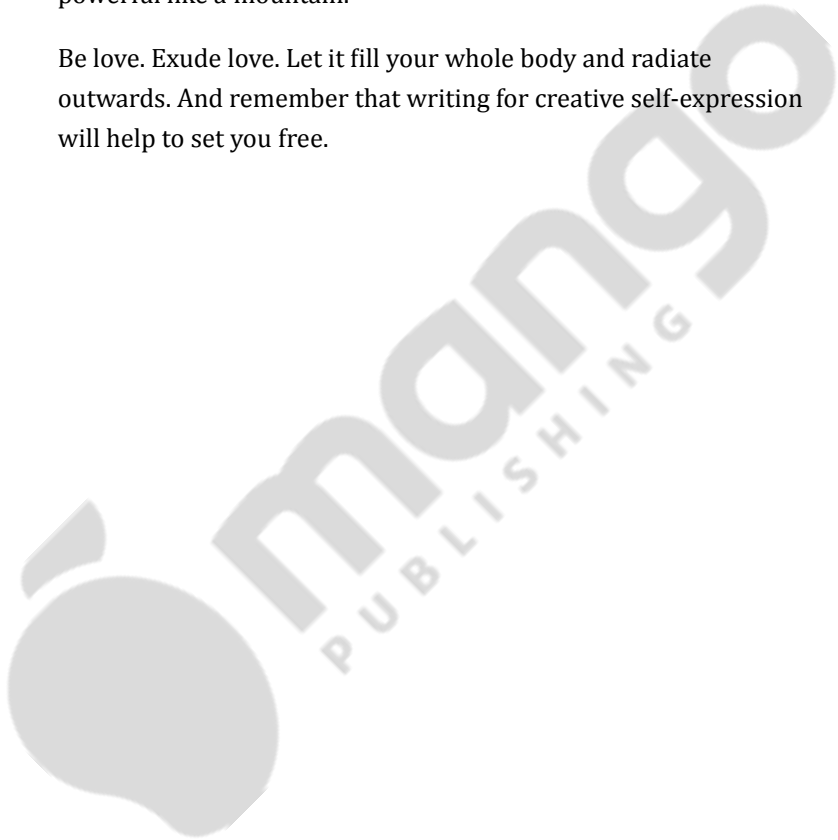
Most of all, I want you to know that what you hold in your hands now, or consume via your screen or audio device, is an invitation. It's an invitation to begin to live a fully expressed life.

## **A LOVE LESSON, AS TOLD TO ME BY YAIR SAGY**

Finally, I'd like to end this introduction with a short meditation. Put your hands on your heart and imagine the space within. Feel your heart and then see your inner child. Look in her eyes and give her a hug. Love her. Take care of her needs. Be kind to her. Protect her

from harm. Listen to her. Laugh with her. Give her treats. Take her for a day out. Be a parent to the little girl inside you, and remember this—when you love yourself, it’s easy to put up boundaries because you don’t fear rejection. You can easily say “no.” Repeat the affirmation: “I love myself.” Repeat it again. Then imagine the roar of a lion and its power and say, “I am creative, fertile, serene, and powerful like a mountain.”

Be love. Exude love. Let it fill your whole body and radiate outwards. And remember that writing for creative self-expression will help to set you free.

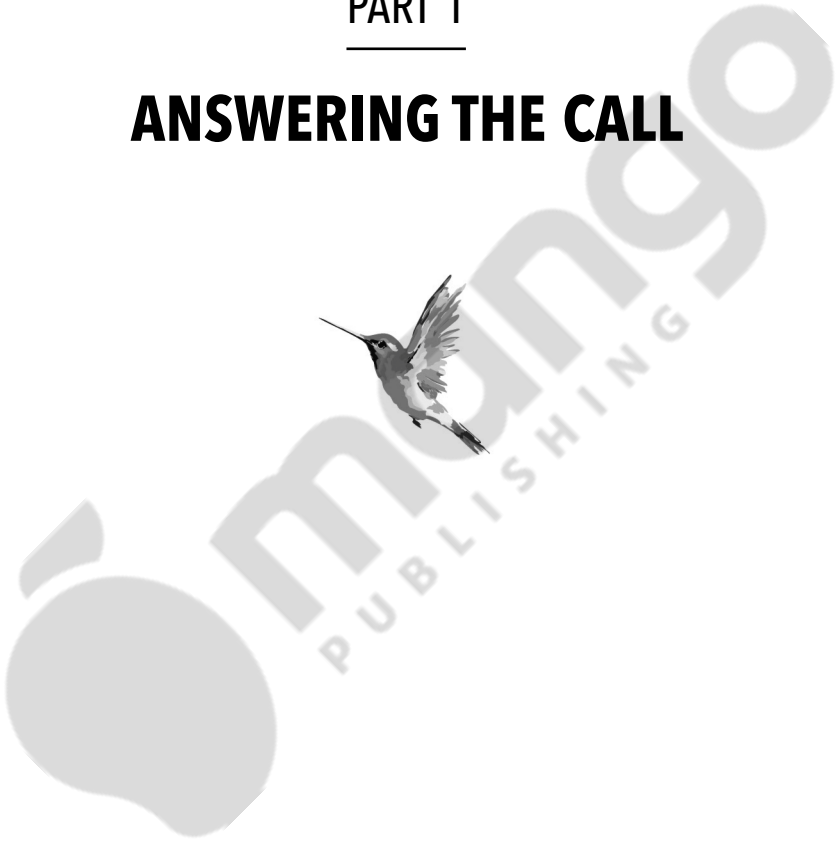




PART 1

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**ANSWERING THE CALL**



## CHAPTER 1

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# CLEARING THE BLOCKS TO SELF-EXPRESSION

When you write, do you feel truly able to express yourself? Are you able to *really* say what you need and want to say? I always ask these questions at the beginning of my workshops in writing for creative self-expression.

When writers are struggling with the world, they often put their angst into words. For instance, the 1950s beat poet Allen Ginsberg poured all his suffering into *Howl*—an epic poem about his dissatisfaction with life. His publisher was then put on trial for printing obscene language. Yet to Ginsberg, those words simply expressed what he thought and felt, nothing more; nothing less. His world contained gay sex, and he didn't hide that. He freely expressed himself.

You may be thinking, well, time has moved on—now anything goes. But we are all taught in our daily lives to censor ourselves, and we're socialized to do this from a very young age. This censorship not only extends to our social relationships, but even to our private thoughts, and, for some of us, into almost every waking moment of life. Rather than face a “trial,” we figure it's easier to just write (or say) something bland, something every palette can handle. But if you do this enough, it becomes a habit that's hard to break.





So when I ask that question, “Are you truly able to express yourself?” it’s no surprise that 90 percent of people say, “no.”

## **FOR MOST PEOPLE, WRITING COMES WITH A LOT OF BAGGAGE**

Writing is free. It costs just a pen, a piece of paper—and perhaps a coffee (maybe a bulletproof one for extra brain power). But for many of us, it’s a minefield. On the surface of it, the blank page is non-judgmental. All it asks is to be filled with marks. It’s completely impartial. It doesn’t mind whether the marks are scribbled or perfect looking, or if they’re grammatically correct. But when we bring ourselves to the page, we bring a lifetime of baggage—some of it accumulated from around the age of five, the first time we ever put pen to paper.

Now, of course, there are some people for whom writing freely is a weapon. I’m thinking of people who practice hate speech; the alt-right; the bitchy columnists who spread racist and sexist propaganda; and the internet trolls who delight in taking people down. However, I’m sure you’ll agree that these folks are not truly self-expressed. Their bullying behavior is a mask for something else, and though they may write freely, it’s not with joy and love. I hope those people find health and happiness. But they’re outside the scope of what this book is about. And I don’t want to waste another word on them. You who are reading this book—yes, *you!* You are the one I have written this for.

## HAVE YOU EVER BEEN GRAMMAR-SHAMED?

By this, I mean when you've written something heartfelt or creative, and the response you get back is all about your grammar or punctuation. This type of *mostly unhelpful* feedback is commonplace. People who don't know how to write or who are excellent technical writers with blocked self-expression can *only* focus on the mechanics of writing. They miss the nuances and ignore the feelings and the messages behind the writing. And, if you listen to them, you'll get on a fast track to being blocked yourself, like my client who can remember vividly the specific nun who shamed her as a child, whose voice she still hears when she's writing. Another client used to write professionally but then was deeply shamed by a senior editor who resented her naivete and enthusiasm. She remembers the specific occasion where she was lambasted in front of her work colleagues and how it shredded her self-confidence.

The solution is to practice the exercises in this book and just let them unfold a path for you. Clients have told me that my work has helped to take away the shame they felt from being dyslexic and that they used to be self-conscious about their writing, but, after practicing for a while, the self-consciousness just disappeared. Others have healed from the wounds left from parents or partners reading their innermost thoughts and picking them apart.

They were finally able to let the joy of creative self-expression take over. And that's the thing. We don't want to get too serious and bogged down, nor try to drown out the negative voices or hurl insults back. We want to listen. So ask yourself, "When, where, and why have people shamed you into thinking your creativity is bad?"



This is something that we explore deeply in my online program. We need to accept the answers and make a space in our hearts for joy to bubble up. Then we use that to express ourselves—our true selves.

## THE COMMUNICATION PYRAMID

The communication pyramid is a handy tool to help you to visualize the different layers of self-expression that you can access.

At the top, we have the mind—the place where most of us write from. I don't teach this at all, not even when teaching in the business and academic worlds. When you write from the mind, the writing is dull, formulaic, and rule-based. It cannot inspire or move anyone to do anything—least of all yourself.

Second down, we have the body. This layer is useful and is the zone of the practical writing techniques that you may have learned in a how-to course, or while reading a how-to article on the internet. I also teach these in many of my writing workshops and online programs. The heart and soul are, of course, the focus of this book. We'll do lots of work around these, and there'll be lots of stories and examples to keep you on track.

Finally, at the bottom, there is voice—the much-discussed holy grail for writers. Every writer wants to find their voice. But you can't really find it. As you go down the layers of the communication pyramid, you uncover it. It's the sum total of the mind, body, heart, and soul. Because although I said I don't teach the mind stuff, of course it comes into play. The mind figures out how to organize the dance of words, phrases, and sentences. My method is to ensure you get out of its way. Give it lots of time and space, and the heart and soul will speak to it for you.

# The communication pyramid

## Mind

Grammar, sentence structure, writing hacks, and rules and regulations.

## Body

Creative and practical tools, tips and techniques for clear, concise, compelling writing.

## Heart

The way you express yourself. Your choice of words, your point of view, and the stories you choose to tell.

## Soul

Your core beliefs, why you're writing what you're writing, what it means to you and your purpose.

## Voice

Your distinct personality and style – an authentic version of you. Everything should feel resolutely YOU.

## Grab a Notebook and Answer the Following Questions:

- \* Which place do you write from most?
- \* How can you access the deeper places? Brainstorm some solutions that you think might work for you.



Don't wait for the perfect time to write. If you have an idea, pull out your phone and jot it down. Put all those sentences together and you may have a full piece! Learn to love first drafts, and don't be shamed by spelling mistakes or grammar errors. When it comes to creative self-expression, they're simply not in the job description. Walk, run, shower, wash up, go for a drive. Do things that switch off your mind and see what bubbles up. Then write it down.

## FACING UP TO WHAT LIES BENEATH

Quieting your mind and getting honest with yourself is tough. In the early 2000s, I spent a few years exploring acting as a possible career and signed up for an acting course at Pineapple dance studios in London's Covent Garden. The first session was fun, until the teacher told us our homework. The task was to bring in a picture of yourself as a baby and talk about your childhood. I felt I couldn't do it—that it was too personal. And I walked around with a knot in my stomach all week, dreading having to reveal myself publicly.

But I did it, and it felt good to face my fear. And it wasn't even as though I shared anything earth-shattering, just some run-of-the-mill family stuff. After the second session, we were given another assignment. This time we had to choose a significant event in our lives. Then we would have to communicate it the following week to the others in the class, using only our eyes and faces. Now I was really scared. I had never done anything like that before. Where inside me could I find the means to express that? I told myself that it wasn't really acting and that it didn't make any sense. What about the words? Why couldn't we just *say* how we felt? The following week, I found a reason not to make it to class. And the following, and the following...until the ten-week course was over, and I'd

spent a couple of hundred pounds (that I couldn't afford) on only two group acting classes!

When I *did* enroll in full-time drama school the following year, my voice teacher cautioned me, "You have to find your own voice. Everything you do is about championing the voices of others." And it was true. I was, and at heart am, a journalist. I love doing interviews and telling people's stories. I love packaging advice in fun, fresh ways. I love digesting information and retelling it. But at that time, I was simply unable to go deeper in my communication. In any case, after a couple of years, I realized acting wasn't for me and continued on my path as a writer.

If *you're* having trouble accessing the lower layers of the communication pyramid, the collection of beliefs and behaviors that make up your writing personality are probably getting in the way.

We all have a writing personality that protects us from going too deep, that prevents us from accessing that place inside and drawing it out. It's self-protection. But it'll get in the way unless you bring it to light. Figuring out your writing personality and how to navigate it can allow you to reap dividends. In doing so, you shine a light on your behavior when you have a pen and paper in your hand or you're at the keyboard.

## WRITING PERSONALITY TYPES

**Note:** these descriptions relate to the public writing you do, which is probably at work. But we take these public personas home with us too, and our writing personality seeps through every time we write.



## **Perfectionist Petra**

Your attitude is that your writing is either perfect or worthless. You spend ages on one piece and feel that nothing you do is ever quite good enough. Ironically, your work has plenty of errors because you always want your writing to be exact and precise. You're highly conscientious and a hard worker.

## **Fretful Fiona**

You hate seeing your boss's, editor's, or colleague's red marks on your work. So you play it safe and don't take many writing risks. This means you tend to follow set patterns in your work and don't like to try out new techniques or ideas.

## **Could Do Better Betty**

You simply never put 100 percent into anything. You know that you have huge potential but instead prefer to do just enough to get by. Occasionally you pull out all the stops and write something magnificent. But then you go back to your "easy" life—which of course doesn't feel easy on the inside.

## **Fun-Seeking Femi**

You prefer not to think too much and would much rather be active and outdoors than cooped up with a notepad and pen or hunched over a computer. Having fun is the most important thing, and writing just doesn't compete with other activities. But secretly you yearn to write.

## **Slapdash Susannah**

You whittle work off at an amazing speed, but your writing is littered with silly errors that would have been spotted with a little more care and attention. You also leap in and start writing without formulating any kind of plan.

## **Last-minute Lorraine**

If you have a deadline, you often miss it, or make it just in the nick of time. This is simply because you don't give yourself enough time to write. With every piece of writing you do, it's as though you're competing in a hundred-meter race because you avoid it until the last minute.

## **One-trick Olivia**

You quite like writing certain things: your blog or Instagram posts, for instance. But when it comes to something you find challenging, you freeze up. Sometimes, you can get going but find it hard to finish. You wonder if you really have the skills to write properly.

## **Grab Your Notebook and Answer the Following Questions:**

- \* What's your writing personality (in your own words)?
- \* Which of the writing personality types did you identify with?
- \* How do they sabotage your writing?
- \* What strategies could you put in place to stop them taking over?





### Now consider this:

- \* How can you get your writing personality to work for you, not against you?

FEAR—that’s the word to remember. All these writing personality types are governed by fear. Shaking things up helps you to bypass this fear. Quite simply, you forget you’re scared, you lose the coping behaviors, and writing just happens. So don’t be afraid to shake things up. In fact, page by page, that is what I will urge you to do in this book. The following quote by the philosopher Nietzsche has become my mantra over the years: “One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star.” We just need to remember that there is safety in the storm. When you ride the wave, the raging tide cannot harm you. When you yield to its force, you are strong. It’s only when you try to resist it that the chaos can turn into destruction.

A great way to get past the fear is to move. So, the final exercise in this chapter is a moving one. Your challenge is to pull on a pair of comfy shoes, go for a solo walk, and shake off the fears.

## THE MAGIC OF MOVEMENT (AKA WHY YOU NEED TO WRITE ON THE GO)

Walking and thinking and writing go hand in hand. Getting into your stride and mapping out where you want to go on the street allows your mind to do the same with your thoughts and ideas.

Ferris Jahr explained this perfectly in an article called “Why Walking Helps Us Think” (published in *The New Yorker*). He wrote, “Since the time of the peripatetic Greek philosophers, writers have discovered a deep, intuitive connection between walking, thinking,

and writing. ‘How vain it is to sit down to write when you have not stood up to live!’ Henry David Thoreau penned in his journal. ‘Methinks that the moment my legs begin to move, my thoughts begin to flow.’ ” I couldn’t agree more. And no, I didn’t just include that quote for the snigger factor of the word “methinks.” Although I dare you to go around using that for a day, just for fun!

But I guess that’s the point. Movement is fun, and walking shakes things up, helping to clear the cobwebs to creativity. It pumps blood and oxygen to all the muscles in your body.

In fact, for the past few years, I’ve been blogging on the go, pounding the pavements, and typing my posts into my phone. It struck me that when I get out into the world, armed with a little inspiration, the ideas (and my writing) just flow. I realized that if I consciously sit down and think about what I want to write, the writing often comes from my head, and not from my heart. In contrast, my writing is far more heart-centered when I put myself into an alpha state, where my subconscious can flow.

In my first book *Just Write It!* I wrote a little about this alpha state:

*Ideas are like radio waves that float all around us waiting for us to tune into them. And when you alternate intense thinking with periods of rest, you often find that you open your antennae for flashes of inspiration. This usually happens when you’re doing routine activities such as walking, running, washing up, or taking a shower. These types of activities increase alpha brainwaves. These put you in a relaxed enough state for your intuition to kick in, or for you to have an “aha” moment.*

The trouble is that in our society, we do too much pushing and not enough allowing. Many of us take quotes such as Thomas Edison’s “Success is 99 percent perspiration and 1 percent inspiration” to



heart. And that can mean that we end up chaining ourselves to our desks.

The following exercise is about giving yourself permission to move, to roam, and to explore—to shake out of your skin and move into the magic of your imagination.

## Writing on the Go: The Instructions

Walk for thirty minutes while thinking, daydreaming, looking, and seeing. Make sure you have a notebook and pen with you, or a smartphone where you can write down whatever comes into your head.

**Before:** Set an intention for what you want to write, or think about an issue or topic that you'd like to ruminate on. Alternatively, you can think about what's bothering you today—those (good or bad) thoughts you just can't shake.

**During:** Well, there are no real rules. Just do anything that gets you walking and into a good rhythm. You could go to the park, or go window shopping, or explore a part of town you've never been to before. Once ideas pop into your head, stop and write them down as fast as you can, and then continue walking.

**After:** Once you're back from your walk, reread what you've written, and, if you feel inspired, use your favorite bits in a finished piece of "work." By work, I mean a Facebook or Instagram post, a little note that you put on your fridge door, or a verse you decide to save on your phone. If you like what you have written, honor it by saving it somewhere special.

I love this exercise, because it allows creativity to percolate and brew. When I run retreats, we do this together. We begin in a pack—talking and laughing—before wandering off our separate

ways to walk our way to writing. I recommend doing this walking and writing exercise regularly (as often as you can). If nothing happens the first time, try again. Wait patiently for creativity to happen, and trust that it will. If nothing more, you'll have gone for a head-clearing walk.

## **YOURS TOO, CAN BE THE TRUEST VOICE**

If your energy is flagging, I hope this story will perk you up. You may have heard it before—it's the story of Florence Foster Jenkins, which was made into a film of the same name in 2016. If you haven't seen it, I recommend that you get yourself to a movie download site, pronto! The film is a heartwarming display of passion. Florence is a woman who has had syphilis for fifty years. She's always known she could die at any moment, so she always felt she had nothing to lose by following her passions. She had wanted to be a concert pianist but couldn't due to problems with her hands. So, she ran a successful music club with her boyfriend for more than two decades.

Then, in her twilight years, she decided that she wanted to sing. The trouble was she didn't have a "good" voice. It was either flat or completely out of tune. Plus, she had poor phrasing and terrible breathing. But she sang with such gusto and passion, and with so much of her heart and soul, that despite her concert audiences laughing at her, they also fell in love with her.

Toward the end of the film, she reads a terrible review of her performance in *The New York Times*. She looks to her boyfriend for reassurance: "I was never laughing at you. Yours is the truest voice I have ever heard," he says. But the shock of the review sends her health into a downward spiral. And finally, on her deathbed,



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Greta Solomon is a British journalist turned writing coach and author. In 2006, she discovered a talent for helping people overcome the blocks, fears, and shame that stop them from fully expressing themselves. Through talks, workshops, and online programs, Greta teaches real-world writing techniques and inspires others to live rich, creative lives. She lives in London.