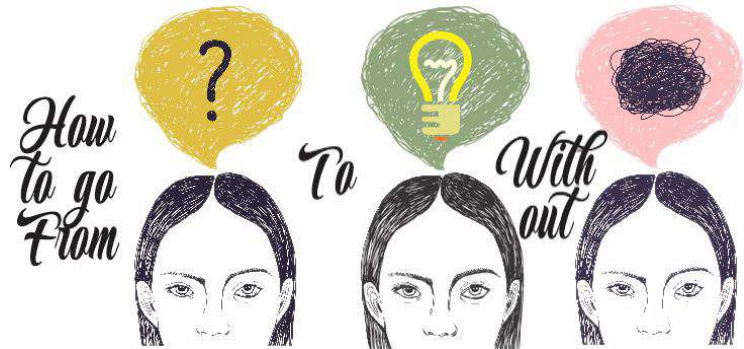


Claire Kennedy

FROM THE SEWING ARTISTRY
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WHERE'S MY INSPIRATION or HOW TO GET YOUR MOJO BACK?



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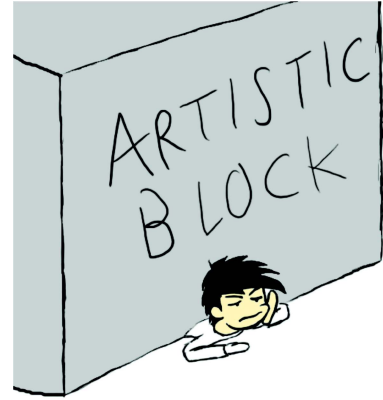
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I run into so many of my students who fall into two categories. One is that they are almost paralyzed to start a project. The other is that they start, but somehow get stuck. Both of these really have the same source and with some serious look at what's really happening and some guidelines, you can get past these a lot easier than you think.



Why is it when we sit down to create a project, that suddenly our mind goes blank? But just two weeks ago, when you were swamped with another project, you had tons of ideas. Or you finally have some time and your studio is all set to go and you can't come up with one project for all the others that are screaming at you. What's going on here? How can you get started? Where's your mojo?!!

Believe it or not, even professionals have this and must learn to work through them and how to deal with them. There are a myriad of reasons for them, and I wanted to discuss those with you. As well there are methods used by these professionals to pull them out of the doldrums or during blank periods. After all this is their livelihood and there is a lot we can learn from them on how they deal with these blank periods.

Part of my job as an instructor, is to enlighten, empower with knowledge, but most of all to inspire you about sewing. Sewing is a creative means toward expressing your own style but also turning your dreams into realizations. That is the creative process, and that process is very delicate. Think of it as a very fine thread on a very delicate fabric, and with just the slightest pull or tug, can completely unravel. You want to take care of it, nurture it and make sure that you have your creativity in a place where it feels safe and protected so that it can flourish and grow.

Note: There are several quotes throughout this resource and they are linked to the graphics of the quote that you can place on your desktop, screen saver or smartphone wallpaper. You can download them and use them as helpful reminders.

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

There are a number of different reasons we stall and it's important to realize what's going on,

and why. This isn't tricky or difficult to understand. This is more about knowing what's there and that it *is* there. It's hard to solve a problem when you're not even sure 1.) There is a problem or 2.) What the problem is. And I'm not trying to grow weeds here so I can pick them that when the "weed police" come by I can show I'm doing something. I'm not inventing a problem so you I can say I solved it.

This is more about naming the problem, defining it and then offering guidelines for working through solutions that will work for you.

What is a Block and What Isn't

The creative process is something you really can't put your finger on. Here's a good quote from one of my favorite books, [Making Art a Practice](#) by Cat Bennett:

Creativity is a process. Everyone's creative process is unique but shares common roots in sensing and ideas, or intuition. The sensing domain comprises sight, sound, color, form, and materials [and in some cases need - new coat, new pants, etc.]. Of course, we make art with both, but it appears some of us rely more heavily on one aspect or the other. Our creative process depends on the way we approach things.

Inspiration, as noted, will come in the doing, so none of us should attach too much to fixed ways of proceeding. Staying open and flexible helps.

REFLECTION: What is the idea or core conviction behind your work? Perhaps you want to share your love of beauty in nature or explore the mystery of death. Maybe you want to share your love for our human experience. There are few primal things that most of us are exploring in our art. Write about yours in your art journal.

Now I know a lot of this sounds pretty woo-woo for we dressmakers and designers, but don't kid yourself for an instant. Our process tracks precisely on the same path as a visual artist, an actor, or a musician. And because of this, we can learn a lot about creating works and how to control the flow of creativity. Believe me, being overloaded with ideas is just as bad as not having any. It's the median that's different, and that's all.

FIRST

Designing and dressmaking are art forms. Designing and dressmaking are creative processes, and they respond, act, and quack like art forms. And it's no different from the disciplines or skills that one must learn to practice our art form. Like an artist has to know how to mix colors to get the right shade, a dressmaker/designer has to understand how to mix fabrics to get the right look.

SECOND

In all art forms, there is a skill or technique, or discipline that must be learned, practiced, and honed to use these skills to express his/her creativity. At the same time, no artist would confuse

the perfecting of those skills with being creative. That's why a dressmaker knows the techniques, how to apply them, but also how to use them to create her own style, and fashion. A seamstress knows how to operate a sewing machine and put pieces together, and that's the extent of her knowledge.

One other note here. **There are *so few of us sewists around*** that almost every one of us is creative and has this creative tendency. Face it, it would be faster, albeit more expensive in the long run, to go out and purchase our own clothing. But sewists seem to have this quirk to express ourselves in a way that is different but not odd. We want to be unique in a very subtle and almost invisible way. Matching plaids, matching print patterns, searching for that perfect button, and mastering the hang and drape of our garment are tell-tale signs of our creativity and or our talent. But most people wouldn't see it or realize it unless they were highly educated about clothing design and production.

Two different parts to sewing.

THE CREATIVE PART

This is applying those skills and techniques in creative ways and most often in ways never seen before. Using the skills you have learned, and practiced, you style and fashion your garment in artistic and creative ways.

THE FITTING PART

Fitting is the tangible part of sewing. Because you haven't learned all there is to fit doesn't mean you aren't creative. Here's a perfect example - have you ever heard the song Crazy by Patsy Cline - it's sublime. Have you ever listened to the composer sing it - it's a far stretch from the magnificence of the Cline version. Patsy Cline was a masterful song stylist. Willie Nelson is a masterful songwriter. They were both creative, but Patsy could sing while Willie can write. We would never think Willie isn't creative cause he can't sing (worth a damn), nor Patsy isn't creative cause she can't write a song. Creativity lies in many different areas, and because you can't fit (a technical skill) doesn't mean you aren't creative, and it especially doesn't mean you can't *learn* to fit.

This fitting part can be such an obstacle for a lot of sewists. There are several specific tools I teach for this specific technical part of sewing. This is a little bit of a tangent, but it needs to be included here, so I'm doing this in a [different document](#) that you can download here.

Things to rule out:

1. Your equipment first.
 - a. Check out your machine. Always do this, and don't fail to put it on your list.

Sometimes just a simple re-thread of a machine will start it back up again. And then sometimes it's more than that.

- b. As far as a new machine, buy your dealer. That means, buy your machine where you can get service
 - i. (how many techs do they have in the shop),
 - ii. knowledgeable staff (take in some samples to sew on and ask what machine is best for your needs...quilting?...dressmaking?...crafting?)
 - iii. will they let you sew on your samples in the store? If they won't I'd be suspicious about their machine quality.
 - iv. how many classes do they have?...how well do they know their own equipment? Walking into a shop where classes are being held, people are working on projects and there's a lot of activity tells you it's a thriving sewing community connected with the shop.
 - v. Consider a used model - do they have used models?...what is their guarantee on their used models? If you don't like it, you can always sell it with a much better return than on a new one, and if you want more, go back to the shop and trade up and they will most likely give you a very favorable trade in for the used one.
2. Fitting is not a creative block. Because you haven't been able to fit yourself (note I did not say you can't fit yourself, cause everyone can be fitted), it doesn't mean you have a creative block. It can lead to a block on down the road if not dealt with, but fitting is a mechanical problem not a creative one!
3. Laziness is not a creative block - it's laziness. Laziness is an aversion or objection to productivity. Have a Plan - sounds like a duh! moment doesn't it, but simple isn't always easy!

NOTE: There is an excellent book out on artistic blocks and laziness. The [War of Art](#) by Steven Pressfield is available in Kindle, Google Books, and paperback. It is a short, concise and very useful book in helpful with identifying and dealing with artistic blocks. I highly recommend it.

Here are some typical things that can block you:

1. A dramatic change in your life - death, divorce, health, financial, family, friends, winning the lottery (don't kid yourself, that last one is a major change and sometimes not all for the better) - all of these count.
2. Either a series of mistakes or a major wadder - which is blog-speak for a huge mistake.
3. Lack of organization and that means space as well as time.
4. Have a Plan - sounds like a duh! moment doesn't it - I'll explain.

Those may not sound like something that would stop you in your track, but they can be major, particularly if you are blind-sided, which is usually how this happens. So before any depression or guilt-trip starts, it's good to look at what's going on with these and to understand what's normal and what's not.

TYPICAL BLOCKS

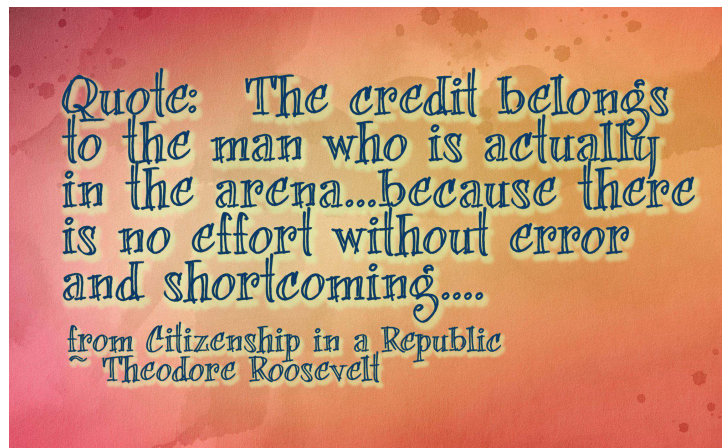
Dramatic Change in Life

Stuff happens in life, no matter how much we prepare or plan. As the adage goes: shit happens! The last thing you want to do is put a guilt trip on yourself that you aren't outputting enough from the sewing department of your life after a traumatic loss or event in your life.

First, it's normal to feel sorry, fright and depression during these times. If you didn't feel that way then something is really wrong with you. It's when they hang on for years and years, that you will need help, but it's nice to know that it's normal *not* to feel normal when you get hit with a trauma or catastrophe.

Sometimes, you will need to come back to sewing at another time. And you will know when it's right, but in the meantime, whatever event is taking place in your life, let it work its way through your life. It's normal to feel a loss or frightened, or otherwise debilitated when you get hit with a trauma.

At the same time, sewing can be the place where you can escape, albeit for a short time, when times aren't normal. I can't tell you how often in traumatic times in my life, that I have turned to sewing and experienced solace, peace, and even self-worth. The simple task of assembling a garment and then looking at it and enjoying the joy and satisfaction of accomplishment are enough to take me away from the troubles and give your brain a respite from the constant worry. This can often be enough space to actually think about solutions and possible alternative plans to deal with the traumas or catastrophes.



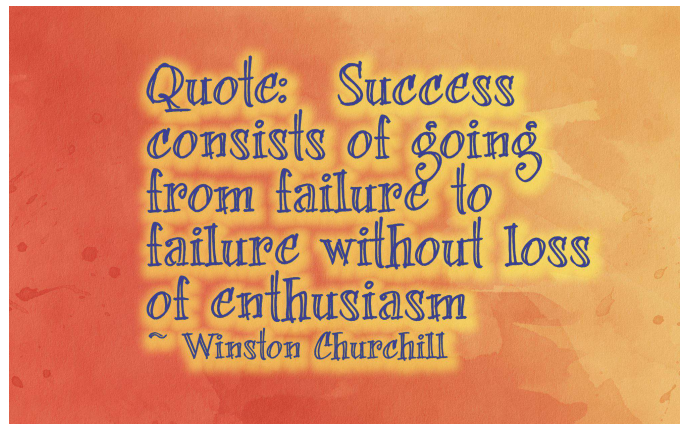
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How to tell the difference? One sure way is that if sewing is a forced activity, either to sew or not to sew, then listen to your heart. If the thought of working at assembling a garment is something that feels like work or duty, then your heart is telling you to walk away. On the other hand, if you radiate to your sewing space's creative activity, and it provides peace and a place away from your troubles, your heart is telling you that this is something you need. And it doesn't have to be something monumental. Even the simplest of tasks, making a tee-shirt or sewing a basic top, are enough to take your worrying mind away from the troubles.

A Major Mishap or Series of Mistakes

Nothing, and I mean nothing, can zap your creativity faster and more than making a series of mistakes or a huge big one! Creative folks make many mistakes and are always dealing with mistakes and wrong choices. Part of the artistic process is the act of creating something that hasn't been done before. Figuring out how to accomplish a task in a new way is fraught with opportunities for mistakes. If you think you aren't going to make mistakes doing that, then let me dissuade you from that false belief! And if you believe that buying a pattern and fabric isn't creative, let's stop that thinking right now, too. Who picked out the fabric?...who picked out the pattern?...who picked the two to go together? - You. That's creativity.

Mistakes are the artist's way of knowing that the process is working and progressing toward completion. Don't think that because you have made a mistake, no matter if they come in a series or a big one, that you are a failure. Don't let mistakes or failure define you as an artist. Even if you have one success after a series of failures - it's the success you found. And that one success does make up for the many failures to get there.



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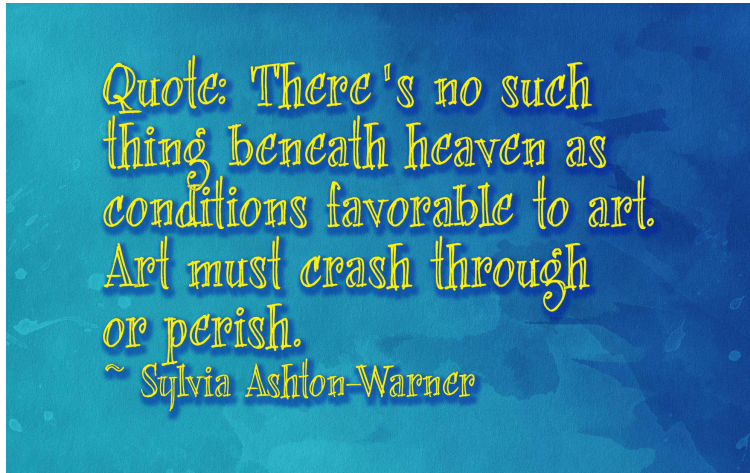
How many times did mold have to grow on the orange before penicillin was discovered? How many jackets did Chanel have to make to come up with the quilting process and for it to achieve the look and feel she wanted?

If you feel you are working in the dark on a technique or method, you can ask me. I love getting your questions and hearing about your problems. I know that sounds kinky and canned, but I do love it.

Here's why. I've had those problems. I've seen those mistakes before. I've even made those mistakes, and probably more than once! I've been where you are. There were an awful lot of frogs I had to go through a lot before I found my princess of an instructor, teacher, and mentor. There is a solution to every dilemma. It's a matter of working through some steps to get to the solution. Whether that's fitting or construction - there are always solutions - believe me, I've seen most of them and have worked through almost all those puzzles.

There's something here, though, that bears repeating. And this is from my personal experience.

I have worked through almost all puzzles when it comes to fitting and construction. That's how I know there is a solution to your fitting or construction puzzle or problem(s). So from here on out, let's call it a puzzle because some problems don't have a solution. I think of these sewing puzzles like mathematical puzzles or problems. A simple puzzle would be what the answer to $4 + 4$ is? That's a simple one, a more complicated one would be what is the solution to $1,804,200$ times $42,381$ minus $180,000$ square rooted by 14 . Or an even more advanced puzzle would be to plot on a graph $(a-b)42/y$. The point is that all of these puzzles have solutions, as do all your sewing and fitting puzzles.



Dang, if anything sounded like a recipe for disaster and failure, "this crashing art" sounds like it, and yet it's so true. So what's an artist to do? Remember that you're 1.) crashing through and that's normal, 2.) it's fraught with opportunities for errors and miscues, and 3.) When you've finished, you will have the joy of accomplishment and satisfaction of creation that makes for a very addictive high!

[Landscape](#) or [Portrait](#)

Lack of Organization in Time and Space

I like a lot of the tenets of [Feng Shui](#) (pronounced fung shway), the ancient Chinese art of placement. It is a way to place objects and pathways in your work or living area to facilitate the best life can give you. It also acts to hinder the worst life can throw at you. Many people think this is a bunch of malarkey, but one of Feng Shui's rules is always to keep your water closet seat down when flushing. When you think about it, this prevents the full bowl's content from splashing and misting throughout the bathroom with toothbrushes, combs, and other grooming and health articles lying around. That sounds pretty savvy to me.



[Landscape](#) or [Portrait](#)

But there's another part of Feng Shui. The other part is how you leave your studio at the end of your work period. What I've learned to do is neaten up a bit. Now, this doesn't mean I put everything away and have it spic and span ready for a drill sergeant's inspection. It means I place everything in stacks of projects. This means that when I enter my studio again to work, projects are stacked in order, and I literally can follow exactly where my brain was when I last was in my studio

Organizing your time by setting priorities and one of those priorities is "your time." You do this regularly during the day and may not realize it. When you get ready to fix dinner, you don't start the laundry or get the vacuum cleaner out to clean the living room. You go to the fridge and pick out what you're going to fix and prepare it. But what happens when you set out to work on your sewing? Do you pass the bedroom and think, "Gee, I need to do the laundry first," or "Dang, I meant to clean up the bedroom." Or do you pass the kitchen and think, "I need to go to the store and get some groceries." The truth is that we all have about 5 or 6 tasks working in our heads at the same time. It's easy to get side-tracked, but you have experience at not getting side-tracked on specific tasks; fixing dinner is one of them. Using the same logic and reasoning about keeping your mind on your goal when you're fixing dinner, the same as when you are working in your studio or cleaning the house, makes total sense!

Have a plan

What I mean is sit down and order out what you need to do when working on a sewing project. Order your chores, your must do's, your hafta's, and then your wanna's and sewing most likely will be in that later part. Once you order everything, you will find out that putting #1 where it belongs, and #2 and then #3, it's easier to order your sewing time and space.

And have a plan for your sewing projects too. This is where you can have fun. Order things so that you have fun with them. If you're doing some funky trim or fun buttonholes, put those in the order of construction in between something boring.

But when I say have a plan, I mean two things - have a plan of your regular life, and then have a plan of your sewing project. Sewing shouldn't replace sleeping or running carpool - you have to do those. However, carpool and sleeping shouldn't replace sewing, and having a little time so you can go be creative means that you stay healthy. Putting your chores in the proper place and your sewing keeps you balanced and healthy and, yes, happy!

Here's what I mean about prioritizing sewing projects and planning them out. Pick out the pieces you love the most and scatter them throughout your project. For me that's doing front placket first, boring side seams and shoulder seams, then exciting collar, boring sleeves, then cuffs. It's really the finishing parts I love so much. Here's what happens though when you have the projects taking less time (core patterns and easy patterns) is that you will whip right through them not really having an energy-sustaining problem.

Do this for yourself. Keep the project interesting for you, and if at any time you get bored, do something a little different or out of order just a little to keep your interest.

Maintaining Energy Through A Project

THINKING ABOUT THE FINISHED PROJECT

I keep the vision of the finished garment as it's coming to life (cause that's the biggest charge I get).

BALANCE BETWEEN CHORES AND SEWING

And the second is that I keep on a healthy schedule with chores and my sewing. Neither one is used as an escape (well, sometimes I use sewing as an escape during tough times), and neither one governs over the other. I don't prioritize my sewing as last on the list of things to do if I have everything else done. That's unrealistic and you'll never or at least rarely get to sewing that way. Schedule in sewing the same way you would schedule housekeeping, running errands, fixing dinner or any other task around your home.

At the same time, I've done all my chores and work, and maybe it's not all done, but enough done so that I can have some time to myself - then that's when I sew.

Back to our original question, what is a Block and what isn't? The answer is that fitting is not a block; it's merely a lack of knowledge. Styling and fashioning a garment is a block. Why is this important? Because trying to use creative unblocking knowledge to understand mechanical skills isn't going to work. Many people seriously think that if they were more creative, they could fit better. Getting the two confused is like trying to learn how to peel an orange while using an apple as a stand-in for the orange! Don't go there. It's an instant recipe for failure!

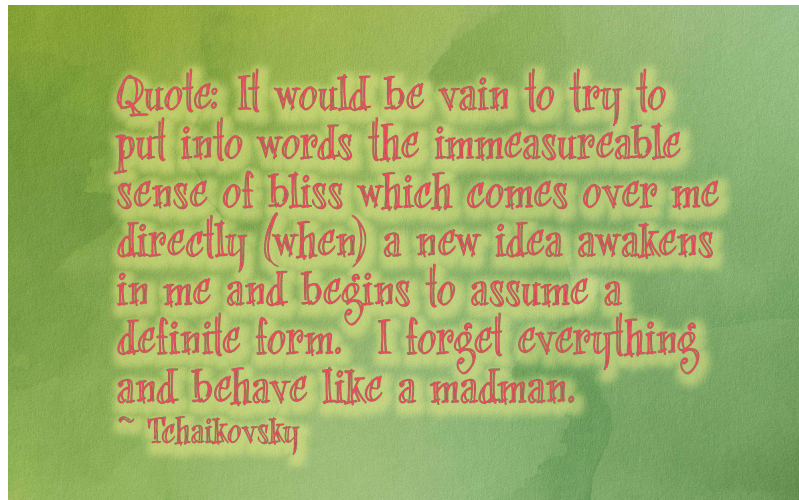
A block is a lack of ideas. A block is looking at a piece of fabric and not having the faintest idea of what to do with it. A block is having a period of time available to you and all set to sew and not remembering or inspired to do anything cause you can't make up your mind. A block is just as much an overload of being bombarded by many projects and not starting one - an overabundance of creativity.

The creative flow needs to be nurtured and treated with kid gloves. And some guidelines can help you with all the blocking problems. Here are some of my best guidelines.

1. **Keep a notebook with you.** I keep one by my sewing machine, by my computer, by my night table, and one in the car. You can use a notebook ([these](#) are my favorites) or your smartphone (I personally like Evernote and Pinterest for noting important creative ideas). I won't go on and on about this technique, but this is probably my go-to technique for keeping the muse at *my* beck and call not hers!
2. **If you don't have any record of any ideas, start a project.** Do something simple like a classic white tee. There's nothing like starting a project and sewing to get the muses all limbered up to come visit. I like to start something like that, and in the middle of the project, when I'm getting some creative ideas, I write them down to work on them when I'm finished.
3. **Snoop shop.** This is great for when you're visiting a major metropolitan area. There are expensive boutiques with lots of creative things in them. You may like one part from one garment and another part from another designer. This is the sheer joy of being creative and picking out an idea here and there and putting it into your own garment just where you want it.

As well, you can be perusing through the internet in one of those time black-hole moments where you are trekking from one place to another, not really sure where you've come from or where you're going, but it's still fun nonetheless! While trekking around, you can collect ideas but don't have time to act on them now - put in a Pinterest board and they are there for later. However, I do have a [sketchbook](#) that I love using when I'm visiting places with shops I need to record ideas. I keep the sketch simple and to the point - sometimes it's just a line, and that's all I need. This sketchbook is really handy because each page has a croquis or a model that you can sketch on so that you don't have to know how to draw.

4. **Routine.** Often it's establishing a simple routine. That routine may be as basic as keeping your sewing space neat and organized so that you can tell where you left off when you were last in your space. I don't do this as often as I should. When I do, it's remarkable at how immediately I can remember my train of thought, and I'm off and working as if I had taken a five-minute break. Part of your routine could be as basic as getting a mug of tea, getting everything all set, entering your sewing space. Then looking at what is on your schedule for the day. Before I leave my space at night, I like to make a short list of things that I'd like to tackle for the next day.



[Landscape](#) or [Portrait](#)

Now then - it's time for me to come clean with you. I suspect many of you think I popped out of my mother's womb with a sewing machine and immediately had the rubber baby buggy bumpers for my own crib, already sewn in coordinating fabric before getting home from the hospital.

Not quite.

My path to sewing nirvana was very tortured.

I want to relate some of this to you, not because I want you to feel sorry for me, but because I don't want you to think I'm some prima donna here that never had to struggle. And I still struggle today, it's just that I consider this a part of the *normal* creative process and don't get all upset or even discouraged by it.

I had to struggle a lot. I can remember many times being tempted by some gorgeous piece of fabric, thinking "Wow, it can't be that hard to put a dress together - they're all over the stores!" Then purchasing it, only to get to the finishing part of the garment, and it didn't quite look right - OK, it looked wrong - really wrong! This was exacerbated by the constant search for teachers and they were mostly pathetic or non-existent, as well as who to ask or where to go to find good ones. So don't think you're alone with those feelings. Every good designer and dressmaker has been there. And more importantly, I've felt those feelings of frustration and confusion so I do know where you are coming from and more importantly how to get out of these technical problems.

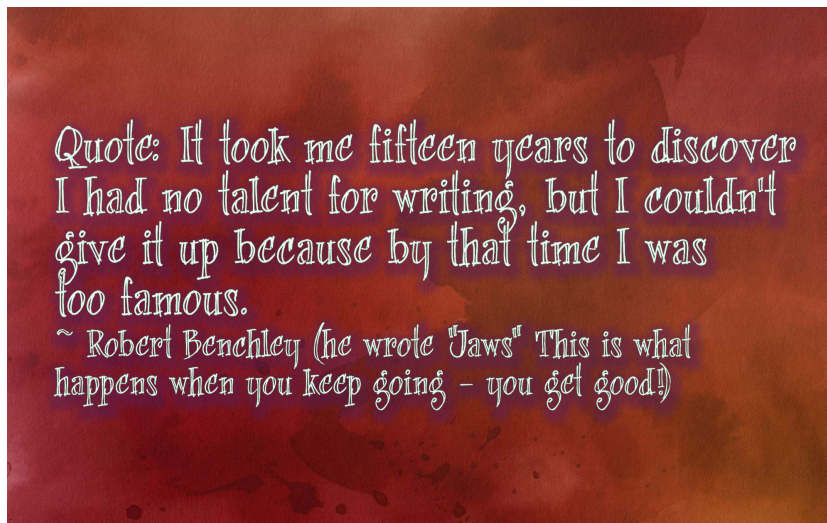
If you are coming back to sewing after being away from it for a while, then realize that it will take time and practice to hone your skill, and having more mistakes in the beginning is hard, but it's typical. Don't call an end to your return to sewing because getting past these problems is the same as a runner getting past the hurdles that he hasn't seen or run in a while. And certainly don't give up especially on the fitting part as this will most likely be all new to you. Just know that this is mechanical and it can be learned.

The most important advice I can give you is keep trying.



[Landscape](#) or [Portrait](#)

The other most crucial piece of encouragement I can give you is that you will get better. Why? Because after doing a project once, twice, and again, you learn how to do it better, and your technique gets better and better. That is a law, and I promise you do get better. This is something to which you can look forward.



[Landscape](#) or [Portrait](#)

THE ARTISTIC PROCESS IN THE REAL WORLD

Let's get into some more practical problems and some immediately helpful tactics to work on these problems:

Fear of cutting into a special fabric

Here's the truth on this...there's not a sewist out there who doesn't have problems with this phase, so realize that it's there. This gets into a little bit of the "blank canvas" syndrome, and the best way to work through this is good planning. Even I have problems with this as much as I cut out. I love doing the drafting, but it's the cutting - maybe cause it's the point of no return. But my advice on handling this fear - get over it, screw up your guts and cut it out. That said, we measure twice, cutting once!

About Time

Time - let's talk about time. It's about management. We are always envisioning project after project after project. This can get really out of control if I don't do some management of the creative process.

- to do it right takes time
- time to mark it right
- time to cut it right
- time to sew it right
- time to unsew it right
- time to fit it right
- time to finish it right

I've written a complete resource on Time Management a.k.a. Commando Sewing. This is key to so much of our sewing as a lot of times we're on a deadline. That deadline can be something as basic and simple as a season - sewing a certain look or outfit for summer or winter or for a certain climate, as well as for an important event on a certain date. Here's a link to the [Time Management a.k.a. Commando Sewing Resource](#).

From my library, [here is a list](#), with links to the sources of the books, of some of my favorite inspirational books. Some of these are about artists' inspiration, but it works for us too, and there are wonderful workbooks and concepts that have been great inspiration to me. Additionally are some hands-on inspirational books filled with ideas to make you think and to kick your creative juices into high gear.

Many of us have calamities that happen to us in life and are perfectly OK with it. If we're in the kitchen, it might be a failed meal, burnt Thanksgiving turkey. And many of us have casualties around the house, leaking water heater, busted pipe. So why are challenges in our sewing so monumental? Because we haven't learned that 1.) they are normal, 2.) there are cures, and most of all, 3.) it happens to pros all the time. Challenges in sewing are often a means of showing you the way through to the solution. Yeah, I know that sounds kind of reverse thinking, below is some interesting notions on failure.

This whole Resource is about inspiration.

That means positively injecting you with ideas and excitement about current and future projects. It also means presenting a different way of thinking of things, particularly sewing challenges that seem otherwise monumental.

Think of most of the challenging fitting or other technical problems as methods by which you can learn to overcome and think differently about how to solve future challenges. Sometimes these blocks can offer excuses like we're not shaped right, it's taking too much time, I don't have enough support, not enough years left. We can become experts at listing the things that keep us from moving forward. A quote from Ryan Holiday's, "[The Obstacle Is The Way](#)." BTW, this book is on thinkr.org, which is a marvelous resource for reading or listening to major works only condensed, cause who has the time?!

“Perception 1: Most people crumble in the face of adversity because they've never been given a blueprint for overcoming adversity.

“Somewhere within ourselves we know this is true, and that there is a part of us that feels much more comfortable with those excuses keeping us where we are. But then there's another part of us that is tired of feelings of depression, anger, fear, and frustration that arise whenever we capitulate to our obstacles at the office, at school, and at home.

“At the same time, we see people who not only approach obstacles with confident, deliberate strides but seem to gain from each challenge. The very things that have us mired in life's marshes seem to launch them to the moon. Moreover, earlier generations faced and overcame far more formidable obstacles -- which is part of the reason why posterity has fewer obstacles -- but somehow we still feel pushed back into a corner.

“We need a concrete strategy and field-tested worldview to help us get where we would like to go by transforming setbacks into setups for success. Maybe no one has ever taught you this, but it is never too late to begin learning.”

Now I know that can sound like a bunch of hooey-foeey, but the truth is that if we are honest with ourselves, there are obstacles that hold us back. If we haven't been taught how to overcome

those obstacles, how will we know we can? With an outlook like this, nothing can prevent us from learning, asking, and searching for what works for us.

Perception 2: No one can ever take away your power to reframe a situation, however you can give it away.

Hitting a brick wall and facing it begins with perception. You can make this out to be the most monumental sewing or fitting mistake of your life; or here you are again with this same problem that always stops you.

This doesn't mean that you go lallygagging down the street talking about how wonderful life is while all around you is chaos and calamity. I'm not asking you to be [Candide](#) and not recognize sewing problems as problems. What I'm asking is that because it is a problem, doesn't mean something's wrong with you and particularly that it can't be fixed or that you can't find a solution. There are almost always 5 or more solutions to every sewing/fitting problem. It's comforting to remember that.

Action 1: Calamity is not as bad as losing your head in the middle of Calamity

I have literally seen a student melt-down over the wrong color of thread in a garment. I'm not talking about a yellow thread on black, but a dark blue thread on a medium blue garment, with no top-stitching.

Yes, for us who are looking from afar, this is ridiculous. How many of us have become so exasperated by making the same mistake continuously, as well as those huge, whopper of errors? It happens. And I know how you feel, cause I've been there too - only on a deadline! It takes a lot of reasoning and control not to panic in these situations. If you can approach this from the same perspective, that although the problem may seem impossible at this very instant, it isn't in the long run. Look at yourself, and how many times have you 1.) walked away, 2) taken a break or 3.) waited overnight only to find the next morning, the problem practically solves itself.

Walking away is one solution, but the bottom line here is not to panic. The world is not coming to an end, and in particular, your sewing understanding is not being threatened. Realizing that keeping a clear and reasonable perspective while all around you seems to be spinning out of control will only bring about solutions and practical alternatives to working through sewing dilemmas.

Working in foreign or unknown territories will often bring about calamitous results. Realizing that this is normal and almost always occurring is a massive step in asking for and searching for solutions.

Action 2: Running and hiding away doesn't solve anything.

Well, now that sounds downright obvious when we are away from the trauma of creating a significant mistake. In the middle of the arena, it's another thing. Errors and perpetual ones can be particularly aggravating and, worse, debilitating, leading to making a mountain out of a molehill.

This can further the sewing demon and can take over your head if you don't call it for what it is - a simple mistake on the way to learning something more valuable. Panic, anxiety, and rage aren't helpful at all. Action is what is needed, an action that is directed toward a particular goal. That goal might be finding out how to fit a sleeve better or messing with the sleeve until it acts the way you want, or working with various fabrics until you get the look you want. Not all of your actions, well-intentioned as they might be, will be successful. Even if it is re-thinking the problem in front of you, continuing an action goal is worth your time and effort.

It seems like this simplest of solutions is evident when we aren't in the middle of a disastrous fitting problem. And this is just the time when we feel like hiding away or avoiding the problem will make it better. It's like if we walk away and forget it, it will solve itself - uh no! That doesn't happen!

Will: Over time, these habits of working through problems generate more confidence and future success.

Of the three answers we can have to mistakes, perception, action, and will, it is will that is the hardest. But over time, the will comes a natural product of mastering perception and action. Will-type obstacles are the hardest to overcome and deal with, but they provide the most profound information. As the old Haitian adage goes, "Behind the mountains are more mountains!"

It doesn't sound like much hope, but the truth is that after continued successes, they build on each other. And from my personal experience, if something doesn't work, OK, well, I'll have to figure out another way. This is how I figured out the importance of fitting the shoulders. This is why I love the hang and drape of a garment so much. From other lessons, I learned the bliss of the FBA and how it can miraculously fit areas that were formerly problems for clients.

GENERAL FEARS

That Keep You From Starting or Continuing

Here are two big fears I hear a lot:

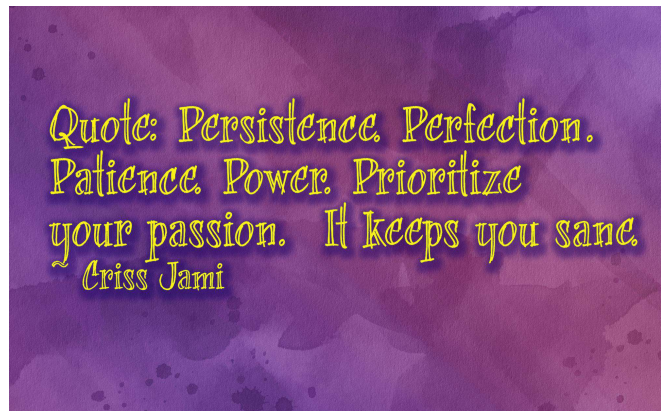
1. Fear of picking wrong fabric for wrong pattern
2. Fear of doing all this work and having it turn out badly or wrong - excellent workmanship, great fit, but something's wrong.

Sketching

Drawing out your project on a model is a magical way to solidify the design in your mind and work out possible problems like how the garment will close?...how a placket will end?...how a cuff will roll up or not?...how a hem will be curved, straight or different levels? All these sorts of design ideas can be solved with the sketching of the design.

The truth is that even when you practice these techniques, you will have some mistakes. It's inevitable. The mathematical odds will be in your favor, cause after you start getting a bunch of things right, you'll have a mess-up - it's just part of being an artist. Chalk it up to that and dig right in for the next project. Failure is not a reflection of your self-worth or value - never. Failure is simply a signal to try again.

As far as doing something wrong - every artist has something wrong with their work. None of my garments - even my most favorite ones - are perfection or mistake-free. The thing to learn is to let it go - stop working on it and declaring it finished. Many lessons for an artist to learn!



Visualization

Practice visioning things in your mind. This is an artist's technique that CAN BE [Landscape](#) or [Portrait](#) LEARNED through practice. This is part of what artists learn in art school. You can learn this too - how, by practicing it but also by drawing up croquis. (click [here](#) to download those instructions). This is a wonderful tool which I still use today when I'm not sure of my visual imaging.

I often will do a quick visualization of the entire cutting, preparation, and assembly process. These are like quick pictures in my mind, running the rotary cutter around each piece, stacking them in assembly order (to do first is on top), then envisioning sewing up the various seams to see any potential time blocks that I might need. If I'm working with a very tightly woven fabric, I know easing in the sleeve head will take more time than if I'm working on a knit. Imaging the various techniques and probable problem areas help you block out the time you will need to give yourself a realistic and plausible time block to complete the garment.

This sounds nit-picking about "budgeting" in every little minute you will be using. And yes, at first, this will seem laborious. But this technique is used to have you think in terms of time when assembling a garment. You won't do this for every garment you make because after you have used this for ten or so garments, you can get used to doing this in your head very quickly. This is a *practiced habit* that you will be learning. This is not some gift. It's something you can learn, like you learned addition and multiplication tables. Most of all, I love that thinking this way has helped me avoid so many pitfalls and mistakes when constructing a garment.

Another way to practice visualizing is to start by looking at something in a catalogue or magazine - something simple - one color top one color bottom - and then closing your eyes and remembering it. Practice this on about 5 or 10 pictures. Make them simple - not too much going on.

If you need some more help in visualizing, drawing in your croquis template is a highly helpful technique. Not visualizing at first is a little frustrating, but after sketching and drawing ideas with your croquis template, gets you closer and closer to doing visualizations. I also use easy mediums like colored pencils or colored markers to help me envision particularly dominate prints or designs, especially when I'm dealing with matching and if a certain design will work with a large or dominantly printed fabric.

Blocks vs Time Out

Know the difference between a fallow period and a block and a lack of inspiration - they are all three different although they may look and feel the same.

- A fallow period is a period of inactivity that usually follows a immense period of productivity and tons of creativity. None of us flow evenly, so it's normal to expect this.
- A block is where you are all set up to work, you have the time and everything is all set, and no idea - nada - a blank white sheet and that's it!
- A lack of inspiration is no any desire to work on a project - again if this comes after a very fertile and productive period, it's usually just a time of resting for your creative juices. This could be caused by other things which I've listed as a separate bonus download.



[Landscape](#) or [Portrait](#)

Recharging

I like to think of my creativity as a jar, and although using a lot of what's in that jar will fill it back up, there are times when the jar is empty. The body is willing but the soul is literally dried

up. Don't think this is a block. It is simply your creativity jar asking for a little time out to refill again. A constant run of creativity is exhilarating and often addictively high, but *always* being in this high or constant run is not healthy nor normal. You need a break. It's healthy to pulse between high creativity and no creativity. It doesn't mean your creativity is gone. It simply means you need a break periodically to recharge that creativity.

Quick Starts

Here are some other methods I like to get you into the mood to sew.

A FAST POP

One way that is a sure hit is to do something you really like - maybe something fast and something simple or maybe it's something that has a little effort to it that you've done a gazillion times before but you love the outcome. It's a little like eating ice cream to get your appetite back after you've been sick. A top or a knit jacket or something that you've done and you like it and it's fast. Something that will give you a POP fast and quick.

MEDITATION

You may scoff at this, but this is something that will really work for you if you let it. Not only that but it will make your life more organized, you'll be richer, thinner and have more time - well, OK it won't be that good, but meditation is something that can really make a difference, and especially when it comes to creativity. For this to work, try this at least once, best if twice a day and find a quiet time (early morning - late evening) and I like to use some music that is very soft and pleasing - something that is more background music - like Liquid Mind, or something new age meditation. Do a search on iTunes or Amazon.com to download or purchase music for this. If you're on Spotify (I don't think you have to be a member), you can see my list of meditation music [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#).

JUST DO IT

Sometimes it takes just putting one foot in front of the other, standing up at the cutting table, spreading out the pattern, fitting it, and start cutting - whether it's the muslin or the fashion fabric. IOW, get out a piece of fabric and a pattern and start cutting - no intentions, no expectations. Don't think about it. Don't procrastinate and don't talk about it with yourself - just start - something - anything, even if it's just a simple little pocket that you may attach on skirt later.