



WAYS TO  
*overcome*  
CRITICISM

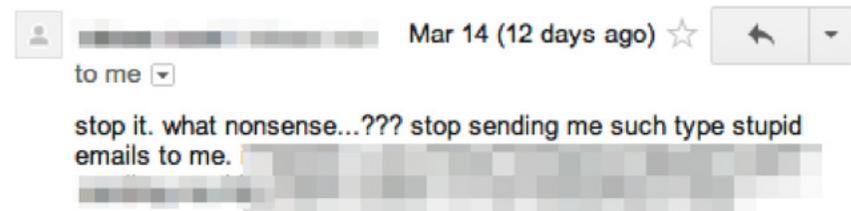
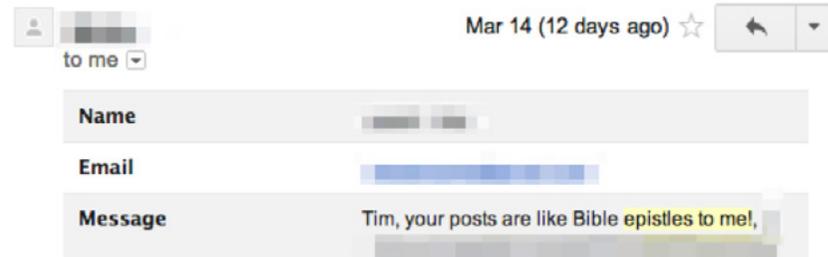
BY TIM GRAHL

In most of the writing I do to help writers, I try to focus on the upside of sharing your work with the world. I talk about how your writing can help your readers live better lives. I discuss the fulfillment that comes from connecting with your fans. Overall, I try to focus on the positive.

But let's be honest. The publishing experience is not all positive.

Most writers feel plagued by self-doubt at one time or another. "Is this piece well-written? Will it reach the right audience? Is this point worth making?" Unfortunately, it's not only our own doubts that plague us. Often, we also have to deal with other people's doubts about our writing.

A couple weeks ago I received these two emails, within five minutes of each other:



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Talk about a high and a low! One person compared my writing to holy scripture and the other called it stupid nonsense.

Then there was W. Terry Whalin.

[He published a 3-star review of my book](#), *Your First 1000 Copies*, on Goodreads and Amazon. It ended with the phrase, "That I gave it three stars was a bit generous in my view."

Of course, it's fine that someone left a negative review of my book. That's what the whole customer review process is for. [And Terry wasn't the only one](#) to leave a negative or lukewarm review. But instead of merely writing the review and leaving it at that, he decided to post a link to his review on Twitter with the comment, "Save your money."



**Terry Whalin** @terrywhalin · Aug 28

I gave @timgrahl's YOUR FIRST 1,000 COPIES a three star Amazon review at: [amzn.to/1740yqH](https://amzn.to/1740yqH)  Save your money

 View summary



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Again, completely his prerogative. But did he really have to tag me in the tweet so it would ping my phone during my drive home from work that day? It's one thing to leave criticism online. It's another to intentionally wave it in the criticized person's face.

And while there's no scientific study that's been done on this, I think we can all agree that most writers need to receive about 50 good reviews to recover from a single bad one.

## Sooner or later, we all face criticism

If you're doing something interesting—something new, something novel—if you're taking a stand of any kind, then at some point, someone somewhere is going to have a problem with your work. Or just not understand it.

Take a small peak into history and you'll see that anyone who did anything interesting in the world had a lot of critics. Hell, Copernicus waited until he was dead to allow publication of his book that stated that the planets revolved around the sun, not the Earth. He knew it would be considered highly controversial, and he was right.

The biggest downside of the internet age is that so many now have the ability to publicly rip someone to shreds, without being there face-to-face and having to deal with the social consequences of their action.

But if it's all part of being a writer in the internet age, then . . .

## How do we deal with criticism?

Over the years I've come up against criticism in various forms, aimed at both my and my clients' writing.

Here are a few ideas that help me deal with it in a positive way:

### 1. Know it's coming.

Don't delude yourself into thinking you'll escape it. Even if you are talking about the most benign of subjects, someone somewhere will have a problem with the fact that you are doing something with your life besides being an internet troll or a couch vegetable.

### 2. Whenever possible, avoid the negatives.

After a while, [Hugh Howey came to the point where he stopped reading his negative reviews](#).

I know writers who have someone else check their email every day, and delete all the negative ones before they see them.

I don't spend any time on Reddit. Actively avoid negativity and criticism, even about other people, whenever you can.

### 3. Kick negative people out.

Among Tim Ferriss' rules for leaving comments on his blog: "Remember what Fonzie was like? Cool. That's how we're gonna be—cool. Critical is fine, but if you're rude, we'll delete your stuff."

I've also heard him refer to his blog as his living room. When he invites people into his home, they're allowed to disagree, but if they get rude, negative or offensive, he'll kick them out.

You're allowed to do the same. If someone enters your space not with simple criticism, but with a rude or offensive comment, block their email address, block them from your site, and do anything else required to keep them locked out.

Delete their comment. Delete their email. Hide them from your newsfeed. Unfollow and/or block them. Do whatever it takes to get them out of your life for good.

#### 4. **Don't engage. Just delete.**

Don't feed the trolls! Any response from you will only encourage them to keep going.

Don't email them back or reply. Just delete the message, and see #3.

#### 5. **Only accept criticism from people you trust.**

I sent the second draft of *Your First 1000 Copies* to five trusted friends.

Four of them said it was great, and offered suggestions for minor changes. The fifth one gave me six pages of notes on things that needed to be fixed. It was extremely hard to read, but it led me to fix several major flaws in the manuscript.

I recently sent the first draft of a new book to a writer friend. His response was "OK, brutal honesty—it's a mess." Again, hard to hear, but when I took a second look at the draft, I realized the advice he gave after that comment was right on the money.

Surround yourself with people you trust, then ask them for their honest opinion. If they care about you, they will give you honest criticism that you can trust and take to heart.

#### 6. **Keep your eye on the Why.**

Remember why you started writing, and focus on the people you are [relentlessly helping](#).

As far as my own writing is concerned, I'm willing to make a few people angry in the pursuit of helping you reach your goals.

#### 7. **Don't add to the negativity.**

This one is maybe the most important.

I have a personal rule: I never post anything negative on social media. Whether it's a complaint about the weather, a rant against the government, or criticism of someone's work.

While there are times and places to criticize, I think long and hard before I do it, especially publicly. There's already plenty of negativity out there. I'd rather do the work to fix a problem, instead of adding to it.

Unfortunately, criticism is part of the writer's world. But it doesn't have to hold you back or keep you from your most important work. You can learn to not only cope with criticism, but to overcome it. Don't let it shave the edges off of what you're doing.

Don't let it stop you from changing the world!

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