

HOW TO WRITE A BOOK—AUTHOR INTERVIEW

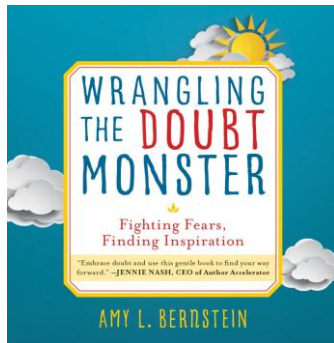
Advice on How to Write a Book from Best Selling & Emerging Authors

Hosted by Lisa Tener, award-winning author of [*The Joy of Writing Journal: Spark Your Creativity in 8 Minutes a Day*](#)

Wrangling the Doubt Monster

By [Maya Stokley](#)

Have you got a creative block? Amy L. Bernstein is a multi-genre novelist who discussed strategies to navigate creative self-doubt with helpful guidance and emotional support to help artists through inspiration in her latest book, *Wrangling the Doubt Monster*. I had the pleasure of interviewing Bernstein about the process of creating the book, illustration, words of advice, and the overall message that readers should take with them!



Developing *Wrangling the Doubt Monster*

Maya: What was the inspiration for *Wrangling the Doubt Monster*?

Amy: The book came from a deeply urgent place of wanting to bring a topic to light that creative people hesitate to admit publicly, which is that we constantly doubt ourselves, which often holds us back. I've lived with these feelings for years, but over the last five years, I've come to know so many writers and creative people worldwide who express self-doubt in one form or another. It's quite a universal phenomenon. So I decided, in my way, to say out loud what we're all thinking.

Maya: I love the playful title, *Wrangling the Doubt Monster*. Was it a process to come to that title or how did you land upon it?

Amy: This was not the book's original title, but the current title is much better than where I began. (Note to writers: Don't hesitate to brainstorm many titles for your book!) The title and tagline (Fighting Fears, Finding Inspiration) resulted from my collaboration with my publisher. And I will admit that the publisher drew up an AI tool (I'm not sure which one) to generate words and phrases. But to be clear, AI did *not* create the title. I did, with input from the publisher.

The Philosophical & Artistic Process Behind the *Doubt Monster*



Maya: What was your research process? What was the most fascinating fact that you found in this book?

Amy: I did far more research than a casual reader might imagine. I spent hours delving into centuries of philosophy around creativity and doubt and waded through professional psychology literature. It's impossible to research 'doubt' without coming across much material about faith and religion. The quotations I've included were also chosen carefully and deliberately. I wanted to go beyond the typical Goodreads or Brainy Quote sources and offer comments from lesser-known artists from non-Western cultures. Learning about the Uncertainty Avoidance Index probably sent me down the deepest rabbit hole, and I was happy to stumble upon that.

Maya: The "Doubt Monster" illustrations throughout your book are amazing! What was the artistic process, and how did you create the design?

Amy: Props to my publisher, Bruce Bortz of Bancroft Press! He and I discussed the possibility of [including illustrations](#). (We both thought this would be a good idea independently.) Bruce had worked with the artist Mary Grace Corpus on other projects and thought she'd be a good fit. We had a wonderful time working out some basic rules for the 'world' of these illustrations, and I believe we are all happy with the result. We had discussions, in particular, about straddling the line between childlike and somewhat knowing or cynical. I suggested, in particular, bending the horns of the doubt monster in odd directions—to bring some whimsy and perhaps an off-balance feeling to the character.

Why These Literary Devices for Creative Self-Doubt

Maya: What inspired you to write the Preface in a poem format?

Amy: Ah, the mysteries of literary creation! I can't explain where my voice for this whole book came from. I wrote in a hybrid prose-poem format throughout. It felt right, and whatever I said wanted to be expressed this way.

Maya: You have personified doubt throughout *Wrangling the Doubt Monster*. For example, you described doubt as "a classic Trickster." Why did you choose this literary device for doubt?

Amy: I was determined to render a somewhat abstract set of emotions into visual, concrete terms that would help the reader see, or envision, more clearly what we're dealing with here. Besides, this was fun to do!



Bernstein's Personal Experience With Creative Self-Doubt

Maya: In the "Introduction, Part 1: Swimming," you wrote about "cognitive disinhibition." Could you provide a time when you experienced this phenomenon?

Amy: This may sound like a cliché, but I have had success on more than one occasion

of using the time at night in bed, when I'm trying to fall asleep, to think about a piece of fiction I'm working on—to solve a plot problem or something like that. I allow anything and everything to come into my mind as relaxed as possible. Ideas pop up suddenly, and I can see my way toward a solution that ties loose ends together or keeps the story moving.

Maya: In the “Introduction, Part 3,” you said that “doubt is fuel as well as foe.” Could you provide a personal example?

Amy: The act of dusting yourself off after a rejection—a string of rejections—and doubling down on your creative process: that's fueled by doubt. It stems partly from a strong desire to prove myself by succeeding where others have deemed I've failed. I do this every day. I write, revise, or begin something new in the face of rejection; I remind myself that I am an artist despite my doubts—and that they do not define me.

Maya: Throughout *Wrangling the Doubt Monster*, you debunked theories and common conceptions about doubt. How did you learn to accept doubt in your life?

Amy: This is an ongoing (lifelong) process! Doubt is a byproduct of the human condition. We cannot escape it; therefore, learning to cope with all the feelings and anxieties that come with doubt is a good idea. That often begins with recognizing—in a very conscious way—how and when feelings of doubt affect your decisions and perhaps make you more timid (and less apt to take risks) than you need to be. So it's a matter of awareness, accommodation, and, in a sense, whistling past the graveyard. Therefore, I try to put all of this into practice daily.

Now It Is The Audience's Turn To Combat Creative Self-Doubt

Maya: What do you want readers to take from *Wrangling the Doubt Monster*?

Amy: This is a book of encouragement and inspiration that the reader is invited to dip into as needed. I hope readers will keep a copy on their nightstands or next to their laptops. I want artists to feel seen and understood; that's a big takeaway.

Maya: You are the author of numerous plays, poems, essays, and novels. Also, you are a nonfiction book coach and much more. How will you promote this book and its content to audiences?

Amy: Ah, [book marketing](#)! Don't you love it? (Not.) I'm doing everything I can to help spread the word about *Doubt Monster*. My weekly Substack, *Doubt Monster*, is an ongoing source of related exploration. Plus, the usual things as the time comes—bookstore signings, podcasts, wonderful interview opportunities like this one, etc. I've also developed a workshop on manifesting a creative life that goes hand-in-hand with the book's themes.