

Writing Through the Body™

*Banish Writer's Block,
Achieve Flow,
Tell Your Untold Stories*



Johnnie
Mazzocco

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Achieve Flow,
Tell Your Untold Stories**

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Portland, Oregon

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About the Author

Who I Am

Hello! My name is Johnnie Mazzocco. I'm the creator of the Writing Through the Body™ process, and I'm so excited and grateful you've taken a step toward learning about how Writing Through the Body™ can help you banish writer's block, achieve flow, and tell your untold stories. I'm excited because, after a lot of self-exploration and experimenting, it's clear to me that my purpose in life is to heal and transform people through story, whether it's through the stories I write and tell or the stories I help others write and tell. And I'm grateful you're here because you're not only ready to enhance your writing life—and your life in general—but you're validating my purpose and my path. So, thank you for that.

I think a stifled voice is tragic, and I'm driven to present and teach this process to help transform obstacles in people so they can share their voices and their stories with the world. As the late, great Maya Angelou said, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you," and I agree with this wholeheartedly.

I know from being a writing professor for many years that so many of us carry around stories that never make it to the page. I've seen my students struggle to get past fears around their writing, and these fears come from a variety of sources. It might be a teacher who criticized their writing or their ideas when they were younger. It might be parents who accepted nothing but perfection. It might be a friend who's a writer who freely shares unsolicited advice and critique. Some students have come into my classes essentially crippled when it comes to expressing themselves through writing and making meaning of life. And that's what writing is and does—it's the process of making meaning of life.

Many students have stood out from my years of teaching, and I want to tell you about one in particular. His name is Mark. When I first met him, he was in his forties and coming back to school to make a career shift. Had the class not been required, Mark wouldn't have been there. (I know this because he told me so.) One of the first exercises I asked the students to complete was a short essay that addressed one of the two following prompts:

I love to write because _____.

I don't love to write because _____.

As you might guess, Mark wrote his essay about why he didn't like to write. He wrote about the time he was eight years old and wrote his grandmother a letter. She lived in another town, and because they didn't live near each other, he wanted to tell her what he liked and how he spent his days. He wanted to tell her about the things that mattered to him.

Mark's grandmother was an English teacher; and when Mark received her response letter in the mail, he excitedly opened it only to find his original letter marked up with red pen.

In his essay for my class, he wrote about the crushing feeling of that experience and about how he now knew, almost forty years later, that he'd been silenced at a young age. He wrote about his realization of subconsciously vowing all those years ago to never write again.

Reading this absolutely broke my heart. I could envision this forty-something-man as an eight-year-old boy, his shoulders slumping and his demeanor changing. And I thought about the lifetime he had spent staying quiet so he wouldn't be criticized. I promised Mark that I would never use a red pen and that any comments I made about his writing would be done in the most

positive way possible. The good news is that he left my class with an entirely different view of writing. He smiled when he spoke about it, and he told me it was something he wanted to keep doing.

These moments of revelation—these epiphanies—are what I see in students when they tap into the subconscious and extract long-silent images, words, characters, and voices from their imaginations and make them realities on the page. And by excavating these long-silenced pieces of themselves, they are a little freer than before. This kind of freedom through writing comes when we *write with our whole selves*—something I’ve always encouraged my students to do but didn’t fully understand when I first started saying it. I’ve since come to realize that I made this request of them based on the intuition of something more to come.

This intuitive request came from my own magical experience of writing with my whole self, which I’ll tell you more about in chapter 3. It was an experience that has taught me to live more authentically and be more tuned in to myself, allowing *me* to evolve and grow—to not only help others achieve higher levels of authenticity and happiness but to also stay committed to my own evolution as a person, a writer, and a teacher.

To get you started (and if you haven’t already), I hope you’ll visit and “like” the [Writing Through the Body™ Facebook page](#), where you can download my free “10 Ways to Banish Writer’s Block!” exercise. You can also find the same checklist at the [Writing Through the Body™ website](#)—my gift to you for signing up for my email list.

Flow

One of the big reasons so many writers or would-be writers get stuck is because they can't achieve flow.

Some of you may know of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. He's a Hungarian psychology professor who currently teaches at Claremont Graduate University in California. He is known for researching and coining the term "flow," which he describes like this:

flow = concentration / complete absorption = happiness

In an interview with *Wired* magazine, he said, "[Flow is] being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. *Your whole being is involved*, and you're using your skills to the utmost" (Gierland). (emphasis mine)

For any of you who have found that sweet spot—that place where you're completely immersed in what you're doing, whether it's writing, painting, cooking, dancing (whatever it is)—you know, that feeling of happiness that comes from being in flow, when the rest of the world seems to disappear.

The key phrase here is "your whole being is involved." That's what we want to achieve when we write. We want our *whole being* involved. We want to be in flow.

So, how do we achieve flow?

There's a way we can facilitate flow rather than just wishing and hoping it will visit us from time to time. This is usually what most people think of when they talk about inspiration—an elusive and fleeting muse that might, if we're lucky, show up and bestow its magic on us so we can eke out a few brilliant pages.

Fortunately, we don't have to wait for flow or inspiration. We don't have to be at the mercy of a fickle muse. We just have to learn how to access our subconscious.

Easier said than done, though, right? What about writer's block?

I think writer's block is a myth—I don't believe in it. (And if you read on, I'll explain why...)

My Path to Creating Writing Through the Body™

It was a magical experience with writing in flow that ultimately led me to create the Writing Through the Body™ workshops.

Over twenty years ago, an idea for a novel came to me. It came to me the way all my ideas do: organically, as I was going about my day. I was doing dishes when the main character first made herself known to me. I knew she had amnesia—that was all. Knowing nothing about amnesia, I began to research it and learned that the type of amnesia I was imagining is caused by an injury to the brain. I pondered this over and over, dreaming up different ways she might have sustained this injury. I also wondered about who her family members were and all those things we consider when developing a character.

As this character and novel evolved, strange “coincidences” began to happen. For instance, Miranda’s name simply came to me just the idea of her had—during the day, while I was carrying out my daily chores. I liked the name and decided to keep it. It wasn’t until months later, when I was taking a Shakespeare class and we were studying *The Tempest*, that I learned “Miranda” (Prospero’s daughter in *The Tempest*) comes from the Latin word *mirar*, which means *wonder, surprise, or truth* (a synchronicity that will become more clear later on in this chapter).

One of many remarkable incidents surrounding the writing of the novel (now titled *Miranda’s Garden*) happened one day around Thanksgiving that year. I had just made a pumpkin pie and put it on the counter to cool. I noticed the sheen on the top of my newly baked pie, and the child in me had a momentary compulsion to poke her fingers in it. Instead, I went to my desk to write while the house was quiet. (My kids, who were then aged two, four, and six, were out of

the house with their dad.) I worked for about two hours on a scene in which young Miranda, around three or four years old, pulled a stool up to the kitchen counter and poked her little fingers in the perfect, shiny top of her Aunt Minna's pumpkin pie.

Aunt Minna, who raised Miranda and her siblings with the help of her husband, Frank, after Miranda's parents died in a car accident, is not the most maternal or nurturing person in the world (to put it mildly). When she discovers Miranda with her fingers in the pie, she yanks her off the stool and roughs her up.

When I finished the scene, I went back into the kitchen, where I discovered that my kids and their dad had come back while I was writing. Lo and behold, I found tiny finger pokes in *my* pumpkin pie! Needless to say, the coincidence gave me pause.

Another incident occurred around the naming of Miranda's best childhood friend: Mary Ann Tibbets..Mary Ann Tibbets's name is a conflation of names belonging to two girls I knew when I was a girl. The strange coincidence occurred when I was doing research on Stonewall, Colorado, an area that has significance in the story. This was before the internet, so I called information (remember information? 1411?) and was told that Stonewall was so small it had no chamber of commerce. The operator offered me the number to the fire station, so I called and talked to the fire chief. He told me of a ninety-five-year-old woman from the area who had done extensive research on Stonewall, and he gave me her name: Anna Tibbet.

A little aside here: simultaneous to these strange events, I was struggling with a physical illness that no doctor I visited had any explanation for. They all sent me away frustrated, not knowing what was wrong with me or how to help me. I was having trouble staying vertical, so taking care of my three little kids was an extreme challenge.

Looking back, I now know that all the research and digging I was doing for the novel had caused a quaking in my psyche, and from the cracks it created, long-withheld information started to seep out.

And I had a shocking realization: Miranda wasn't suffering from amnesia due to an injury to her brain; she was suffering from repression due to an injury to her spirit, and that injury was incest and sexual abuse. I was stunned that Miranda is the name that came to me before I even knew that this was a story of her waking up, just as Prospero's Miranda woke up after a long sleep. This was the story of my Miranda embarking on a quest of *wonder* about her past, the story of her willingness to be *surprised*, no matter how difficult, and the story of her innate curiosity to seek *the truth* of her own authenticity. And I knew then I was on to something.

The most profound shock, though, came when I realized that this repression—this injury to the spirit, this abuse—was my own.

As you can probably imagine, my life was turned upside down for a while, and there were moments when I didn't want to be on this earth. But the beauty of the whole ordeal was that my health not only improved over time but I developed a fascinating relationship with Miranda. We became a team; we were allies. I promised to tell her story with as much honesty and integrity as I could, and she would help me learn how to navigate, overcome, and grow from this very difficult time in my life.

I came to realize that I was tapping into something greater than myself—call it the Divine or my own wise inner knowing. Whatever it was, I knew something magical was happening to me, and I was achieving a deep, deep level of flow.

Do I believe that everyone who achieves this kind of flow will experience repressed memories? Not at all. But we all have wisdom and knowledge within that's likely unknown to

us. Unearthing this wisdom and knowledge frees us up so we can be our most authentic selves, and when we're able to do this, magical things happen in our lives.

The added benefit: with greater wisdom and knowledge, we can render our characters and our own personal stories in a way that will deeply resonate with our readers. This is why writing and reading are such powerful, transformative endeavors. I also believe this is why we're compelled to write in the first place—to reach people, to touch them, to make a difference and change their lives. And this is why I teach the Writing Through the Body™ process.

So, how did I achieve this deep level of flow? It wasn't something I did intentionally. It just happened, probably for a number of reasons. It wasn't until after I'd spent all those years in the classroom telling my students to write with their whole selves, creating my Divination Deck, which was based on the seven main chakras of the body, and encountering the work of Candace Pert, whose work I discuss in the next chapter, that a connection was sparked by the words of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and I had the revelation that led to the creation of Writing Through the Body™. My subconscious knew, but I hadn't allowed the information to coalesce and show me what I was supposed to do with it all.

Writing with Your Whole Self: The Science Behind WTB™

To help explain what I mean by “write with your whole self” and what WTB™ is all about, let’s look at the work of Candace Pert in conjunction with Csikszentmihaly’s theories of flow.

Candace Pert was a pharmacologist best known for her work in mind-body medicine, which she quite intentionally called *mindbody* because her research on how our thoughts and emotions affect our health led her to understand that there is no separation between the two. (Any of you who have watched the movie *What the Bleep Do We Know?* may remember her.) Unfortunately, she died in 2013, but her team continues to do the very important work she started.

One of the main driving questions of her research was:

Where do emotions come from?

For writers, this is a very important question, because what we strive to do, in addition to making meaning of life and helping readers view the human condition in new ways, is to connect that meaning and those views to emotion—that’s how we connect with our readers. That’s how we stay with our readers and keep them thinking about our characters’ trials and tribulations, and about our own personal stories—what we’ve experienced and overcome—long after they’ve read our work.

Deepak Chopra says this about Candace Pert in the forward of her book, *Molecules of Emotion*:

Candace has taken a giant step toward shattering some cherished beliefs held sacred by Western scientists for more than two centuries. Her pioneering research has demonstrated how our internal chemicals, the neuropeptides and their receptors, are the actual biological underpinnings of our awareness, manifesting themselves as our emotions, beliefs, and expectations, and profoundly influencing how we respond to and experience our world. (Chopra, 9)

From her work, Pert was led to make this declaration:

Your body is your subconscious mind.

She wrote and talked about how she had transformed from hard scientist to so-called “New Age” convert. Despite the gravity of her work, she maintained a jovial essence and found ways to explain her findings to lay people. If you aren’t familiar with her and her work, I highly recommend that you seek her out, as she’s a very important figure in the mind-body conversation.

In an interview with mind-body health guru, Adam “AgniDeva” Helfer, Pert said this: “I realized in 1987 that areas along the spinal axis, from the top of the forehead to the base of the spine, these classical chakra areas, corresponded to what I called ‘nodal points.’ Places where lots of neurotransmitters and neuropeptides were released” (Pert).

Candace Pert discovered that the nodal points she was working with—these places that create and transmit emotion—are in the exact spots where the chakras are located.

After reading the findings and theories of both Csikszentmihalyi and Pert, I felt like I had found a magic formula for living out my life purpose of helping others to make their voices heard:

Write in flow



Access the subconscious



“Your body is your subconscious mind.”



Write through the body

Now that you have a better understanding of my reasoning behind the Writing Through the Body™ process, let’s take a look at the chakras and how understanding them and working with them will help with your writing.

The Chakras: What They Are and How They Can Improve Writing

Understanding the chakras can help our writing in two different ways: it is corrective in that it can help troubleshoot and overcome problem areas in our writing that cause us to get stuck, and it is generative in that it can help us create new ideas. But before we get to those, let's first look at what the chakras are.

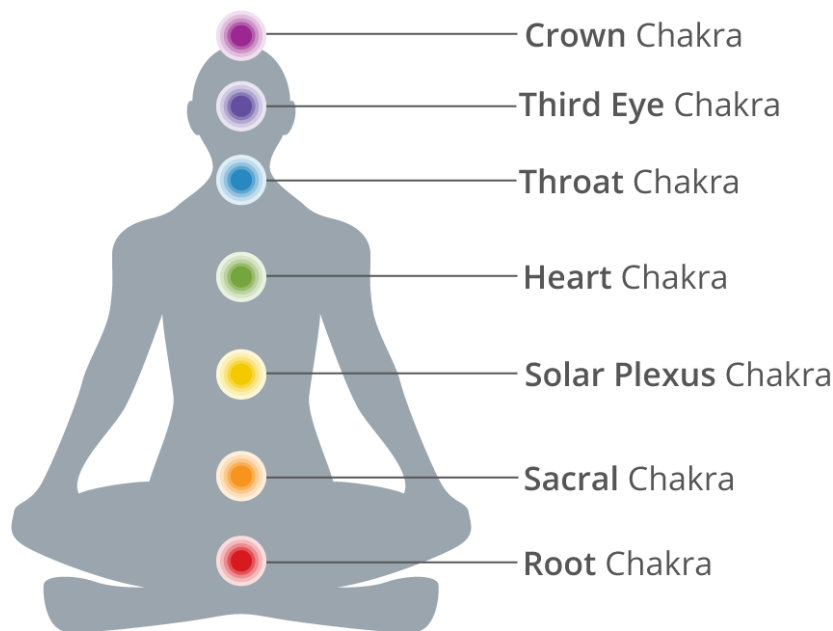


Image courtesy of Healthline.com

Chakras are invisible areas in the body through which energy flows.

Now, before you start to think this is all too “woo-woo” for you, hear me out.

Imagine a flowing electrical current or a spark of lightning, a babbling brook or a rushing

stream, a gentle breeze or a full-force wind, a candle's flame or a blazing fire. Each of these is energy manifested in physical form.

Likewise, we are energy manifested in physical form. And this energy moving through us is sometimes referred to as *chi*, or life force. It's that invisible "thing" that drives us; compels us; urges us to do, to make, and to be. It's what gets us up in the morning. It's what keeps us going when the going gets rough. It's what sparks our brains and makes us feel. It's what we need to create.

By learning about the chakras, you will become more aware of this energy within you, which you can increase in consistency and force to your benefit. By opening up this continuous movement of energy within, allowing emotions to flow more freely and the subconscious to be accessed more readily, deeper knowing will become more accessible.

Chakra is an ancient Sanskrit word meaning "wheel," "circle," or "cycle." Some believe the image of a whirlpool or vortex best describes them. What I see are porous, pliable, colored orbs. I see these orbs with gradients in hue and visualize them having the ability to expand or contract, plump up or shrivel like a breathing rubber ball.

In the meditations I've created for my Writing Through the Body™ process, I utilize this visual to help participants imagine the expansion that can be realized for the greatest access to the powerful elements of each chakra. (Some links to these meditations are provided in chapter 7.) Learning and using the elements of each chakra will also assist your writing in a very practical way. By applying these elements you will be able to understand each one of your characters and her/his desires, motivations, and actions. This is the key to creating deep, complex, and believable characters and stories that resonate with readers.

Using these elements will not only connect you to flow (for increased creativity) but

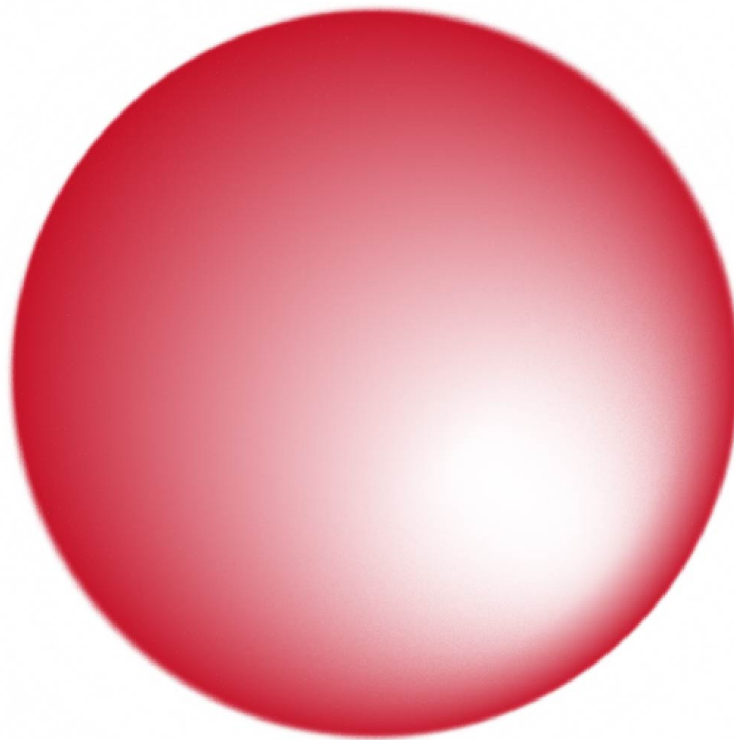
assist you in revealing and removing your own energetic blocks in addition to those of your characters, for deeper character development and accessibility (and thereby, deeper connection with your readers).

In the next chapter, you will find these elements (location, power type, writing applications, and so on) detailed for each chakra.

The Chakras: Key Elements

Below are some basic elements, considerations, and applications of the Root Chakra.

Chakra 1—Root



Color: Red

Location: Base of the spine

Mantra: “I am”

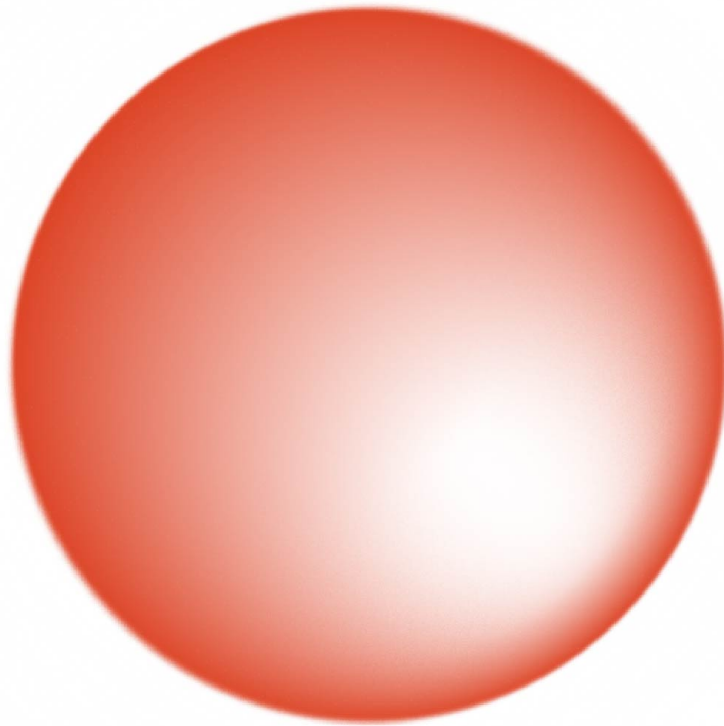
Power: Tribal

Lesson: Survival in the material world, sense of security and belonging

Writing Applications: Quality of family ties, sense of security and abundance, fears around abandonment and survival

Below are some basic elements, considerations, and applications of the Sacral Chakra.

Chakra 2—Sacral



Color: Orange

Location: Lower abdomen / pelvis

Mantra: “I feel”

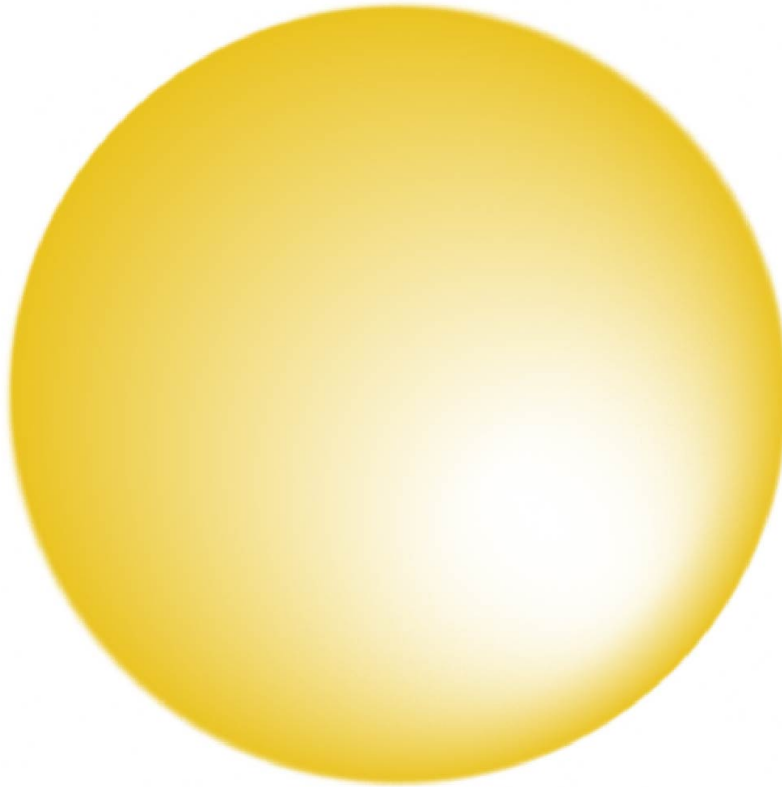
Power: Partnership

Lesson: Acceptance that we cannot control much of what happens in life

Writing Applications: Ability to protect oneself; creativity and self-expression; fears around anger, jealousy, and loss of control

Below are some basic elements, considerations, and applications of the Solar Plexus Chakra.

Chakra 3—Solar Plexus



Color: Yellow

Location: Solar plexus

Mantra: “I act”

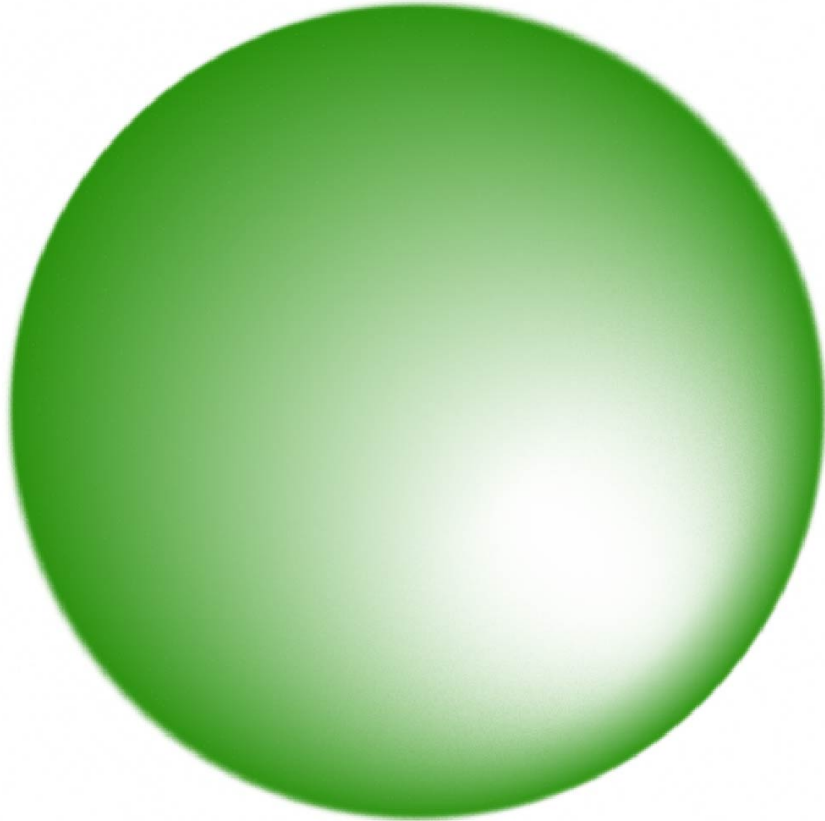
Power: Self/Personal

Lesson: Balance between taking control and letting go

Writing Applications: Level of self-esteem and self-respect, fears around rejection and criticism

Below are some basic elements, considerations, and applications of the Heart Chakra.

Chakra 4—Heart



Color: Green

Location: Chest

Mantra: “I love”

Power: Emotional

Lesson: Forgiveness, compassion, trust, how to act out of love

Writing Applications: Ability to love and forgive, courage, fears around loneliness and following one’s heart

Below are some basic elements, considerations, and applications of the Throat Chakra.

Chakra 5—Throat



Color: Blue

Location: Throat

Mantra: “I speak”

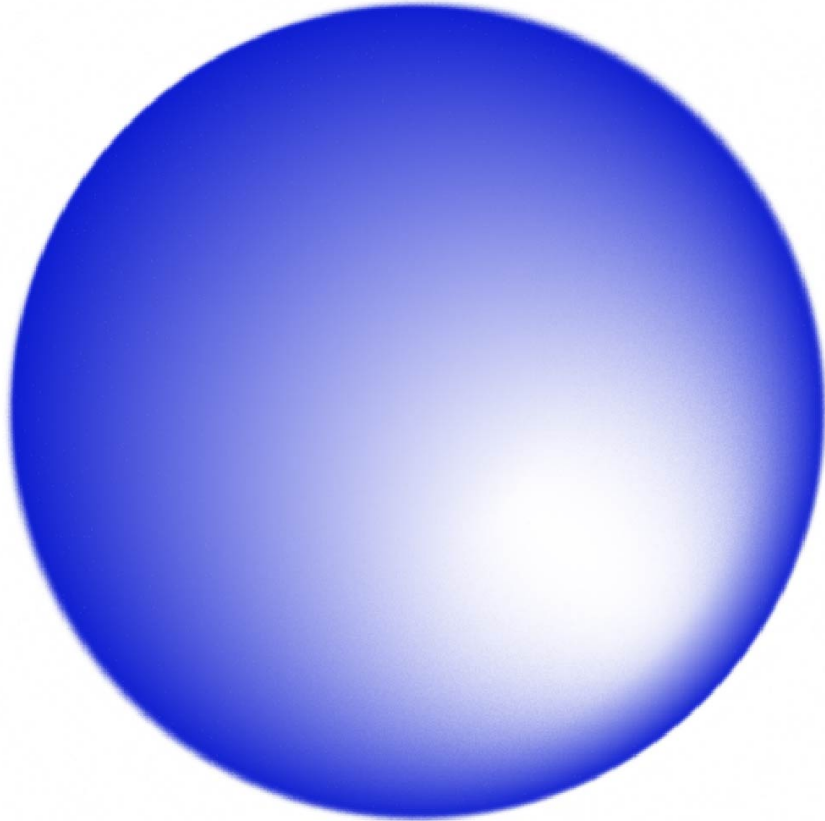
Power: Will

Lesson: Recognizing free will and self-expression in ourselves and others, and accepting both with love and compassion

Writing Applications: Faith and self-knowledge; ability to speak one’s truth; fears around money, power, and the emotions of others

Below are some basic elements, considerations, and applications of the Third Eye Chakra.

Chakra 6—Third Eye



Color: Indigo

Location: Forehead

Mantra: “I see”

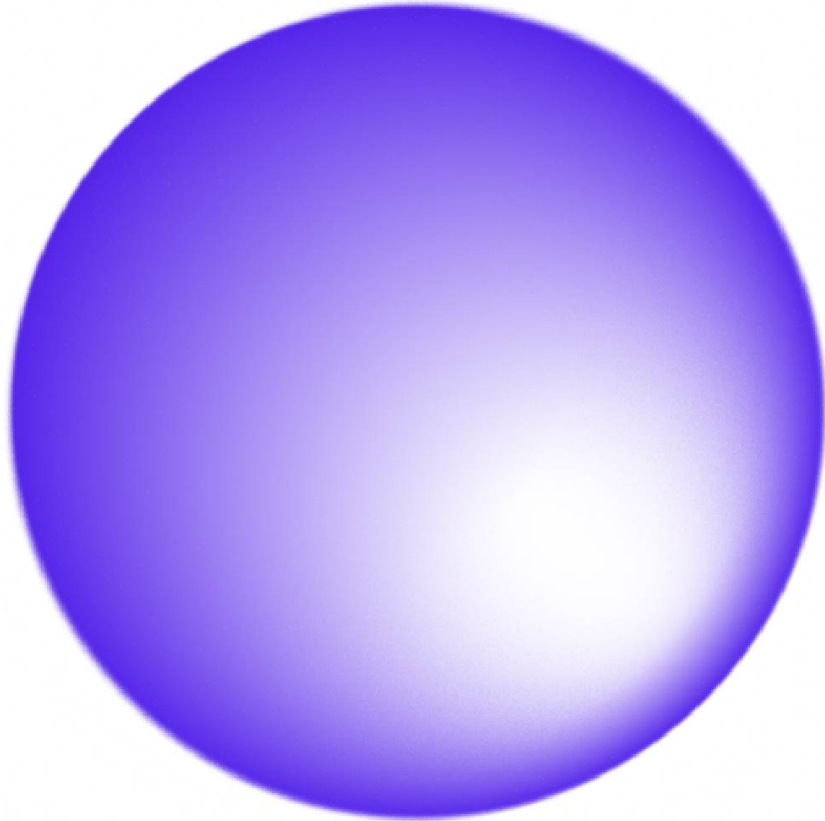
Power: Mind/Mental

Lesson: Discerning the difference between truth and illusion

Writing Applications: Intellectual abilities and skills, intuition and psychic abilities, fears around one’s shadow side and purging one’s fears

Below are some basic elements, considerations, and applications of the Crown Chakra.

Chakra 7—Crown



Color: Violet

Location: Crown of the head

Mantra: “I know”

Power: Spiritual

Lesson: To live in Divine union

Writing Applications: Faith in a higher power and/or one’s own inner guidance, mystical connections, fears around loss of identity and an inability to let go of the past

The above-mentioned information is meant to serve as examples of how Writing Through the Body™ can work as a method to enhance your writing practice and assist you in creating complex characters and stories that will engage and enlighten your readers.

Whether writing fiction or creative non-fiction, Writing Through the Body™ is a practical, valuable tool that can be used in conjunction with a variety of writing methods, such as amalgamation, which we'll cover in the following chapter.

Other Important Facets of WTB™

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Writing Through the Body™ is a practical tool that can enhance any writing practice and can also be used in conjunction with other writing modalities.

For example, many writers would agree that no matter the genre in which we write, we frequently use amalgamation as a device, whether we're conscious of it or not. And using this method to create complex characters and stories with ample verisimilitude, along with the WTB™ process can give way to unforgettable experiences for our readers.

Amalgamation

Amalgamation is a process utilized in the WTB™ process (which can apply to both fiction and creative non-fiction). It consists of creating lists of real-life places, people, and events as well as imaginary places, people, and events. Participants are asked to combine their real life with their imaginations while using specially designed writing prompts to help them create complex characters with complex pasts and believable motivations.

Now it's your turn. After listening to the sample fiction meditation in the next section, try the prompt provided. But first, create a scenario:

1. Pick a real person from your own life.
2. Imagine a place/setting (this can be a country, a town, a building, the inside of a vehicle or elevator—the possibilities are endless!).

3. Imagine the person in the place.
4. Hold that thought and read on.

Meditation

Meditation is an important facet of the Writing Through the Body™ process, which involves chakra-specific meditations for both fiction and creative non-fiction writers. Each specially designed meditation will help you become more tuned in to your chakras, offering a way to quickly and easily tap into each chakra's unique power to enhance your writing and your life.

Listen to the sample meditations below to get an idea of how this works.

Sample fiction meditation (root chakra)

Sample memoir meditation (root chakra)

Writing Prompts

In tandem with the meditations for Writing Through the Body™, I have created writing prompts specifically designed for each chakra for both fiction and creative non-fiction writers. Each group of prompts applies the elements of each chakra to help you access the deeper parts of your subconscious for a more profound rendering of characters' stories.

After listening to the sample meditations in the last section, try the following sample prompts.

Sample Fiction Prompt (Root Chakra)

- How does the character experience the place (emotions, sights, sounds, smells, touch, etc.)?
- When does this story take place (now, the recent or distance past, the future)?
- Why is the character there?
- What feels appropriate for expressing the answers to these questions—perhaps an interior monologue? How else might you explore/express this character on the page?

Sample Memoir Prompt (Root Chakra)

- What's your reality within this tribe right now?
 - Are you in harmony or conflict with this tribal reality?
 - What (or who) was it within this tribe that created your reality?
- What rituals from this tribe do you carry out?
 - How do you feel about them?
 - Do you carry them out because you want to, or do you do it by tacit acceptance?

These are but a few examples of how the Writing Through the Body™ process works.

Considering how studying each chakra can be a rich, informative, and enlightening experience in and of itself and that the understanding of how the chakras also work in conjunction with each other, we can see how the possibilities and benefits of this unique and practical process are virtually endless.

With a tool like Writing Through the Body™, you'll have a method to move forward with your writing projects, freed up from obstacles and problem spots you've encountered in the past, thus being able to share your unique voice in a world that is very much in need of your stories.

Why You Have to Write

I understand that life gets busy, and I understand that we can get in our own way. Our minds get cluttered with the responsibilities of daily life, and our psyches get burdened with old messages that play over and over—messages that we oftentimes aren't even aware of and that no longer serve us. I also understand that we all have people in our lives who need us, and our love for them often precludes our love for ourselves, our happiness, and our writing.

But I see it like this: when we hold our writing at bay—when we silence our own voice—we're abusing ourselves. Imagine if someone you love deeply kept trying to speak, and your response was to hold up your hand or put a finger to their lips to quiet them. We'd never do this to the people we love, so we must stop doing it to ourselves.

Stop silencing yourself. *Really*—just stop. Don't focus on how you can't write or how you don't have the time—that's another voice from another time talking. Instead, take a different view on the matter: you're treating yourself badly, and you're robbing the world of your unique, one-of-a-kind perspective. *Don't do that*. Not sharing your voice prevents you from making a difference in the lives of others, and that's a tragedy. Let us in on your little corner of the world—your flow of Divine, inner knowing. We'll all be better for it. And once you commit to starting, the Writing Through the Body™ process will be your ally, breaking through that old messaging and fear to let your authenticity shine.

Sending you love and mad writing mojo...

—Johnnie

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About the Author

Johnnie Mazzocco is writer, storyteller, editor, writing coach, and filmmaker. Story is at the heart of everything she does—the vehicle through which she heals and transforms people, whether it’s through the stories she tells or the ones she helps other people tell. She believes story and narrative to be the most transformative medium available to us in our quest to understand the human condition and heal ourselves on all levels.

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