



# **EXER SIGHTS**

**A Self-Esteem Workout for  
Writers and Artists**

**Marney K. Makridakis**  
**Artella ~ the waltz of words and art**



# ExerSIGHS

by Marney K. Makridakis

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# Welcome to Your Workout!

Think of your self-esteem as a muscle...a muscle that must be worked regularly in order to be kept in shape. When it is strong, vital, and in shape, it can assist you marvelously in tapping into your well of creativity and bringing your projects into the world in forms that are rewarding to both you and others.

This workbook contains some exercises that can help you whip your self-esteem into shape. I encourage you to dive in and try each exercise out.

If a particular exercise doesn't work for you, don't sweat it! Just move on to try something else. But do try to move past your resistance and approach each exercise with an open mind. You might be surprised at what you can uncover by moving through these exercises. Take a deep breath and simply relax to see what you may find.

Try not to think of these exercises as "work"...but rather, an escape into a really fun gym for your creative muscles. With practice, many of these exercises get easier and easier (not to mention more and more fun). Don't give up. Your creative voice is counting on you!

Art washes away from the soul the dust  
of everyday life.

~Pablo Picasso

The enemy of joy is the litany of "not good enough"  
that picks away at what is or what might be, finding  
the imperfections, real or imagined.

~Orah Mountain Dreamer

Great symphonies begin with just one note.

~Priscilla Young Pratt

When you get into a tight place and everything goes  
against you, till it seems as tho you could not hang on a  
minute longer, never give up then, for that is just the place  
and time that the tide will turn.

~Harriet Beecher Stowe

# 1.0 Work with a “Trainer”!

## 1.1 Reflections

You’d be surprised what a little work with a made-up mentor can do! Here are the steps for this exercise:

1. Think of someone whom you really admire in the realm in which you create. Someone who has successfully walked the path you want to travel.
2. Write down a list of things that you admire about that person.
3. Go back to your list and, for each item, think (or write down) a time in which the word or phrase described YOU. I promise you, it’s there. What we admire in others is *always* reflection of what we see in ourselves.

For example, if you say that you admire someone because of their great persistence in not giving up until they were published, you may feel lost because you can’t think of a time when you have been a go-getter with your writing. But look a deeper...can you think of a time in which you were persistent at something else? Persistent to find the best price for something when shopping? Persistent on making a visit to see a friend even though your circumstances made it difficult?

## 1.2 Mentors in Your Mind

Think of someone whom you would love to have as a mentor. It can be someone alive or dead, someone based on a real person or someone you make up with all the “right” qualities. In your head or in your journal, ask this person (or these people) to tell you what they love about you.

Here’s an example of from my journal of a session I had with these “mentors”...

**Rumi** (13th Century poet) – I love your eyes, your commitment, how much you tell people you love them. I love the color of your dreams.

**Georgia O’Keefe** – I love the way you observe everything. Your eye is tremendously keen. I love how you appreciate things to their core.

**Helen Keller** – I love how you have risen above adversity and continue to use your experiences in your art. I love that you are not afraid to be you and to admit your mistakes.

**Marc Chagall (painter)** – I love your spontaneity and how quickly you can create in such an uninhibited way. I love the ease and childlike way in which you approach art. I love that you are always learning.

**Katherine Hepburn** – I love your class and spark. I love the loyalty and devotion you give to those you love, and your affinity for what is right and best for them.

I tell you, after “hearing” these great comments, I felt amazing!! You will, too. . .try it! Identify what it is that you need, and then let support sources from your imagination GIVE it to you!

## 2.0 Variety Is The Spice!

### 2.1 Dipping and Dabbling

If your self-esteem is stuck in a rut, throw it off-course by trying something new, preferably something you’ve never tried before. When you are a “beginner” at something, you aren’t SUPPOSED to be good...which lets your self-esteem off the hook!

So look for an opportunity to play with a new media or form of expression, or any new skill at all! Congratulate yourself for making all of the beginner’s mistakes and enjoy releasing yourself from the pressure of having to do something “right”.

### 2.2 Go Upside Down

Take whatever project you’re working on and turn it upside down so that you can see it in an entirely different perspective. Some ideas:

- For artwork: turn a piece of artwork literally upside down and work on it that way for a bit.
- For writing: print out your current writing piece and add scribbles to it with colored pencils and see how that changes the story.
- For your business: open up any book and let your finger land on any random word. Re-think your business plan as if you were selling/offering/serving THAT particular, random word. How would that change the plan.

After “going upside down” be sure to check back in with yourself to see if you gained any insights to help you get unstuck. Did you find a new shortcut? A new brainstorm? A new mark of your own brilliance? Did you feel silly and playful? Did you SEE instead of look? Did you laugh at yourself?

## 3.0 Reward and Praise Yourself!

### **3.1 Through the Eyes of a Child**

Place something you've created in front of you and then close your eyes. Imagine that a small child has come up to with something in his or her hand. The child is excited, with eyes wide, smile beaming magically. The child hands you something and says, "Look what I did! What do you like about it? Tell me, tell me!"

Open your eyes. The child has handed you your own creation that is sitting in front of you. Write down your answers to the child. For example:

- What do you like about his or her creation?
- How can you help this glowing child feel GREAT about this amazing expression of creativity?
- When you run out of positive things to say, look for 5 more!

### **3.2 Just Rewards**

If you are feeling nervous or fearful about taking a step with your creative work, a great technique is to "bribe" yourself with a reward.

Some examples:

- When I send my application in to the trade show, I am treating me and a friend to dinner and a movie.
- When I submit my article, I'm taking the day off to go on a solo adventure to the museum.

Don't forget, even little steps deserve rewards. "Get out the phone book" can be a really big step toward making cold calls to galleries. Reward yourself for it!

Right now, make a list of things that you have been putting off doing, and see if you can come up with some modest, easy-to-carry out rewards. Don't get too caught up in gradiose planning for the rewards, or else they can become overwhelming, in and of themselves. Think simple and fun.

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- Patricia Shook



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## 4.0 Work out with a Buddy

### **4.1 Find a Community**

When it comes to self-esteem challenges, sometimes the quickest way to get a boost is to realize that we're not alone.

Thanks to Internet message boards and discussion groups, support of all kinds is more available than ever. You can find a discussion group for just about any topic by going to yahoo groups at <http://www.yahogroups.com> and entering keywords in the search box.

Artella has over twenty-five active discussion groups that you may want to explore:

To find out more about these groups, visit the Artella Cafe at:

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In seeking a group of your own, you're not just limited to the Internet. Here are a few more ideas:

- Post a sign in your local bookstore or community center for the group or community you'd like to start.
- Hook up with an existing group or community to create a sub- or affiliate group. For example, I have a good friend who recently connected with her county Arts Council in order to start a new Artist's Guild, because she was seeking more community with other artists.
- Invite friends with like interests to join a structured group that will serve each of your individual goals.
- If your self-esteem is low because you feel like your dream is impossible, call on the power of a group to brainstorm solutions that give you courage to move forward. Author Barbara Sher writes extensively about "barn raising" – large brainstorming parties where each participant brings one or two people with them. Each person is given adequate time to announce what they need, and then the energy of the group builds and builds until it is practically impossible to NOT find solutions within the group.

Apparently, this is extremely effective in cultivating personal connections, via the "six degrees of separation" theory, to make the impossible suddenly seem possible. To boost your sense of the possible (and boost your hope and self esteem while you're at it), read Chapter 7 in Sher's book, [\*Wishcraft\*](#), in which she gives some incredible examples of inspiring true barnraising stories.



# 5.0 Look the Part

## **5.1 Open a Studio**

It doesn't matter limited your living space is...if you are imaginative, you can create a true "studio" space for yourself and your creative work. Whether it is a garage, a guest room, a corner of your bedroom, or a close-away armoire in the dining room, it is time to create YOUR space.

And if you already have a dedicated space in which you do your creating, think seriously about shifting it around a bit to "spiffy it up" a bit to make it seem newer and fresher.

And for those of you out there with a "craft room" or an "art room" or an "office"...consider finally making the move to calling it your *studio*.

Artists and writers work in studios, so that is what your space should be called, even if it is a corner of a room. And honoring your work by giving it a glorious space in which to be nourished and explored is a GREAT self-esteem booster.

## **5.2 Get Professional!**

This is a GREAT trick to get yourself feeling really excited about your creative endeavors, whatever they are.

Do the "professional thing" and get business cards, business stationery, or a Web site.

Even if you have no intention to sell your work right now, it sends a really great message to your self-esteem that *you take your dreams seriously*.

You can create a free Web site on many different ISP or server sites, create your own stationery, and order free business cards (and just pay low shipping) at <http://www.VistaPrint.com>.

Whether you order super-thrifty business cards, or create a freebie Web site, you can either keep it all for your own admiration, or share it with friends, or share it with your new customer/client base!

The simple of act of getting the professional "gear" can melt away many fears and doubts and bring back the passion for your project, once again.

# 6.1 Develop a Habit

## **6.1 Create an enRICHual**

Rituals - acts that we predictably repeat on certain occasions - are very grounding and are another way to get that not-so-subtle message to your self-esteem that you are ready to make some changes.

Develop your own ritual before engaging in your creative process.

For the past three years, I have kept a steady ritual when I work on my novel. I light a candle, close my eyes and say, "Story, tell me what you know." When I am done, I blow out the candle, close my eyes and say, "Thank you, Story."

(The impetus for this particular ritual was a quote from Madeline L'Engle, who said, "The story knows more than the artist knows.")

I use this ritual every single time I approach any work on the novel, even if it's just a 10-minute character study. The only exception is when I am inspired to work on the story away from home, so I don't have a candle handy.

This helps me make my transition from whatever I was doing prior to writing work INTO the world of the work. With this ritual, somehow the creativity act itself becomes less about ME and whether I'm good or bad. It's about the *process*. The ritual helps me understand that, not only in my head, but deeply ingrained in my body.

## **6.2 Practice, Practice, Practice**

The more often that you practice exercising your self-esteem, the more natural such practices will seem to you. It may seem awkward, at first, to focus on gushing at the positive aspects of your own work. With practice, though, it will soon seem natural and energizing.

Whatever you find that works for you, keep at it. If a particular technique, exercise, or train of thought makes you feel stronger in your own power, repeat it often until you develop a sense memory to cut through all the fear and doubt to find the core of your soul that feels a confidence in who you are and what you are doing.

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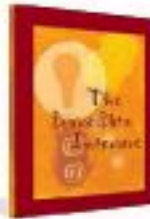
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# 7.0 Work With Resistance

## **7.1 Resistance - Good News!**

Just as physical strength training instructs us to USE resistance to get stronger, our emotional resistance (which often shows up as shaky self-esteem) can help us get stronger, too.

Resistance is ALWAYS a sign that something is shifting. The comfortable places in you that are afraid of change are kicking and screaming as you are on the verge of growth (after all, they think they are protecting you by keeping you safe).

When resistance comes (in terms of fear, procrastination, sleepiness, anger, self-doubt, etc.), it is a sign that change is right at the cusp.

Create a mantra for yourself that you can use when the resistance comes. For example, "I feel this resistance and know that there is a payoff on the other side." Or "This resistance is shifting the tides and bringing great news."

With our physical bodies, muscles get stronger from micro-tears that occur when we stretch and pull our muscles. Literal *tears* in the muscle push our body to heal itself, and heal stronger than before...and that is the basis of muscle strength. Remember that overcoming each hurdle of resistance is doing the same thing...making tiny little tears in your ego, in order to grow back stronger and more purposeful.

## **7.2 Take Your Worries Out for Coffee**

Yes, it's time to make friends. Here's how to do it:

1. Think of a specific worry or fear you have about your current project, or about your creative endeavors, in general. Write it down in a single sentence on a blank page in your journal.
2. Give this worry a name. Any name. "TimeMan" for a worry about not having enough time works just as well as "Rufus". Just make sure that the name is something that you can associate specifically with the worry you wrote down in #1.
3. In your mind, ask your worry to have seat and order a hot beverage. Write on your page, "So, (worry's name), what's going on?"

4. Next, let your worry answer you. Write from the worry's point of view; just let all his/her agitations come out. Use this to vent and let go. . ....but remember, it's not from your voice, it's from the worry's voice.

5. Next, go back to YOUR voice and write, "Is there anything I can do to help you?"

6. See what comes up when you answer (in writing) from the worry's voice.

7. Bring the conversation to a close in your own voice. You may write, "Ok, thanks for letting me know. I'll do \_\_\_\_\_." You may want to tell the worry very clearly, "Okay, I'll do \_\_\_\_\_. And I will turn \_\_\_\_\_ over to God/Spirit/the universe." End the conversation on a positive note, knowing that you took time to listen to the worry and address his/her concerns.

8. Move on to the next worry. Sum it up in a sentence, give it a name, order another latte, and repeat steps #1-#8.

This exercise is a great way to sift out what you can actually DO about a worry, and what is just "worry lint" that gets knotted up on its own and is better off being thrown away.

Obviously, you don't have to do this exercise in writing to make use of its effectiveness. You can just carry it out as a simple visualization.

If you feel like what you need is direction and focus, and not necessarily venting, skip #4, and move immediately to asking the worry what you can do for him/her once he/she sits down at your table.

Repeat these steps as often as necessary, until you're feeling more relaxed and can order a decaf.

## 8.0 Get Out of the Locker Room

### **8.1 Just Do It!**

In the end, there is no exercise or technique that gives your self-esteem a stronger message than just DOING it. Whatever your "it" is...just MOVING, CHOOSING, STARTING, LEAPING is the best way to combat an inner voice that is saying "I can't".

Throw caution to the wind, and throw your analytical mind out with it! Close your eyes and let something else take over. However that part of you makes itself known -- as your Muse, your divine essence, your inner child, God, inner being, inner peace -- it is creating from THAT place that will both push you to new heights but also keep you safe.

It's there. Find it...trust it...and just do it!

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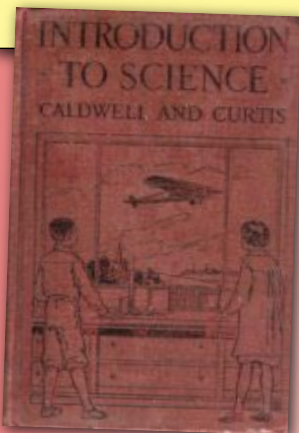


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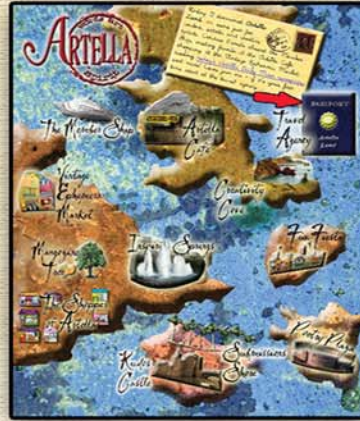
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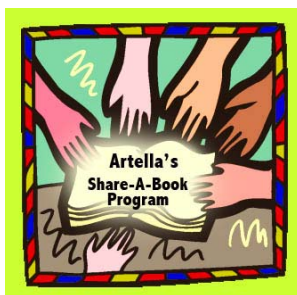
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