

Lesson 22 Worksheet: Handling Rejection and Criticism

This worksheet will help you deal with the rejection and criticism you will inevitably encounter en route to succeeding as a creative professional.

The section on rejection focuses on your dealings with gatekeepers – editors, producers, casting directors, interviewers etc. Depending on your art form or industry, these people will be more or less crucial to your success. But don't forget about the earlier lessons (see below) about building your network, reputation and online presence, as a way of attracting opportunities. It makes gatekeepers a lot easier to deal with when they see that you have an audience of your own!

1. Rejection

(a) Normalizing rejection

Read through this list of famous writers whose works were rejected multiple times:

<https://www.buzzfeed.com/stmartinspress/20-brilliant-authors-whose-work-was-initially-reje-7rut>

- i. How does that feel?
- ii. Now make a list of your top 10 creative heroes – in your own field or otherwise.
- iii. Read up on their careers – especially the early stages – and look out for stories of rejection and perseverance in spite of obstacles. Chances are you'll find plenty.
- iv. If they could pick themselves up after so many rejections, surely you can do the same?

(b) Play the numbers game

The more options you'll have, the more relaxed you'll be about any one of them. Which paradoxically means you'll probably perform better. So make sure your opportunity funnel is constantly being filled:

- i. Build your network – see Lessons 10 (<http://lateralaction.com/networking/>) and 11 (<http://lateralaction.com/social-networking/>).
- ii. Build your reputation – see Lessons 9 (<http://lateralaction.com/creative-resume/>) and 13 (<http://lateralaction.com/creative-internet-marketing/>).
- iii. Make a list of the most important industry gatekeepers who can provide you with opportunities.
- iv. Research them and their organisations.
- v. Look for opportunities to connect with them via your network.
- vi. Look out for opportunities they advertise.
- vii. If they take direct submissions/pitches, then approach them yourself.
- viii. Keep working at this – have a spreadsheet, contacts database or checklist where you keep a record of contacts, conversations, and potential new contacts.

(b) Getting used to it

- i. Remember the first time you experienced professional rejection. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = best, 10 = worst) how bad did it feel?
- ii. Now remember a more recent rejection. On the same scale, how bad did that feel?
- iii. If you notice that you feel less bad about rejections as time goes on, that's a sign that you are learning to acclimatize yourself to them and to see them as a normal part of the process.
- iv. If you notice that rejections tend to feel worse as time goes on, watch out for the following thought patterns, that could well be making you feel worse than you need to:
 - **Taking it personally.** ("This proves I'm no good.")
Instead, remind yourself that rejection is a normal occupational hazard for creative professionals.
 - **Making predictions.** ("I'll never succeed.")
Instead, start looking for the next opportunity.
 - **Comparing yourself to others.** ("Sean's done far more projects than I have, what's wrong with me?")
Instead, remind yourself that no two careers follow the same path – and focus on what *you* can do to improve your chances next time.

2. Criticism

This section focuses on destructive criticism as well as negative criticism (i.e. people telling you something's wrong and you need to fix it). For ways of finding and using constructive and positive feedback, see Lesson 4: <http://lateralaction.com/be-more-creative/>

(a) Where is the criticism coming from?

How seriously you should take criticism depends on where it's coming from:

- **Haters and trolls** – ignore them. (And give yourself a pat on the back – attracting haters is a sign of success!)
- **The peanut gallery** (vocal people whose opinions are irrelevant to your goals) – ignore them. Or be polite but don't take them seriously.
- **The public** – firstly, separate out the general public from your public (your fans and potential customers/clients). Ignore the former; listen to the latter, even if you don't always do what they want.
- **The critics** – firstly, separate out the ones who 'get' what you are trying to do from the ones who don't. Feel free to ignore the latter. Analyze the former's words carefully, to see whether there's anything you can learn from them.
- **Your peers** – firstly, try to separate out rivalry from genuine criticism. Secondly, ask yourself whether they have a point, and what you can learn from them.
- **Your mentor(s)** – assuming you respect and trust them, listen carefully to what they say and consider it over time. And if it's not clear, ask them to explain further. Ultimately you may disagree with them; or it could be that they are challenging you in a positive direction, and it takes a while for you to understand what they are saying.

(b) Getting some critical distance on your own work

See the tips in these articles:

Three Ways to Assess Your Own Creative Work:

<http://www.wishfulthinking.co.uk/2007/12/09/three-ways-to-assess-your-own-creative-work/>

How to Deal with Stinging Criticism: <http://lateralaction.com/articles/deal-with-criticism/>