

# POCKET GUIDE TO BRAINSTORMING ANGLES

by Sylvia Cary, MFT

*Brainstorming (def): The unrestrained offering of ideas or suggestions. To seek solutions to problems. A sudden inspiration or plan.*

*Angle (def): An aspect, as of something viewed or considered; to examine a problem from all angles; to give a specific bias, or point of view.*

Writers say the hardest part of writing is knowing what to write. Once you nail down your topic, the next hardest part is zeroing in on your angle -- i.e., figuring out what approach to take. For those of you who work as psychotherapists, you may want to write an article, or even a book, about your area of expertise, such as addiction, men's issues, short-term therapy, stress or anger management, aging, eating disorders, abuse, bi-polar disorder, or depression - all topics that have been written about a lot. So obviously, sitting down to write "about addiction" or "about abuse" isn't going to do the trick as far as getting an article or book published is concerned. You'll need to come up with a new twist/angle/hook in order to get anyone interested in publishing your work. For example, instead of writing a piece "about depression", you could write an article called, "Is Your Dog Depressed?" I think you understand what I'm driving at here.

## **Trend Tree**

Think of the special topic you want to write about as a branch on a tree, a rapidly growing, ever-evolving thing. What seems like a fresh or trendy idea one year may seem old-hat the next. Back in the 1980's, "co-dependency" was a hot book topic; today it's not. The zeitgeist (i.e. cultural atmosphere) has moved beyond that. And it keeps on moving on. So you have to keep pushing out on your old branch in order to create a new leafy branch.

## **7 Ways to Brainstorm Angles**

Writers use tricks to help them brainstorm old-news topics and tweak them into something fresh. So, with your topic in mind...

1. *Cruise the Online Bookstores* to see what's already out there. Search for your favorite subject. Last time I clicked onto Amazon.com and searched for books about "alcoholism" (my specialty), I found 2,560 listed! Pretty daunting; and pretty discouraging if alcoholism is what you want to write

about. But keep in mind, publishers are *still* bringing out books on alcoholism, so the market obviously isn't dead yet. Come up with a fresh angle, and you could still have a chance. Look for "holes" that need filling; look for aspects that haven't been explored yet. Late-onset alcoholism?

2. *Cruise the Real-Life Bookstores*: Even if you like online research, lurking around real bookstores is another way to get ideas about how to fashion your work-in-progress. Look through books on similar topics. Study the *Tables of Contents*. Sometimes a mere paragraph in one book can give you an idea that you can go on to develop into an entire article or book.

3. *Chit Chat with Book Buyers*: In larger bookstores, there's often an on-site person who is responsible for ordering the books you see on the shelves. Ask them questions: What's hot? What's not? What trends are coming down the pike? If a book on X, Y or Z were to be published, would they order it for the bookstore? If not, why not?

4. *The Trusty Old Yellow Pad and Sharpened Pencil Technique*: I must admit that my favorite brainstorming technique is writing things down on paper. I write down my topic and then I start writing down all the scattered ideas that occur to me about that topic. It's a free-association process that helps me decide if it's a good idea or not. If I get lots of associations, it's a good idea. If I get two and then run dry, it's not -- so I drop it.

5. *Shower Power*: Some writers (I don't happen to be one of them) get ideas while meditating, walking, running, or showering. Some even instruct their brains to give them solutions in dreams. They focus on a problem: "I want to write about Freud but I need a fresh angle." Then they meditate, walk, run, shower -- or sleep -- and the answer sometimes pops into their heads.

6. *The Personal Experience Angle*: Instead of writing a scholarly, researched article (or book) on your topic, write something from a personal, rather than professional, perspective. Many of us therapists are also "wounded healers". We got into this business, or selected a "niche" within our field, partly as the result of some personal or family experience. Often the most compelling and informative writings are by therapists who have had personal experiences with addiction, child abuse, bipolar disorder, etc.

7. *The "10 Things" Angle:* This is a good technique if the idea of writing an article seems overwhelming. Think about your topic and ask yourself, "What are the top ten things I'd like the world to know about this subject?" For example, "10 Things Your Clients Should Know About Obsessive Compulsive Disorder;" "10 Ways to Help People with Phobias" (or 7 Things or 15 Things); "10 Symptoms of Sex Addiction;" or "10 Misconceptions about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder." All you need is a paragraph or two as an introduction, then the "10 Things," (bullet points even), then a conclusion and wrap-up sentence. What you end up with is a kind of one-sheet seminar that puts your expertise to good use, is handy to give out to clients, can be put on your website, can be sent out in PR mailings, and, from a writer's point of view, is relatively painless to write.

There are many other ways to brainstorm ideas and trigger creativity. Books are written on the subject, in fact, but this is a start. And it's worth a shot because, as you well know, getting an article or book published is definitely a career-helper for a therapist. So write those articles, submit them to a newspaper, journal or magazine, and you're on your way.

Bio:

*Sylvia Cary, MFT, is a Los Angeles area licensed psychotherapist and writer and has been a member of The Scriptwriters Network for nearly a decade. She was the winner of the 2003 Carl Sautter Screenwriting Competition (for Features). She is the author of 4 books, 5 educational films, and numerous articles in national magazines. She is currently "book-doctoring" and writing script coverage for a film distribution company. She can be contacted at [sylvia@sylviacary.com](mailto:sylvia@sylviacary.com). Her website is: [www.TherapistsWhoWrite.com](http://www.TherapistsWhoWrite.com).*