

Beyond “I think I can”: Ten Affirmations to Bolster Optimism

By Kathryn Craft

Optimism can help you get published.

Doubt it? More than thirty years of research in high-rejection endeavors, from athletic competition to life insurance sales, suggests the statement is true. There is more to optimism, however, than the little engine’s wishful mantra. Optimism is the practice of framing what has already happened in a positive light.

To raise your optimism quotient, try the following ten affirmations. Meditate on them, speak them, and copy them down in your own hand until you are convinced of their truth. Once you own these concepts, your writing will be less about the absolutes of success and failure, and more about gleaning the benefits of every step on your path. And who knows—you may end up appreciating the process of getting published as much as you enjoy the writing.

1. Agents, editors, and authors all love to read and all have the same goal: to increase our country’s wealth of good writing. Agents and editors need writers to keep them in business.
2. The book industry is super tough right now, but I am doing what I can to improve both my craft and my knowledge of the publishing industry.
3. I believe that being a published author is my destiny and I will start my journey down that road, but factors beyond my control will affect the timing of my arrival. I will get there when I get there.

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Writers Throughout History...

“Happy is the heart of him who writes; he is young each day.”
—Ptahotpe, (c. 2350 B.C.)

Perseverance Pays.....

10 rejections: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* by J.K. Rowling

14 rejections: *The Good Earth* by Pearl Buck (won Pulitzer Prize)

15 publishers/**30** agents rejected *A Time to Kill* by John Grisham

18 rejections: *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* by Richard Bach

21 rejections: *M*A*S*H* by Richard Hooker

22 rejections: *Dubliners* by James Joyce

25 rejections: *Gone With the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell

27 rejections: *And To Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* by Dr. Seuss

27 rejections: *Steps* by Jerzy Kosinski—after it won the National Book Award! Chuck Ross, convinced that unknown writers had little chance of having their novels accepted, tested his theory by retyping the book and submitting it under a pen name to a total of 14 publishers and 13 literary agents. They all rejected it—including Random House, the original publisher.

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(Affirmations, continued)

4. While pride is the first of the seven deadly sins, optimism is a blessing for myself and for all of those around me. I love my work, so I will share my enthusiasm for it with others.

5. Rejection is the badge of honor I must sometimes wear to prove that I am boldly putting my work out into the world. No one ever got published by keeping her manuscript safely in her desk drawer.

6. Rejection may be a matter of personal preference—my work didn't connect with that reader—or it may simply mean "not yet." It is better to learn that I am not quite ready for publication by being rejected by an agent or editor than to get slammed publicly by critics, realize poor sales, and never be published again.

7. Every experience is a good experience for a writer. Victory, failure, acceptance, rejection—they are all part of the human experience, and stoke the creative fire within me.

8. If I am an optimistic fool, so be it. The real fool is the person who stops doing what she loves just because it is difficult.

9. Worst case scenario: it never happens for me. My epitaph: "She died pursuing her dream." What stronger, more beautiful statement could be made about my life, published or not?

10. I am committed to learning. Learning can be uncomfortable, but ignorance will not move me forward along my path. If writing is truly my passion, I must not give up. Besides—if we writers stop pursuing our dreams, *who will write all the books?*✍

"I'm sorry, Mr. Kipling, but you just don't know how to use the English Language."

—Rejection letter sent from the
San Francisco Examiner
to Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936)

(Perseverance Pays, continued)

40 rejections were received by Mary Higgins Clark before she made her first sale.

121 rejections: *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* by Robert Pirsig

123 rejections: *Chicken Soup for the Soul* edited by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen

350 rejections were received by Louis L'Amour before he made his first sale

600 rejection slips were received by Jack London before his first sale

Learn from a Master: ***Building Character***

On your second draft, consider allowing your setting to substitute for some of your character description, as Barbara Kingsolver does so masterfully in this excerpt from her novel, *Pigs in Heaven*.

...The ugly kitchen clock says four-fifteen. No time zone differences could make that into a reasonable hour in Tucson; Taylor would answer with her heart pounding, wanting to know who'd dropped dead. Alice rubs the back of her head, where her cropped gray hair lies flat in several wrong directions, prickly with sweat and sleeplessness. The cluttered kitchen irritates her. The Formica countertop is patterned with pink and black loops like rubber bands lying against each other, getting on her nerves, all cocked and ready to spring like hail across the kitchen. Alice wonders if other women have begun to resent their Formica. She stares hard at that telephone on the counter, wishing it would ring. She needs some proof that she isn't the last woman left on earth, the surviving queen of nothing. The clock gulps softly, eating seconds whole while she waits; she receives no proof.