

## REVIEW OF *THE WAR OF ART*

The amateur ... overidentifies with his avocation, his artistic aspiration. He defines himself by it. He is a musician, a painter, a playwright. ... the amateur composer will never write his symphony because he is overly invested in its success and overterrified of its failure. The amateur takes it so seriously it paralyzes him.<sup>1</sup>

There's a lot of quasi-mystical stuff in this book, some of which is probably actively harmful (Pressfield seems ready to blame many cases of chronic illness, even cancer, on the victim's failure to overcome "Resistance"). Like a lot of self-help books, though, I think its value lies not in providing groundbreaking insights or universal truths, but in being able to articulate a message in just the right way to resonate with some subset of the people who need to hear it.

And Pressfield's subsumption of many work-avoidance strategies under the single concept of "Resistance" does resonate with me. The biggest obstacle to me accomplishing certain things may be that I don't *really* try. I'll put lots of time and energy into periphery or preparatory activities—which are indeed valuable and sort-of adjacent to the goal—without ever quite getting around to making a direct and sustained attack on the main objective. (I think perfectionism plays a big role, in two forms: a delusional belief that I'll be able to do a better job later if I procrastinate, and a dread of putting in the amount of effort that will be required to live up to my own standards.)

A few years ago I read a book called *Daily Rituals* and was struck by how many successful writers had a rigid routine of sitting down to write for a few (and usually only a few!) hours each day at a fixed time. Pressfield's approach is similar:

That's four hours or so... I wrap for the day... How many pages have I produced? I don't care. Are they any good? I don't even think about it. All that matters is I've put in my time and hit it with all I've got. All that counts is that, for this day, for this session, I have overcome Resistance.<sup>2</sup>

1. Steven Pressfield, *The War of Art* (Rugged Land, LLC, 2002), 70.
2. Pressfield, *The War of Art*.

*Posted 2024-12-06 by Jacob Williams on [brokensandals.net](https://brokensandals.net). If you have feedback, [email me!](mailto:jacob@brokensandals.net)*