

# SUMMARY

## DO THE WORK

STEVEN PRESSFIELD



# **Summary of “Do the Work” by Steven Pressfield**

Written by Lea Schullery

Overcome Resistance and Get Out of Your Own Way

Introduction	5
Identify Your Enemies and Allies	6
A Research Diet and the Three-Act Structure Will Help Get You Started	8
Fill in the Gaps	10
Overcoming The Wall	11
The Big Crash Will Make you Stronger	13
Final Summary	15



# QuickRead

F R E E B O O K S U M M A R I E S

**Go to [QuickRead.com/App](https://QuickRead.com/App) now to download our app and get access to thousands of free book summaries as both text and audiobooks.**

**Get the key insights of non-fiction books in minutes instead of hours. Listen to our free audiobooks while you workout or on your commute to work.**



# Introduction

Resistance. What exactly is this monster? Let's find out. Perhaps you want to pursue a calling in something like writing, painting, music, or dance. Maybe you want to launch a business, start a new diet, begin working out, break a habit, go back to school, run for mayor, or do anything that requires you to step outside your comfort zone. Why is it that whenever we try to attempt such endeavors we can never see it through? Why do we constantly fail? Well, any act that requires us to reject immediate gratification in favor of long-term growth, health, or integrity will always be met with Resistance. Even worse, the characteristics of Resistance make it a force to be reckoned with. It's invisible. It cannot be seen, heard, touched, or smelled. But we can feel it. It aims to shove us away, distract us, and prevent us from doing our work. It's insidious. It will tell you anything to keep you from doing the work. It will assume any form to deceive you. It is impersonal. It's not out to get you personally, it doesn't care who you are. It's simply a force of nature. It is infallible. Resistance is like a compass, it will always point to the true North - that calling or action it wants to stop you from completing. The more important our call to action, the more Resistance we will feel toward pursuing it. Resistance is universal. It never sleeps. It aims to kill. Everyone struggles with Resistance their entire lives, so when we begin to fight it, we enter into a war to the death. It's time to learn how to fight back.

# Identify Your Enemies and Allies

The first step in moving toward your goals is to identify your enemies and your allies. Those are the things that help you accomplish your goals and the things that get in the way. For instance, the right music might motivate you to go for a run but Netflix releasing that enticing documentary might hinder you from being productive. But before we discuss our enemies, let's take a look at our allies, some of which might surprise you.

Of course, one of our greatest allies is passion. Passion is what led Picasso to paint and Mozart to compose. As children, we have an infinite amount of passion. Next, there's blind faith. Our mightiest ally is the belief in something we cannot see, hear, touch, taste, or feel. When we have faith and passion, we feel as if we can accomplish anything in the world. Unfortunately, Resistance wants to destroy that faith and Fear wants to sap the passion out of you. But when we conquer our fears, we begin to discover a bottomless well of passion.

But what if I told you that some of our negative traits can become our allies? I'm talking about ignorance and arrogance. The key is to be clueless enough to have no idea how difficult a task is going to be and be cocky enough to believe that you can do it anyway. To achieve this state of mind, you must stay stupid. People like Charles Lindbergh, Steve Jobs, and Winston Churchill were some of the dumbest guys, they didn't allow themselves to think. They just acted with blind faith. Charles Lindbergh, for example, didn't know how difficult it would be to attempt to fly across the Atlantic solo. He was constantly told that he would fail, his plane would crash, and that he would drown. He was too arrogant to believe them. But it worked. He went on to become the first person to fly from New York to Paris non-stop by himself.

We also shouldn't underestimate the power of stubbornness. Once you commit to action, the worst thing you can do is stop. And what will keep you from stopping? Stubbornness. When you are stubborn, you won't quit.

Steve Jobs, for instance, was notorious for being stubborn. Combined with his arrogance and blind faith, Jobs built one of the most innovative companies in the world, turning a garage project into a successful tech company.

# A Research Diet and the Three-Act Structure Will Help Get You Started

When you decide that you are going to pursue your passion, what's the first step? Planning. Many of us decide that we are going to start something new, so we research, ask questions, and try to put a plan together to ensure our success. According to Steven Pressfield, however, excessive planning only leads to failure. When we start to plan, we fill our minds with thoughts. Those thoughts then become chatter. The chatter becomes Resistance. Chatter comes from those close in your life who express well-intentioned caution, it comes from your teacher's well-meaning attempts to train you on following the rules. It aims to hold you back. So don't prepare and start before you're ready.

This may seem like impractical advice. How can you know that you even want to begin your project if you don't do any research? Well, you don't have to completely forego this step. You simply need to be put on a *research diet*. You're allowed to read three books on your subject. No more. You aren't allowed to highlight, underline, think, or talk about the documents later. You simply need to let the ideas percolate. Let the unconscious do the work. Research can become Resistance so limit the amount of research that you do.

Before you're ready to begin, simply start doing the work. So if you want to become a writer, start by putting words and ideas on a page. You can go back and rewrite it later. "Better to have written a lousy ballet than to have composed no ballet at all." When talking with writer and documentary maker Norm Stahl, Pressfield received some sound advice, Stahl said, "Steve, God made a single sheet of yellow paper exactly the right length to hold the outline of an entire novel." In other words, don't overthink. Don't overprepare. Instead, start outlining and outline it fast. On instinct. Boil down your story, new business, or philanthropic enterprise to a single page. Of course, this isn't easy so Pressfield has laid out the Three-Act Structure to help.



Divide the paper into three parts: beginning, middle, and end. The social media site Facebook, for example, can be broken down into three basic parts. First, Facebook was a digital commons area where anyone could create a personal page for free. The middle act allowed each page owner to determine who could access his or her page. In its end phase, Facebook became a worldwide community of “friends” who can interact with one another, communicate, and share virtually anything they want.

Another useful trick to help get you started is to simply work backwards. Begin at the end. For example, if you’re writing a movie, begin by identifying the climax. If you want to open a restaurant, begin by visualizing the experience you want your patrons to have. Figure out what you want to do; then work backwards from there. If you aren’t sure what you want your end goal to be, that’s okay too. Start with a theme. What is the project about? What will your movie be about? Your startup? Your book? Once you know that much, you can begin to visualize the end state. And once you know the end state, you can start taking the necessary steps to get there.

## Fill in the Gaps

Once you have a beginning, middle, and end it's time to fill in the gaps. For instance, screenwriters pitch new movies by boiling their presentation down into the following: a killer opening scene, two major set pieces in the middle, a killer climax, and a concise statement of the theme. They've included the major beats, and you can do that, too. If you were to reinvent Twitter, then you would start with What Are You Doing Now?, the 140-character limit, and the Following. Next, you need to fill in the gaps, so you have the hashtag, the tiny URL, and then the re-tweet.

“Any project or enterprise can be broken down into beginning, middle, and end. Fill in the gaps; then fill the gaps between the gaps.” Of course, filling in the gaps sounds easier than it is. So let's break it down even further. The process progresses in two stages: action and reflection. You must act then reflect and then do it again. In writing, the action is putting words on paper and reflection is evaluating what you have on paper. When it comes to taking action, forget rational thought. Instead, play like a child. You see, “Our job is not to control our idea; our job is to figure out what our idea is (and wants to be) - and then bring it into being.” So when an idea pops into your head, the answer is always *yes*. No idea is too crazy or off the wall! Don't doubt what pops into your head, never say *no* and always say *yes*.

As you begin to pour love and passion into your work, it's time to keep working. Stephen King, for example, confessed that he works every day. That means holidays like the Fourth of July, his birthday, and Christmas. Essentially, the momentum is going and you don't want to stop it. Think about how much time you can spare each day and keep working. As you work, take breaks once or twice a week to pause and reflect. Is your project staying on the theme? Is every element serving the theme? Make the necessary adjustments and keep working. Soon, you'll be on a roll. Good things will be happening, ideas will be flowing, and your energy will be electrifying. Best of all, you'll be having fun... until the dreaded wall hits.

# Overcoming The Wall

Out of nowhere, fear begins to take over. Your self-doubt begins to take control and a voice in your head continues to spout negativity, telling you that “You suck!” Everyone who attempts to follow their passions will inevitably hit the wall and begin to experience fear. But that doesn’t make hitting the wall any easier. You’ve invested serious time and money, now what? Should you just give up and cut your losses? Your fear turns into panic and you can’t stop. As Pressfield states, “Welcome to Hell.”

When you hit a wall, the first thing you should remember is to stay calm. Recognize that there is an enemy actively working against you. This enemy is unforgiving. It is intelligent, ruthless, and destructive. Its aim is not to obstruct or to hamper or to impede. It aims to kill. That enemy, however, is inside you. When Pat Riley was the coach of the Lakers, he used the term “peripheral opponents” to describe all the off-court forces his players would be facing. Forces like fame, ego, fans, press, sponsors, agents, etc. Resistance is not a peripheral opponent. It does not arise from your rivals, bosses, spouses, or children. It comes from within you.

This doesn’t mean that you are the enemy, you are not to blame for the voices of Resistance in your head. Everyone has had this voice in their head: Picasso, Einstein, Lady Gaga, and even Donald Trump. “You have a Resistance the same way you have a heartbeat.” You are the knight and Resistance is the dragon, and the dragon lives only to block you from reaching your goals and living out your dreams. You must battle the dragon to death. To do this, you’ll need to find love, love for your work and what you have created.

When Resistance appears, you’ll need to put it to the test with two questions. The first is “How bad do you want it?” Are you just dabbling or interested in your work? Are you intrigued but uncertain? Or are you passionate and totally committed? If your answer is not passionate and committed, then you need to re-evaluate what you are doing. The second

question is “Why do you want it?” Is it for money? Fame? Power? For fun? Technically any answer is correct, but you should feel as if you have no other choice. Nothing else will satisfy you. Only when you have that kind of dedication and persistence will you find the motivation to continue onward.

# The Big Crash Will Make you Stronger

Just like hitting a wall is inevitable, you'll also likely go through the Big Crash. Everything may be going along great. Your project is in high gear, you may even be able to see the finish line! Until everything crashes. Perhaps the bank pulls your financing or one of the stars in your movie checks into rehab. Now what? The worst part of the Big Crash is that nothing can prepare you for it. It arises out of nowhere but it is inevitable for every project.

When author Steven Pressfield's newest book, a novel called *The Profession*, was completed after two years of work, he was so proud of it. He was so excited about it that he began to show it to the people he trusted. Not only did they hate it but they HATED it. Even worse, they were right. The book just simply didn't work and the entire concept was flawed. While he would like to believe that he worked fervently over the next few days to get to book back on track, that didn't happen. Instead, he crashed. He went into an emotional tailspin. He was lost. After several conversations with his colleagues, he was eventually able to improve the book but only after working on it for another year.

A crash doesn't have to be the end of your project. In fact, crashes are *good*. A crash means that you have failed. It means that you've given everything you had but still came up short. This simply means that you have to grow. You are on the threshold of learning something and you become forced to understand what went wrong. How did you get here in the first place? Was it laziness? Did we assess incorrectly? "Whatever the cause, the Big Crash compels us to go back now and solve the problem that we either created directly or set into motion unwittingly at the outside."

When you experience the Big Crash, you begin to panic. But creative panic is good. It means that you are about to cross a threshold into something bigger and better. Think of it like a small child who begins to take its first steps away from her mother. She begins to venture forth, begins to feel the

excitement and exhilaration, then finally freaks out and bolts back to Mommy. That is where you are, you're growing. Next time, the child will venture even further. That panic was only momentary and is a natural part of growth.

When you begin to near the end of your project, you'll also experience the fear of success. This is often when you begin to experience the strongest forces of Resistance. That's because it's extremely hard to finish something. For instance, whenever Michael Crichton approached the end of a novel, he would begin getting up earlier and earlier in the morning. He'd begin at six, then five, then three-thirty, then two-thirty, driving his wife insane. He didn't want to lose momentum, so he checked into a hotel and worked around the clock until he finished the book. "He knew that Resistance was strongest at the finish. He did what he had to do, no matter how nutty or unorthodox, to finish and be ready to ship."

In the end, all it takes is slaying the dragon just once. Slay the dragon once, and he will never have power over you again. Sure, the dragon will always be there and you'll still have to battle him every morning. But the moment you've beaten him once, you'll know you can beat him again. And that, my friend, will transform your life.

## Final Summary

Once you've completed your project, kudos to you! Anyone who can follow their dream, hang tough, and see it through to reality deserves a round of applause. Whether you've lost forty pounds, kicked a smoking habit, survived the loss of a loved one or made your dream a reality, then congratulations. You should be proud of yourself for accomplishing something. "You have done what only mothers and gods do: you have created new life." To do this, all it takes is a few strategies like identifying your enemies and allies, getting started before you're ready, and staying focused and committed along the way. You'll hit the wall, you'll go through the Big Crash, but you must remember that each challenge is an opportunity for growth. Your love and passion for your work and what you want to accomplish will overpower the dragon that aims to stop you. You'll defeat the Resistance and, in the end, you'll have created the life you've dreamed of.



# QuickRead

F R E E B O O K S U M M A R I E S

**Go to [QuickRead.com/App](https://QuickRead.com/App) now to download our app and get access to thousands of free book summaries as both text and audiobooks.**

**Get the key insights of non-fiction books in minutes instead of hours. Listen to our free audiobooks while you workout or on your commute to work.**

