

## **10 Journaling Techniques to Kick-Start Your Creative Writing-The Gift of Writing**

**Are you someone who hears the word "journaling" and switches off?**

It's true, it doesn't have quite the same ring to it as "bungee jumping," "parachuting," or "kayaking" as far as activities go, but did you know journaling has been scientifically proven to improve both mental and physical health? Not only does it decrease stress levels, improve relationships, and enhance focus, it also decreases the symptoms of asthma and rheumatoid arthritis.

Who knew?

**Any time we tune into our thoughts and emotions and process them, we enjoy the benefits of getting to know ourselves better.** This, in turn, reflects positively on the way we live our lives. I have been journaling for years, but since learning more about the practice and using specific exercises to gain better results, I have seen a huge improvement in my relationships and stress levels.

I also find journaling very helpful to kick-start my creative writing process. Often when I sit down to write it's not because the muse is haunting me; rather, it's because I'm committed to a regular writing practice. But that doesn't mean I'm feeling creative or raring to go. **Journaling helps bridge the gap between writer's block and creative fluidity**

Perhaps the most common question I hear around journaling is this: "What is there to learn?"

Well, there's enough for me to teach a 12-hour course on the subject.

**Here are 10 of the exercises and writing prompts I use to kick-start my creative writing, and slow down when I'm overly stressed:**

### **1. Free Writing**

When I'm really blocked, I warm up with a free write. Much like a warm-up at the gym for your muscles, free writing helps to clear your thoughts and tap into the right-hand creative side of your brain. The most important thing to remember about this exercise is that you must keep your pen moving.

Write for 8-10 minutes about anything. Simply follow your thoughts and right them down, allowing those thoughts to be your guide. If the words that come to mind are "I have no idea what to write," then write down those words. Allow your mind to wander and your pen to inquire.

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## **2. Dialoguing**

A journal dialogue is a two way conversation in which you write both parts. This can be a dialogue between yourself and another person, or yourself and another entity, such as the government, the church, your school, your work, God.

**It could also be a conversation between yourself and a body part or your whole body.** If you have sickness or pain in your body, you may want to dialogue about that.

This exercise helps give us insight into another person's perspective by putting ourselves in their shoes. It's also great for revealing answers. The subconscious mind carries many answers that the conscious mind is not always aware of; in your heart you may know why a particular relationship is the way it is, but you don't necessarily accept it in your conscious mind.

More examples of dialogue partners could be your future self, your career, your hopes and dreams, money, your boss, your inner wisdom or higher self...whatever works for you.

## **3. List-making**

In journaling, lists are used as a creative tool for getting to know ourselves better. They are great for clarifying thoughts, identifying patterns or problems, getting below the surface, and gathering information quickly.

When I first attempted this exercise, I was reluctant. To me, list making was reserved for task-oriented activities—not creative journaling. But this exercise was actually very clarifying for me. It highlighted all those areas in my life that I need to work on.

The list I made was a list of 100 things I fear. It's amazing how there were really only a few key things that came up. Repeatedly. Things that were clearly weighing heavily on my mind. The key to this exercise is to allow yourself to repeat. That's how you begin to see the patterns.

**Here are some common list topics:**

1. 100 things I need or want to do
2. 100 fears
3. 100 things I like about myself
4. 100 things I'm feeling stressed about

## **4. Perspectives**

The perspectives exercise involves stepping into the future or the past, or into the point of view of another person and looking at an event or situation from another perspective. You may be in

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conflict with someone over a specific unresolved issue. Your challenge would be to write about that issue entirely from their perspective.

**Perspectives written in the future are helpful if we are at a crossroads in life and need to make a decision.** We write about how life would be if we made a certain choice, and how it would be if we made a different choice. This will often help us to make the decision.

But my very favourite perspectives exercise is to imagine my life five years from now and allow myself to dream about the future. I find this has a kind of prophetic quality to it, i.e. if I imagine it and believe it, it is more likely to happen.

### **5. Core Values**

Knowing your values is a huge part of living an authentic and whole hearted life. When we live from our values we are able to make decisions effectively and find more meaning and contentment in our lives.

When we look at our children one of the biggest things we want for them is to find their true identity, but quite often we want this without really knowing who we are ourselves.

My values are joy, love, authenticity, creativity, spirituality, and respect. I don't do a great job at living them out, but I find it really helpful to know that this is who I am at the core, and when I'm feeling lost or overwhelmed I can review my values to see where I'm going wrong.

In the back of this packet, you will find a list of values identified by Steve Pavlina. Use this to pinpoint 5 or 6 core values that you feel fully represent who you are.

### **6. Personal Manifesto**

**Your personal manifesto is a personal declaration of who you are—your principles, your values, and what you believe in.** It encapsulates the essence of what defines you.

**It is not necessarily an indication of how you see yourself right now, rather, it may be where you see yourself heading.** You may currently be experiencing difficulties in your career, relationships, and with self-esteem. Your manifesto is not these issues—it's the person you are underneath them and your intentions as a person.

**Your manifesto is about realizing your authentic self. It's about figuring out who is the real you—the person beneath the baggage.** The person that's aching to be seen and brought into the light. It is your best self on display for the world to see.

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## **7. Unsent Letter**

The unsent letter is one of my favourite techniques for venting and downloading feelings! It's a great stress management tool and a way to voice your feeling and opinions without damaging a relationship.

Unlike a dialogue, the unsent letter is a one-way communication. It is an opportunity to express without interruption, discussion, or arguing. Once you've written your letter, you will probably find you have more clarity about your position and that you have some resolution in your feelings.

**Remember: you ARE NOT going to send this so everything you write should be truthful.** Don't censor yourself and remember you don't have to share your letter to anyone.

The idea behind this is to allow yourself to say whatever you may have left unsaid to a person or, as with dialoguing, an entity, organization, body part etc. You may then do as you wish with your letter: keep it, burn it, send it if you feel really, really sure it's what needs to be done.

Don't make the mistake of thinking your letter needs to be angry. Yes, this is a great place to vent, but you may also want to write a letter to someone who has been inspirational in your life, or to a loved one who has passed on and you want them to know how much you miss them.

## **8. Character Sketch**

The character sketch is a form of descriptive writing. It is a written portrait of another person, or of some aspect of yourself and useful for when you're in conflict with someone else, or when you want to get to know the different parts of yourself in a more direct and intimate way.

**The people we draw into our lives are mirrors. Everyone we meet is in some way our teacher.** They each bring out something different in us and give us more information about who we are. When we love or hate a quality in a person, it is likely that we're loving or hating that quality in ourselves.

In the character sketch you will describe either yourself from the perspective of a friend or your own perspective, or you can describe a person you admire. Or you can describe someone you may be in conflict with or who pushes your buttons.

When you write about yourself from another perspective, you will learn more about how others see you. And when you write about others you will learn more about the way you see yourself.

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## **9. Captured Moment**

A captured moment is a form of written description that records a moment in time in as much descriptive detail as possible. I like it to a video clip where all the details are recorded. Except as the author of this event you can also add in details that a video can't such as smells, emotions, tastes, and sounds.

**Captured moments are best written from the senses and told in story format.** This is the time to be as expressive as you can and to really focus in on details.

## **10. Writing Prompts**

When I don't know what to write in my journal I often turn to this list, which includes my favourite writing prompts.

1. What stifles my creativity?
2. What does my heart say?
3. What do I need today?
4. What does this day need from me?
5. What chapter of my life is beginning or ending?

*And the 11<sup>th</sup>...*

## **11. Gratitude \***

Keeping a gratitude journal can be helpful when trying to remind oneself of the good things in life. In your journal write down 5-7 good things about your day.

As you write, here are nine important tips:

1. Be as specific as possible—specificity is key to fostering gratitude. “I’m grateful that my co-workers brought me soup when I was sick on Tuesday” will be more effective than “I’m grateful for my co-workers.”
2. Go for depth over breadth. Elaborating in detail about a particular person or thing for which you’re grateful carries more benefits than a superficial list of many things.
3. Get personal. Focusing on people to whom you are grateful has more of an impact than focusing on things for which you are grateful.
4. Try subtraction, not just addition. Consider what your life would be like without certain people or things, rather than just tallying up all the good stuff. Be grateful for the negative outcomes you avoided, escaped, prevented, or turned into something positive—try not to take that good fortune for granted.
5. See good things as “gifts.” Thinking of the good things in your life as gifts guards against taking them for granted. Try to relish and savor the gifts you’ve received.
6. Savor surprises. Try to record events that were unexpected or surprising, as these tend to elicit stronger levels of gratitude.

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7. Revise if you repeat. Writing about some of the same people and things is OK, but zero in on a different aspect in detail.
8. Write regularly. Whether you write every other day or once a week, commit to a regular time to journal, then honor that commitment. But...
9. Don't overdo it. Evidence suggests writing occasionally (1-3 times per week) is more beneficial than daily journaling. That might be because we adapt to positive events and can soon become numb to them—that's why it helps to savor surprises.

Keeping a gratitude journal weekly for 10 weeks or daily for two weeks increase feelings of gratitude, positive moods, optimism about one's future, and better sleep.

What makes this style of journaling beneficial, is that it **brings focus on what goes right in our lives, versus the reverse**. Gratitude journaling forces one to identify and write down the positive things in one's lives that may be, otherwise, taken for granted. Therefore, we may start being more mindful about the positive sources of pleasure around us, which can shift our mood. Writing gratitude down is the key to improving our emotions. Research suggests, "translating thoughts into concrete language makes us more aware of them, deepening their emotional impact."

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