

The more often you write in your journal, the greater the chance to catch your thoughts. Take your journal with you wherever you go. If you have ten minutes waiting for a friend's class to end, write in your journal. If you are early for a meeting, write in your journal. Write last thing at night, or on first waking up. Try to gain the habit of writing thoughtfully every day, however short your entry.

Try to write some longer entries in the journal. The longer you write, the greater the chance of developing thoughts or finding a new idea you can use in your life or your work.

Even if your teacher gives you lots of writing prompts for journal entries, try to initiate your own entries, too. If you are excited by a new experience, or puzzled by a new idea, use your journal to capture your feelings and responses.

### **How Should I Write?**

Most teachers will expect you to write informally your journal. Informal writing is rather like speaking: you express the maximum number of ideas in the shortest possible time. You don't worry too much about 'correct' punctuation, or grammar, or spelling. You can use underlining, or bold, or italics to add meaning, and you may link lots of ideas together with dashes instead of periods and commas. The idea, not the presentation, is critical in journal writing.

The journal also allows you to experiment as a writer. Sometimes a poem or a dialogue where you argue or debate with yourself is the only way to express an idea. Draw a detailed picture one day. Take a risk!

### **What Should I Write About?**

Your teacher may assign a subject for at least some of your journal entries. Explore the world around you to find inspiration to complete the remainder. Many everyday activities stimulate vivid journal entries.

#### **Observation**

If you see something interesting, beautiful, amusing or (add the adjective of your choice) try to capture it in language in your journal. Observation entries help with your academic work: scientists, for example, use detailed observation to test their theories. Set yourself an observation task. Describe everything on your desk and explore each item's meaning for you. Observe for fifteen minutes the people who sit near you in the Johnson Center.

#### **Questions**

Use your journal to formulate and record questions that are important to you. Think about questions you have about your academic work, about your personal life or values, about items you read in the newspaper or in the books for one of your classes. Think about what you need to know as a human being in its first semester in college. Don't worry about providing all the answers. Let your own questions flow.

#### **Speculation**

Think on paper about the meaning of stories, facts, readings, encounters, patterns you observe, conversations you take part in, movies you see, songs you listen to, treasures you have accumulated. Ask yourself "What if?" and "Why?"

#### **Self-Awareness**

Think about who you are and what you stand for. How do you resemble others of your generation or others in your family? And how do you differ? What values are most important to you? What values are changing for you? Where do you stand on ethical or political debates like the rationing of health care or the control of guns? Who influences you? Or whom do you influence?

#### **Digression**

Let your writing lead your thinking. You start off writing about your family and find yourself composing sentence after sentence about your favorite song. Allow yourself to drift off the ostensible subject of your entry: often you will discover the ideas that interest you most. The journal lets you explore on paper whatever comes to mind.

#### **Synthesis**

The journal provides a space for you to make connections. Put together ideas from different courses. Find relationships between ideas and experiences and cultural events. Link your learning in college to your decisions in your personal or professional life.

#### **Revision**

You can also use your journal to reflect on who you are. Read over earlier journal entries and work out how you have changed. Do you have different ideas, or new interpretations of events? Do you disagree with an earlier entry? Can you track the way in which you think and draw conclusions from what you have written? What do you learn about yourself? Try this writing prompt when you have writer's block.

#### **Information**

Most professional writers are magpies. They collect quotations, overheard conversations, postcards, photographs, newspaper articles and ideas, and then transcribe them into their notebooks. Do the same. Write down a line from a song that you love, or describe a scene in your favorite movie. Do you have a funny pet story? Or a wild photograph. Make your journal reflect you.

The study involved 48 asthma patients and 35 arthritis patients who were asked to write about the most stressful event of their lives for 20 minutes, three days in a row. A comparison group of 22 asthma patients and 21 arthritis patients completed a similar exercise, writing instead about their plans for the day. Both of the groups were evaluated at two weeks, two months and four months.

After the four month period, 47% of the patients who wrote about their feelings showed clinical improvement, while only 24% in the comparison group showed improvement. Specifically, the asthma patients who wrote about a stressful life event had a 19% increase in lung function (there was no change in the comparison group). The arthritis patients who wrote about a stressful life event showed an average of 28% improvement in the severity of their illness (again, the comparison group showed no change).

Researchers still say it is unclear why this exercise produces positive health results, but they do cite a previous study done on healthy participants. Those in good health completed the same exercise and while they found it upsetting, they did have improvements in things like heart rate, blood pressure and immune function. The study of writing down one's feelings for those with chronic health conditions is the first one of its kind. It is hypothesized that writing about a stressful event may help change the way the event was originally handled, thereby increasing the ease with which new stressful events are handled.

Time will tell how long the health boost will last for those in the study group and if these results will apply for those with other chronic conditions. It does seem amazing that the exercise took a total of only 60 minutes and produced such dramatic results. This research certainly suggests that it might be health-wise for each of us to take a few minutes to write down a few stressful feelings – and begin to feel better

1. Read a book of your choice.
2. After you are finished reading the book, or at any time while you are still reading the book, find a diary or notebook and a pen.
3. Write down your thoughts and feelings about what you are reading and how it relates to your life.

#### **Tips:**

1. Keep your book journal in a private place.

2. Read through previous entries to remember how you felt or reacted to a particular book.
3. Write in the journal on a regular basis.
4. Write entries that are as lengthy as you wish.

**What You Need:**

Books	<a href="#">Info/Shop</a>
Notebook	<a href="#">Info/Shop</a>
Pen	<a href="#">Info/Shop</a>

The first step in creating a journal is having some tips and tricks to help you start out.

- 1) Don't be concerned with grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. Write so that you get your thoughts out as quickly as possible.
- 2) Write for yourself and no one else. This is your journal. Don't try and be another Anne Frank.
- 3) Write as often as you can. Don't feel pressured to write on a daily basis, but the more often you can, the better.
- 4) You may want to carry your journal with you wherever you go, that way you can write whenever you need to, and not have the thought be lost by the time you get the chance to finally write it.
- 5) Write down whatever you feel is important. If you like to keep track of your dreams, have a special place to write down your nightly dreams. Or do an Oprah and make "Thankful" lists (gratitude journal). This is YOUR book, and that's the most important thing to keep in mind.
- 6) Use a 3 ring binder with loose leaf paper, or if you like to type your journal, printer paper. That way you are not limited to a certain amount of pages.

Find a template you like, mix and match to create a unique spiral bound notebook journal, or design your own!

[Template 1](#)

[Template 2](#)

[Template 3](#)

Some journals help you get to know yourself better, by making you think about answers to a particular subject, remember those journals in elementary school where the teacher gave you a subject to write about? They could be used on days that were boring and you have nothing else to write about. Some examples are below, but you could always think up your own ideas!

[Examples](#)

[More Examples](#)

Finally, treat your journal as if it were a person, your very best friend who you can tell anything, but will never get mad, spread gossip, or betray you. Your journal will become your very best friend in time, and your stress level will go down, because you're getting your feelings out, but not to a person with a mouth and other friends :-)

## BEGINNINGS

**A journal is a helpful way of keeping up with our spiritual journey. A spiritual journal is different from a regular journal. It is a written record of personal reactions to spiritual matters.**

**I began keeping a personal spiritual journal several years ago, and I have found it helpful in discovering God's active work in my life.**

**I keep my journal with my Bible to record important new insights, prayers from the Bible that have been helpful to me, and meaningful passages from spiritual books I am reading. The importance of a spiritual journal is that it gathers strength in helping us with our daily spiritual life, especially if we write in it often. A journal of spiritual materials grows more powerful as it is used.**

## HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS

**Let me first suggest that you buy a journal that has a feel of importance about it. I often go to a first class bookstore and buy a journal that is made of genuine bonded leather. This type of journal has a feel of permanence to it, and it will last.**

**I have also found it helpful to include entries by date. This allows quick retrieval of materials that have previously been entered.**

A helpful way to begin a day entry is to **write a brief sentence to record and briefly describe events which are taking place in your life that day.** Describe anything which comes to your mind. State the facts recent experiences as briefly as possible and make them a matter of prayer concern.

## WHAT SHOULD I INCLUDE IN MY JOURNAL?

**Bible verses, sermon notes, or phrases that have a special meaning for you.** Explore your feelings as you study the Bible. Experiences that have been meaningful to you should be added. New awareness of God's revealing himself to you should be included.

**Quotes** from books that are meaningful to you.

Any thoughts that come to your mind. Note any **images** that touch your life. (Example: An eagle crossing the sky)

Note especially **feelings** you have. Write how you feel about events, persons, ideas, and relationships.

What **books are you reading?** Keep a list of books you read. Write phrases from these books in your journal.

Note **"anything that rings a bell in your life"** in your journal.

Every month **summarize the month.** What were key events that happened?

## HOW SHOULD I BEGIN?

***Write fast, write everything, include everything. Write from your feeling, accept whatever comes to mind, and note it in your journal.***

As you begin, ask this question: **"What is the most important thing going on in my life right now?"**

Begin with an image. "This period of my life has been like a narrow bridge."

Write all "the feelings" you have in one day.

Keep photographs, news clippings, and notes of world events.

## WHAT DEVICES SHOULD I USE?

Feelings, descriptions, **reflections (re-looking at the past)**, images, thought, and "whatever comes to mind" are what should be included in your journal. Keep lists

**of events, past happenings, or important events that have happened in your own life. Dialogue with yourself. Carry on an imaginary conversation with yourself. This can be helpful.**

**In summary, your spiritual journal is the key to developing your spiritual life. Work hard with it and your life will be greatly enriched.**

**For further information on [journal writing](#).**

Keeping a personal journal is a great way to develop writing skills, gain confidence, and organize thoughts. Writing a regular journal is also a perfect way of reflecting on educational experiences, while at the same time giving you a permanent record that may be useful in the future.

There are no rules in journal writing, but if you have no idea how to get started (or if you have trouble sticking with it) here are some things that may help.

## **Getting Started**

You need a book and pen that you feel comfortable with. You need to be excited about each moment (no matter how seemingly ordinary) because this will make you want to record things – and that's what a journal is, a record of everything that happens to you, especially your thoughts, feelings and ideas. And you need to practice – you need to write all the time.

## **Tools of Journal Writing**

**The Book:** It's a good idea to keep your journal entries in a book rather than on separate sheets of paper, which may get lost. You may choose any type of book you feel like. It can be a simple spiral notebook with pale blue lines and margins, a sketch book with good heavy paper, or a homemade book with a hand-drawn cover.

**The Pen:** For a writing utensil you should choose something comfortable and permanent (my old entries in pencil are barely readable now).

**Computer Journal Entries:** Using a computer (especially if you use one regularly) is certainly an option. It can be an easy way to keep organized, and you can keep your file on a disk if you desire privacy, but using a little book that you can carry around with you may encourage you to write more often and more spontaneously (in the car, outside etc.). Choose whichever seems to work best for you.

## **Doing It**

After you have the book (or the computer file), you need to start filling it. Set up your journal in any way you like. Don't try to write in any certain way. Just write

what comes to mind. And write as often as you like – once a day, twice a day, once every couple of days.

Find a nice place to write (you might choose the same place every day, or you might take your journal on the road with you). If you have trouble remembering to write, or finding time to write, try setting aside a certain time for it each day (maybe after breakfast, or before you go to bed).

Become a collector. Part of keeping a journal is learning to collect thoughts in one, easy-to-locate place. Copy down quotes that inspire you. Make lists of things that surprise you. Glue in clippings that particularly speak to you.

Write down your dreams. Try to write quickly and remember as much detail as you can. Draw pictures to go with them. Write poems about them.

Write about things that excite you, disappoint you, make you happy or frustrated. Write about books you've read, plays you've seen, music you've heard. Write about what you ate (or made) for dinner, or about the snow blowing past your window. Write about everything.

## **Staying With It**

The most important thing to remember when keeping a journal is that you need to write frequently. Your writing might be awkward at first, and may not seem as beautiful as the moment you are trying to record, but with practice you will get better at accurately recording the essence of your experiences. Paying close attention to detail will help. Try to write down as much as possible. Writing soon after the event while the images are still fresh in your mind will also help. Use point form to make a list of all the things you want to say, and then slowly write about all of them. Most of all, keep writing.

As someone who has been keeping a regular journal for more than ten years, I can't say enough good things about it. I have found the kinds of insights that journals provide invaluable, the improvement of my writing and communication skills noticeable, and most of all I've found the experience of filling book after book highly enjoyable.

# **Growing Down: Tools for Healing the Inner Child**

## **A Growing Down Self-Assessment**

### **Content:**

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### Exercise 1: A picture of you as a child

**Directions:** In your journal, draw a picture of yourself when you were a child. Choose a time from one to twelve years of age. In drawing the picture use a pencil, pen, or crayon. Use your non-dominant hand to draw this picture. (The non-dominant hand is the one you usually do not use for writing.) The reason for using the non-dominant hand is to stimulate the creative side of your brain which is usually not called upon when you use your dominant hand. Inner child work attempts to stimulate the creative, under-utilized and often stagnate compartments of your mind.

Now that you have drawn the picture, write your name with your non-dominant hand as the caption for your picture.

**(Do not go on until you complete the drawing.)**

Now in your journal answer these questions about yourself as a child. You can use your dominant or non-dominant hand to answer questions. But always draw with the non-dominant hand.

- ✚ What age are you in this picture?
- ✚ What was going on in your life and in your family at this time in your life?
- ✚ What are five positive descriptors of you at this age?
- ✚ What are five negative descriptors of you at this age?
- ✚ How did others react to you at this age?
  - At home
  - At school
  - In the neighborhood
  - In the community
- ✚ List five things you were ashamed of as a child.
- ✚ List five things which you did as a child for which you have not yet been able to forgive yourself.
- ✚ How visible were you as a child?

- 1. At home
- 2. At school
- 3. In the neighborhood
- 4. In the community

✚ List five feelings you felt as a child.

✚ How well were your boundaries respected as a child?

- Emotional boundaries
- Physical boundaries

✚ List five games or playtime activities you enjoyed and had fun playing as a child.

✚ What do you recall being told about yourself by your:

- Mother?
- Father?
- Siblings?
- Relatives?
- Teachers?
- Classmates?
- Neighborhood playmates?
- Playmates' parents?

✚ What positive things told to you as a child do you still believe about yourself?

✚ What negative things told to you as a child do you still believe about yourself?

✚ What ten positive messages would you have liked to have heard about yourself as a child?

To conclude this picture of yourself as a child, using your non-dominant hand and write a description of you as a little child.

## Exercise 2: A picture of your childhood family of origin

**Directions:** In your journal, using your non-dominant hand, draw a picture of your family as it was when you were the child drawn in the first exercise. Draw in all the family members, significant others, and pets present in the home who had an impact on your family life.

Now that you have drawn a picture of your childhood family, write with your non-dominant hand the family name as the caption for the picture. Also label each member of the family.

**(Do not go on until you complete the drawing.)**

Now in your journal answer the following questions about your childhood family.

✚ In *Laying the Foundation*, are described nine personality patterns in families. Any person can display one or more of these patterns in a family. In the your journal write in the names of your family members who displayed the specific personality patterns in your childhood family.

- Looking good
- Acting out
- Pulling in
- Entertaining
- Troubled person
- Enabling
- Rescuing
- People pleasing
- Nonfeeling

✚ We know that people often take on new behavioral patterns once they leave their families of origin. Which of your family members took on different behavioral patterns later on in life?

✚ How would you describe your childhood family of origin?

- Overly enmeshed (where physical and emotional boundaries were blurred)
- Overly detached (where everyone was distant physically and emotionally from one another)
- More on the enmeshed side
- More on the detached side

- A good balance of enmeshment and detachment
- ✚ What were ten rules of interrelating, communications, and dealing with feelings present in your childhood family of origin?
- ✚ Were boundaries of individuals respected or violated in this family? If violated, how were they violated?
  - Emotional boundaries
  - Physical boundaries
- ✚ Name five family secrets this family kept hidden during your childhood.
- ✚ Name five feelings you felt while living in this family.
- ✚ How did others describe your family?
  - At school
  - In the neighborhood
  - At church
  - In the community
- ✚ How visible were you and the other family members?
  - In the extended family
  - In the neighborhood
  - In school
  - In the community
- ✚ Name five things you and your family did together to have fun.
- ✚ What things happened in your childhood family of origin for which you still harbor anger and resentment?
- ✚ How is your reaction to your family of origin holding you back in your efforts to recover from low self-esteem and depression?

### Exercise 3: A picture of your childhood home's floor plan

**Directions:** In your journal, draw a floor plan of the home in which you as a child and your childhood family of origin lived. Use your non-dominant hand to draw this picture with a pencil, pen, or crayons.

Now that you have drawn a picture of your childhood home, use your non-dominant hand and write in the address of this home as the caption of the picture and label each of the rooms.

Next, with your non-dominant hand, draw in each of the family members, in the one room of the house you most remember them in. Some family members may end up in the same room. Be sure to label the names of each family member as you proceed with this task.

**(Do not go on until you complete the drawing.)**

Now in your journal answer the following questions.

✚ How many different homes did you live in as a child?

✚ Which home was your favorite? Why?

✚ Which home was your least favorite? Why?

✚ What are your best memories from your childhood home?

✚ What are your worst memories from your childhood home?

In looking at your childhood home's floor plan, can you get a better picture of the following issues? For each issue listed, describe how your picture clarifies the issues of:

✚ Boundaries in the family

■ Emotional

■ Physical

✚ Closeness of family members

■ Enmeshed

■ Detached

✚ Invisibility

■ Self

■ Family members

✚ Family rules

■ Communications

■ Interrelating

■ Handling feelings

- + Family secrets
- + Parenting of you by your parents
- + Personality patterns in the family
- + Impact of neglect in the family
  - Emotional
  - Physical
- + Impact of abuse in the family
  - Sexual
  - Physical
  - Verbal
  - Emotional

From this list of characteristics chose the ones which best describe how this home you have drawn felt for you.

- + Safe
- + Nurturing
- + A safe harbor or refuge in times of trouble
- + Supportive of your physical and emotional needs
- + Permanent
- + Reliable
- + Secure
- + Trust-inducing
- + A place you often want to return to in your daydreams as an adult
- + A place to be avoided as an adult
- + A good place to grow up
- + A sad place
- + A shame and guilt-inducing place

#### Exercise 4: Your place in the family circle

**Directions:** Put a stick person for you in this circle. The circle represents your childhood family of origin. Once you have drawn in yourself and labeled your figure, then proceed to draw in and label the other family members and include others who had a strong influence in the family, like grandparents, maids, nannies, relatives, or pets.

**(Do not go on until you have drawn in and labeled every family member.)**

In looking at your family circle, answer in your journal the following questions.

- ✚ Who of your family members held themselves outside the family circle and why did they do this? Who? Why?
- ✚ Who were you closest to in the family? Why?
- ✚ Who were you most distant from? Why?
- ✚ Who gave you the most nurturing love and acceptance in this family? How was this shown?
- ✚ How open were the lines of communication in this family?
- ✚ Who were most open?
- ✚ Who were most closed?
- ✚ How much sibling competition was there between you and your other siblings? Who encouraged this competition? To what end was this competition encouraged?
- ✚ How does the family circle clarify more issues about your childhood family of origin?
- ✚ What feelings do you have as you see your place in this family?
- ✚ What unresolved issues have surfaced as a result of completing Exercises 1, 2, 3, and 4.

#### Exercise 5: Your inner child's growing down goals

**Directions:** In your journal, draw a picture of yourself as a child - preferably your inner child whom you have for too long ignored and forgotten.

Once you have drawn your inner child, for the caption of the picture write in your name with your non-dominant hand.

**(Do not go on until you complete the picture.)**

Complete the following action statements in your journal:

- ✚ I will tell my inner child the following true positive affirmations.
- ✚ I will accept and love my inner child unconditionally because my inner child is:
- ✚ I will forgive my inner child for:
- ✚ I release my inner child from having shame and guilt over:
- ✚ I will nurture and re-parent my inner child with the following messages:
- ✚ I will engage my inner child in the following child play activities:
- ✚ I will make me and my inner child visible in the following ways:
- ✚ I will help gain respect for the emotional and physical boundaries of my inner child and myself by:
- ✚ I will open myself and my inner child to experience feelings both positive and negative and especially the following feelings with which I am almost out of touch:
- ✚ I commit myself to the goals of **growing down** to my inner child so that I will be able to heal from within and to recover from the chronic low self-esteem and depression I have experienced since my childhood.
- ✚ Your Signature
- ✚ Date

As you work through the Growing Down materials refer back to this inventory and action plan to monitor your progress in growing down and healing your inner child.