

Writing for wellbeing

There is no right or wrong, just write

Writing is an excellent skill to have in your arsenal of self help tools for those times when you are struggling with your emotions or stressful situations. The more methods you have at your disposal to help yourself at these times, the more resilient you are in your every day life.

One of the wonderful things about using writing to help yourself with how you feel is that it is so simple. All you really need is a piece of paper and a pen and you can get started.

The benefits of using writing as a method of self help include

- ❖ Understanding yourself better
- ❖ Feeling less stressed
- ❖ Falling asleep faster
- ❖ Feeling lighter
- ❖ Having more insight into yourself and your life situations
- ❖ Enjoying life more

It is really important to acknowledge right at the beginning of this journey that you do not need to be a writer in order to get benefit from writing. It does not matter if you have never done anything like this before or if you feel you are rubbish at writing. It is not the actual writing but the process of writing that holds the benefits.

There are a few simple things to consider before you start using writing for wellbeing:

- Don't put pressure on yourself - there is no right or wrong way to do this.
- Where would you like to write? - You might get a special notebook or journal to use just for writing, you might use scrap paper or you might prefer to write on a computer or iPad.
- Consider whether you would like to have the option of destroying your writing when it is complete.
- Where would you like to be when you write? - You might like to be in a cosy place at home, in the park or countryside, in a coffee shop or at the library.
- Don't write about anything you don't feel ready for - it is best to start with writing about every day issues to get used to how it feels to write about your emotions and thoughts.

You might like to try all three forms of writing that are covered in this workbook to see which you like. Each style has different benefits and uses in different situations.

Make sure to make time for the reflection questions when you have finished your writing as these are where you usually get the most insight and understanding of the issue you were writing about.

Journaling

'I write because I don't know what I think until I read what I say'

- Flannery O'Connor

Journaling is the most well known of the methods of writing for wellbeing and many people find it the easiest to get started with.

You can journal about anything. Here are some of the ways you might use journaling:

- ❖ To write about something that is bothering you
- ❖ To try to empty your head of busy thoughts
- ❖ To make sense of the day
- ❖ To make a decision
- ❖ To try to process an upsetting event

You might even choose to journal when nothing is bothering you, just to see what comes out.

When you are journaling it is important to try not to censor yourself. Don't worry about your spelling or writing neatly. Just let yourself write whatever comes to mind. Try to write continually rather than stopping to think what your next sentence would be. You might end up writing 'I don't know what to write next' or 'why am I having trouble writing about this' and that's fine, just keep going. This is called stream of consciousness writing and it simply allows the workings of your mind to flow onto paper and can often be when you get the realisations you wouldn't have otherwise had. Don't be surprised if you start off writing about one thing and it quickly leads into other things.

It can be helpful to sit down to write for a set amount of time and commit to continue writing until the time is up. Perhaps start with 10 minutes and see how it feels.

So you might choose to just write and see what comes up, write about something that is current for you such as what is suggested above, or you might choose from one of the following journal prompts.

When you have chosen your topic, set your timer and get writing!

Journal prompts:

- What would I like my life to be like?
- What am I grateful for and why?
- What are my favourite things about myself?
- What holds me back in life?
- What do I need to do more of?



Read your writing back and consider the following:

When I read this back I notice...

When I read this back I feel...

Have I been aware of avoiding anything in my writing?

Writing Letters

Writing is the best way to talk without being interrupted - Jules Rennard

Writing letters is a tool that has long been used for therapeutic purposes. Most letters that are written for this purpose are not sent to the person in question. They are intended to be cathartic and allow you to get your true feelings out on paper, without necessarily taking note of how others may feel.

Writing a letter is a fantastic tool if you feel stuck with your emotions after an argument or a hurtful situation, you feel you have unfinished business with someone or you need to express yourself to someone who has passed away. You can even use letter writing to resolve or understand conflicts within yourself.

Some examples of letters you might find useful to write are:

- ✦ Writing to someone you have had an argument with
- ✦ Writing to someone you feel has treated you unfairly
- ✦ Writing to a part of yourself - e.g. writing to the part of you that is anxious or perfectionist
- ✦ Writing to yourself in the future about your hopes
- ✦ Writing to yourself as if you are in the future to talk about the future consequences of a decision you have to make
- ✦ Writing to someone who has passed away to express what may have gone unsaid
- ✦ Writing to yourself when you feel good to read on days that feel tough to give yourself hope and courage - you might tell yourself what to do on difficult days in order to feel better.

I have even had a lady write a letter to her medical issue to describe how she felt about it and then had her write a letter back to herself, as if she was the medical issue describing what its purpose was to her.

Really you can write a letter for any reason so think about what would benefit you the most.

Once you have decided what the purpose of the letter is, just start writing. You might allow yourself to just write whatever comes to mind, and you might choose to edit it later or not at all.

Again, you can write your letter on scrap paper, on your computer or anywhere that suite you.

The process of writing the letter and reflecting on it afterwards is where you will get the therapeutic benefit. Then you can choose whether to destroy the letter, keep it safe somewhere or send it to another person. If you are thinking of sending it to another person, try to think of how it may be received and whether this will have positive repercussions for you. Remember the purpose of writing letters for wellbeing is to achieve positive effects in the way you feel.



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Life Story

Writing is thinking on paper

Writing your life story could mean writing about your whole life, writing about a portion of it or even just a particular event.

Writing about your life can be extremely cathartic and can help you to feel you can let go of parts of your life that may trouble you. Writing about your life can also help you to process events. Often if we go through a difficult event in life, we want to talk about it over and over again which is due to our mind trying to process it. Writing about it has this same positive effect.

Writing your life story is also an excellent way of using your creativity to positive effect.

There are a number of different ways to go about writing your life story:

- ❖ Write it as you remember it. Often this style of writing your life story will allow you to empty your head onto paper and is very cathartic.
- ❖ Write it in the third person as if you are narrating the events that have happened to you. This can be helpful to give you a bit of distance from events and allow you to gain some perspective.
- ❖ Write it using fictional characters and perhaps embellish on events. This requires more creativity but many people enjoy this process.
- ❖ Write your story of an event but choose to give it the ending you perhaps wish you could have had or that would have given you more peace. You may need to use your judgement here as to whether this might feel helpful for you.

When writing life stories and true events, try writing whatever comes to mind to begin with to allow the cathartic process of emptying your mind. Then you might go back through your writing and edit it or change sections of it. When writing life stories many people find they want the writing to be accurate or to perfectly reflect how they wish it to be told. In this way, this form of writing is quite different from journalling and letter writing.

Many people also prefer to keep their life story writing so you may want to factor this in to making your decision about where to write it. If however you are writing about a traumatic event, you may prefer to destroy it when you have finished.

If there is an event in your life that you feel uncomfortable writing about or don't feel ready to try to process, then please don't do it. Stick to events you feel able to write about, particularly when you are using these techniques for the first time. If you have suffered a trauma you may need further support from a trained therapist. This commonly applies to life events such as accidents, bereavements and abuse but could apply to anything that feels very difficult for you to cope with and process alone.



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