The Practice of Keeping a Journal

by Heather Carlile

Those who want mastery of themselves and quality in their lives can no longer avoid the practice of writing.

- Heather Carlile

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Articulation is central to human survival and self-determination . . . to relieve the soul of incoherence.
- Shirley Hazzard

WRITTEN RECORD: A journal or diary (both words are rooted in the Latin for "daily") is any daily account or record of occurrences and reflections from a ship's log, troubled musings, 'to-do' lists or memorable moments to the musings of people such as Winston Churchill, Anne Frank, Benjamin Franklin, Anais Nin, David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman.

SELF-EXAMINATION: One of the most useful means for emotional and spiritual self-development is the systematic use of an ongoing workbook, diary or journal. Such a journal, thoughtfully done, can provide a structure to assist us in paying closer attention to our lives and in evoking and developing our understanding of ourselves, others and our relationships.

SPIRAL-BOUND NOTEBOOK: You may like to use a hard-bound book of blank pages, etc. My favorite book for journaling or personal writing is a spiral-bound notebook with pockets in the front. I recommend that you write on only one side of the paper and use the other side for a Trump card or a space completely open for anything you choose. In our private writings, we are completely free to inscribe anything we choose including such elements as:

- Notebook Musings or Scrapbook Nostalgia
- Art, Sketches, Charts or Drawings
- Letters (whether to be sent or not)
- Dreams and Interpretations
- Descriptions of Fantasies and Meditations
- Voicing and Dialogue with Ourselves or Others
- Making Lists, Strategic Thinking or Intuitive Problem Solving.

How to Begin – Just Let the Words Formulate…

RESPECT YOURSELF: The blank page can become a challenge in itself. If you encounter resistance of some sort, notice it and get to know your thought or feeling block. Then, just put down any words you’re thinking. Sometimes, when I’m too intimidated by beginning to write in a book, I remind myself that I’m probably connecting with some vestige of self-doubt and that I need to remember that, whatever my words, they’re mine and, thus, to me, they are important.

Julia Cameron, author of The Artist's Way, assigns a basic structure of journaling via morning pages. Writing in the morning is best before you engage your intellect in activities for your day. You may choose to start with flow-writing, as Cameron names it, "brain dump."
Or you can just note the events of the previous day.

If you need a jump-start, you might list a dozen stepping stones in your life—

- turning points as a result of age, change,
- begun or failed relationships, or
- starting a new direction.

The unexamined life is not worth living.
-Socrates

Emotional Intelligence requires diligent and courageous self-examination.
-Heather Carlile
Benefits of Writing – The Power of Pioneering

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.
-Eleanor Roosevelt

When we do personal writing we are almost always in an innovative activity. Writing puts new perspective even on habitual thoughts and self-talk. Once written, there’s somehow a new view and, that form of creation pioneers new facets of ourselves.

- UNDERSTANDING: formulate and clarify our thoughts, feelings and observations
- COMMITMENTS AND COVENANTS: commit to your conscious unfoldment or growth
- VALUES: get in touch with our true values
- SOLUTIONS: help define, work through and solve problems
- CATHARSIS: harmless and effective emotional catharsis which dissipates anger, sadness, guilt and anxiety, etc.
- HEALING: ease depression or prevent illness
- CREATIVITY: encourage creative processes
- MEANING: identify causes and meanings in life events
- BLOCKS: work through emotional hang-ups or limitations
- CELEBRATIONS: honor peak experiences
- DREAMS: record and interpret dreams
- IDEAS: note and preserve bright ideas.
- GOALS: Explore the goals you want to achieve or update your current ones. You can use The Six Pathways as a guide.

THE SIX PATHWAYS: To write your goals, consider the Six Pathways to Quality of Life:
1) Financial Stability, 3) Health, 5) Friends and
2) Family, 4) Personal Accomplishment, 6) Contribution.

MAINLY: Another general first approach to improvement is MAINLY these:
M-Cleaning up a Mess: clearing a relationship, diet, job, etc.
A-Acknowledgement: paramour, children, clients, prospects, friends, etc.
I-Increase in Wealth: Financial security
N-Doing something New
L-Learn something and
Y-Yourself: do something for yourself: spa, vacation, date with spouse, etc.

By keeping a journal one is engaged in a process of individuation. The private sphere of the self starts to differentiate itself from others and from social stereotypes and where necessary stand in opposition to institutional and societal pressures.
-George F. Simons, Keeping Your Personal Journal
Write It Your Way – Journaling is Private!

It is the lure of privacy that makes a journal so important. Privacy not only of specific thoughts or actions (“I don’t want anybody to know that”) but the simpler, more complete privacy of being alone, at least for part of the day, being alone just to see what will happen, what thoughts will come. It’s the purest form of curiosity. I think even in times of stress or crisis the journal offers, through its privacy, a sense of inner freedom. This inner freedom becomes a habit, almost a reflex within the covers of the notebook.

- Patricia Hampl

CUSTOMIZE TO YOUR STYLE: Every journal is unique and personal. It reflects the individual persona and style of the writer. Allow yourself to follow your thinking and feeling and write freely. You may like to maintain formal language structure or you might rather just freely write phrases or add sketches.

WORDS TO PAPER: I hope you will journal in handwriting, but, some people find it almost impossible to write by hand and so typing works better for them. Choose any paper or book that suits you…that’s part of the self-indulgence or self-respect we express as we write!

You can insert:
- souvenirs,
- drawings,
- letters,
- lists,
- photographs or
- songs, etc.

Find your preference or allow it to unfold. Just begin at any point. Allow yourself to accept your own stream-of-consciousness and write what you think.

Looking for Answers – Writing Queries or Letters

If we had to say what writing is, we would define it essentially as an act of courage.
- Cynthia Ozick

LETTERS: Your imagination and, therefore, what you can write is limitless. For example, you can question your body when it is uncomfortable or ailing. You can question a trusted person such as a parent or mentor. You can write letters to parts of yourself, to others or to God.

HEALING: Your journal can be therapeutic. It won't judge you for your thoughts. It helps you clarify them. Writing about your challenges, physical or emotional can prompt deeper insight about what is out of balance in your life. It is a safe way to explore and/or integrate those parts of yourself you'd rather keep buried or ignore.

ROLES: If you have a role model from fantasy or history, you can imagine writing to that person and then freeing yourself to write to yourself from that person's perspective expanding your ability to think innovatively. You may decide to explore your twelve personal archetypes and get to know them through written interviews.
Dimensions of Personality – *The Twelve Personal Roles*

**PERSONAL DIMENSIONS:** We often make choices, fulfill our responsibilities, contribute to our mission, etc. (consciously or unconsciously) according to typical human archetypal roles. Jungian and mythological experts such as Joseph Campbell, Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Jean Houston and Carol Pearson teach us about these parts of ourselves or our roles in life.

**TWELVE COSTUMES:** As we live through our lifetime, we can gain a wiser perspective by seeing ourselves traveling along the natural journey provided for the soul’s refinement. Each of us has a certain wardrobe available: about twelve major personal roles we may choose from. Four of these roles are universal or common to each of us: child, victim, betrayer and saboteur. Our remaining eight archetypes are unique and suited to our individual needs.

**BEHAVIOR PATTERNS:** These patterns assist us through life’s unfolding by both slowing us down and speeding us ahead. When we become conscious of our patterns, we move into living life as an art…thoughts, feelings, words, and interactions become choices rather than defaults. You may identify these archetypes so you may know some of the ‘characters’ you have chosen to play or use as you become intimate with yourself and your life.

**SIX BASIC:** First you can familiarize yourself with how the four universal roles appear in you: child, victim, betrayer and saboteur. Often you may identify your two earliest archetypal roles in 1) your childhood role model and 2) your Enneatype. 1) Recalling your favorite fairy tale, story character, hero on television or in movies, etc. from childhood determines your first archetype. Sometimes there will be more than one and the synthesis usually forms a familiar pattern. 2) The second, and, I believe, your basic default role, is your Enneatype -- the personality formed through your response to the adult role models in your childhood.

**SIX MORE:** The other six relate to various aspects of your life such as: relationships (mother/father, sister/brother, lover/spouse/partner etc.), career/mission, artistic or creative styles, how you relate in groups, which role you need to learn, etc.

**Steps to Identify Your Different Roles in Life**

**Identify the Archetype/Role/Behavior Pattern:** There are thousands of archetypes. As you begin to identify your foremost twelve, you move into a new dimension of life. You begin to re-write your life by volition, in accord with your soul’s vision. Through advancement as well as adversity you may find yourself growing more profoundly and with greater clarity.

**Write Down the Lesson:** Find stories, fairy tales that contain this archetype. Study them and you’ll see your patterns in behaviors and relationships. The frightened shadow side is strong and hooks you in. So, script it…**re-write it!**

**Re-Write Your Patterns:** Imagine in your psyche how you would like to talk to the people who evoke your four universal archetypes; how it usually works out and in what setting they usually surface. Begin to imagine different words in your head…script it differently. You know what direction is right for you. Respect your old pattern, it’s part of *your learning.*
Creative Journal Writing – Advanced Techniques

STRUCTURED JOURNAL WRITING: Ira Progoff, psychologist, philosopher, theologian, and student of Carl Jung, invented a structured journaling process. He began teaching a more advanced method in 1966 as Director of the Institute for Research in Depth Psychology at Drew University. His opinion is that “Poverty is not simply the lack of money. Ultimately, it is a person's lack of feeling for the reality of his own inner being.” He continues to help us know the larger meaning of our lives and purpose through writing about truths about relationships, careers, physical health, dreams, values and priorities.

Progoff discovered that the process of journal writing can “have the effect of stimulating the development of the person” and, to do that, requires “a method for actively extending life experience.” He modeled the Intensive Journal “after the process of inner continuity and growth” he studied in creative people. He found that “the essential process, the fluidity of the inner movement” gives constructive results.

Intensive Journaling – Progoff’s Four Elements

To expand your benefits, use Dr. Progoff's method of dividing a binder into sections:

1. Life/Time
2. Dialogue
3. Depth
4. Meaning

1. LIFE/TIME: In this section of the binder, focus on your perception of the passage of time, your chronicle of daily events. This can be an elaboration on your daily calendar with your observations and feelings added to color the record of your day.

2. INNER DIALOGUE: Discovering internal elusive threads and intimations of truth can be unusually deepened through using a journal for inner dialogue. You can make connections between the various aspects of yourself. You may dialogue with other persons, with an aspect of yourself (such as your heart, your body, your inner wisdom, yourself as an elder or as a child), with ideas, things or events.

3. DEPTH: Information from your unconscious belongs in the Depth section. This would include images from dreams, guided imagery, visualization or meditation.

4. MEANING: This section gives you a place to write about your beliefs, your values and how they are reflected in your experiences. Here you can preserve realizations that stand out when you learn or observe or integrate something new.

*Ira Progoff on The Intensive Journal:
It needed to be an instrument that could reflect the inner movement of each life within its own terms. It should have ample room therefore for all the various aspects, fluctuation, and transformations contained in a human existence. It should provide the context and the mechanisms that would enable a person by working it to identify, in the midst of the cycles and transitions of his life, his underlying direction and potentiality.*

*There are actually 35 divisions taught for the Ira Progoff Journaling Intensive (see appendix).*
Basic Guidelines - *Cultivating the Writing Habit*

> There's a friend at the end of your pen which you can use to help you solve personal or business problems, get to know all the different parts of yourself, explore your creativity, heal your relationships, develop your intuition...and much more.
> -Kathleen Adams, *Journal to the Self*

- Keep it confidential. Your writing is more valuable when it's for your eyes only.
- Be totally honest about your past, dreams, fears, joys, sexuality, hopes, hurts and plans.
- Write at the same time daily; morning, before you begin thinking about your day, is best.
- The basic rule is: three hand-written pages daily (first 1 1/2 are often day-to-day events).
- Write what you FEEL rather than just recording events.
- Focus on topics that worry or frighten you to lower your stress level and increase insight:
  - Why did it happen? How did it affect other parts of your life? Who else did it affect? How did it reflect who you were in the past? What would you rather do now? How does it relate to your values and/or boundaries?

**JUMP START:** Enforcing a five-minute writing sprint where you just write anything as fast as you can for three to five minutes can prime your journaling pump.

**Sentence Stems – Stimulate Your Thoughts**

Creating or listing sentence stems (A word that describes me is ____________), answering questions, or making lists provides a quick way to move deeper.

- If I accepted myself exactly as I am, I'd ________________ .
- If I didn't criticize myself or others, I'd ________________ .
- I feel jealous when I see ____________________________ .
- If I knew I could not fail, I'd __________________________ .
- My critical intellect tells me ____________________________ .
- If my sadness could speak, it would say ____________________________ .
- If I erased the beliefs I inherited, I'd be free to ____________________________ .
- If I knew all the ways of romance, I'd ____________________________ .
- If money were no limitation, I'd ____________________________ .
Queries – Question Your Inner Self

All day long the door to the sub-conscious remains just ajar;
we slip through to the other side and return again,
as easily and secretly as a cat....
-Walter De La Mare, Behold, this Dreamer! 1939

- Which people support you? Which should you stay away from?
- What are your chief internal and external obstacles?
- List five fantasy lifestyles from your dreams.
- When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?
- What 25 things would you like to do before you die?
  - What is your greatest fear?
  - Which habits deplete your quality of life?
  - What new habits could enrich your life?
- What five people are your favorite role models?

Queries - Making Lists

Making a list seems simple and not very meaningful, but listing can quickly move us to new ideas by getting below the immediate items. For example, authors Segalove and Velick

- List the real reasons you are inspired to stay alive
- List all the times you knew something but didn’t trust your intuition.
- List all the prayers, sayings, and chants you’ve been taught that make you feel better.

Perhaps you are at a point in the transition when it’s time to make some external changes. Here are a few examples give for times like this:

- List how you’d like to change your outer life right now
- List how you’d like to change your inner life right now
- List all the times you’ve fallen flat on your face
- List the major changes you feel you need to make in your life right now.
- List all the times you’ve gone off the beaten track.
- List the ways you sabotage yourself from getting what you want
- Or if you just need to amuse yourself for a break, you could make these lists:
  - List what’s in your glove compartment
  - List the fantastic pranks you’ve successfully pulled off
  - Listing as therapy…listing as fun…listing as insight: who would have thought something so “ordinary” and “simple” could be so helpful? 📝
Benefits of Journaling

1. **GOALS:** A journal will clarify your goals. As you write a few thoughts each day, your ideas about what is important, what is worthy of your life and your time will become much clearer. You’ll automatically discover what you really want in life.

2. **SIMPLICITY AND FOCUS:** A journal will simplify your life. Spending as little as 10 minutes with pen and paper describing your values, noting your achievements and giving thanks for the joys of life, will make you less tolerant of life’s distractions. Things become much simpler when you write them down.

3. **RELATIONSHIPS:** A journal will strengthen your relationships. It will give you time and the words to express your feelings, it will help you understand and be patient with your loved one’s peccadilloes, and it will teach you to love more powerfully.

4. **ATTRACTIVENESS:** A journal will make you more attractive. Socrates said, “Know thyself.” Keeping a journal will help you know yourself and express yourself more clearly, and that is amazingly attractive!

5. **COMMUNICATION:** A journal will empower you. Thinking with pen and paper forces you to eliminate fuzzy or confusing images and “laser” in on precisely the right word, the most powerful image to express yourself. Keeping a journal will make you a better communicator, and that can make you rich!

6. **TEMPTATIONS:** A journal will eliminate temptation. Some ideas sound great in our imagination, but when written on paper they just aren’t the same! It’s easy to blurt out “I hate my job!”, but writing about what it means to quit, change careers and start over will quickly result in one of two things: The temptation will go away, or you’ll start generating actual plans to make your life better. Either way, you win!

7. **HISTORY AND NOSTALGIA:** A journal affirms the reality of your life. Writing about life adds meaning and power. Journal your child’s first steps or first tooth, starting school, her first date and high school graduation adds substance to these things. A friend of mine just became a grandfather for the first time and a gave his son, the proud father, a fat 3-ring binder of notes he’d written as he’d watched his baby boy grow 25 years ago. Together they cried and laughed at the reality that life is a sacred, wonderful thing.

5. **CALMING:** A journal helps you be quiet. Journaling has been called a form of meditation. It has a similar power to quiet the mind and focus your thoughts. It even has the power to turn off the TV! It can heal anxiety, change your breathing and make you smile. What more could you ask?

*That’s why I keep a diary—because it all comes back—the details of those treasured experiences my brain would forget if I didn’t have the magic passwords in my trusty diary to trigger my untrustworthy memory.*

*Diary-keeping is memory-keeping.*

-Helen Rezatto
6. **ASSERTIVENESS:** A journal helps you speak out. Many of my articles, letters to the local paper, and letters to friends began as notes in my journal. A journal helps ideas become words, and it provides a nursery for words to grow into sentences and paragraphs, until finally they need a stage on which to express themselves. Sometimes that “stage” is a candle-lit dinner, other times it’s a protest sign or a letter to an old friend. Whatever form it takes, many of those messages would never have been born without the safety of a journal in which to grow.

7. **PLEASURES:** Finally, a journal just feels good! Using quality paper and a fountain pen or other a beautiful instrument with just the right “heft” and feel is a wonderfully sensuous, delightful experience. It will cheer you up, reduce your stress, make you smile and add to your life. Who knows, it may even improve your sex life or make you more patient with the kids! (Well, it could!)

Anonymous

We write to heighten our…awareness of life…
to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospection…
to transcend…life…to teach ourselves to speak with others,
to record the journey into the labyrinth…
expand our world, when we feel strangled, constricted, lonely…
when I don’t write I feel my world shrinking.
I…lose my fire, my color.
- Anais Nin

Journaling was the friend who
- helped me through the passion and devastation of puppy love
- gave me solace when nobody understood my dreams and goals
- wept with me when I was tortured by being caged by my first husband
- kept me intelligent in making my decisions when I could have been rash in following my heart
- preserved a record of many years as I faced my struggles to find my purpose and mission
- helped me feel, think and come to my soul’s wisdom to stand tall when a lover betrayed me
- accompanied me on airline flights, inspired my creativity and preserved my new ideas
- offered a shoulder to cry on as I grieved the loss of my first career
- listened to my ravings and howling when I was a woman alone longing for love
- was a safe ear when my outrage exploded in language unbecoming a lady
- understood my spiritual journey when I relentlessly pursued a life of virtue all alone
- celebrated with me the dreams-come-true and the thrilling opportunities along the way
- gave me permission to say my passion loudly, passionately, messily and in poetry!
- continues to reveal my depths, purity and complexity, beckoning me through the years with the continuous reminder that there is always more to know about myself and my life!
RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Baldwin, Christina (1992). One to One : Self-Understanding Through Journal Writing. Evans Publisher

Online:
http://www.journalforyou.com/
http://www.dailywriting.net
http://intensivejournal.org/index.php - this is the Progoff Intensive Journal Program (superlative)
See Google Images for Creative Journaling pictures and ideas.

Participate in a study for professor Pennebaker of UTA
The Writing Experience Project
The entire writing study will last a total of less than 30 minutes. Go to:
http://www.utpsyc.org/Write/
The Writing Experience Project is an online study that seeks to learn which ways of expressive writing may work best. A large number of previous studies have found that when people write about emotional events in their lives they tend to show improvements in physical and mental health. Although the effects are consistent, they vary from study to study. Further, no one knows which writing instructions work best for which people.
Appendix

My personal journaling is now in my registered Progoff journals (I have two!).
I sincerely commend this experience to you in the hopes that you can participate in one of
the workshops.

These are the sections in the Progoff Intensive Journal:

1. Period Log
2. Daily Log
3. Dialogue Dimension
   a. Dialogue with Persons
   b. Dialogue with Works
   c. Dialogue with Society – Group Experiences
   d. Dialogue with Events, Situations, and Circumstances
   e. Dialogue with the Body
4. Depth Dimension: Ways of Symbolic Contact
   a. Dream Log – Description, Context, Associations
   b. Dream Enlargements
   c. Twilight Imagery Log
   d. Imagery Extensions
   e. Inner Wisdom Dialogue
5. Life/Time Dimension: Inner Perspectives
   a. Life History Log
6. Remembrances
7. Steppingstone Periods
   a. Steppingstones
   b. Intersections: Roads Taken and Not Taken
   c. NOW: The Open Moment
8. Meaning Dimension: Process Meditation
   a. Meditation Log
9. Entrance Meditations
10. Spiritual Positioning
11. Inner Process Entries
   a. Connections
12. Gatherings
13. Spiritual Steppingstones
14. Re-Openings: Spiritual Roads Not Taken
   a. Mantra/Crystals
15. Mantra/Crystal Index
16. Workings

Progoff Intensive Journal Program
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