

# Phase-Mapped Journaling: Cyclical Approaches to Journaling and Lifelogging

**Phase-mapped journaling** is an approach that organizes personal journal entries around recurring cycles or phases (e.g. moon phases, seasons, biological rhythms) instead of a strictly linear timeline. Traditional diaries list events chronologically day-by-day, but a phase-based journal indexes reflections by where they fall in a repeating cycle. This could mean reviewing certain memories or goals every full moon, at each season change, or during a specific point in your daily energy cycle. The idea is to create **“time loops”** that align past memories with future intentions on a cyclic schedule, fostering periodic reflection and continuous growth. Below, we explore existing circular journaling tools (digital and analog), spiritual and biological frameworks for cyclical reflection, relevant psychology research on recurring reflection (“mental time loops”), and design concepts for visualizing journal entries in a non-linear, orbit-like interface.

## Circular Journaling Tools and Techniques



*Bullet journal example of a “Level 10 Life” wheel, an analog tool where life areas are rated in a radial chart for balanced goal-setting <sup>1</sup>. Such circular layouts inspire non-linear journaling by visualizing life domains or time cycles in a wheel instead of a straight line.*

A number of journaling methods and tools already break out of the linear format and embrace circular or cyclical structures:

- **Bullet Journal “Wheel” Spreads:** Some analog journalers use circular charts to track information. One popular example is the *Level 10 Life* wheel, where you draw a circle divided into life categories

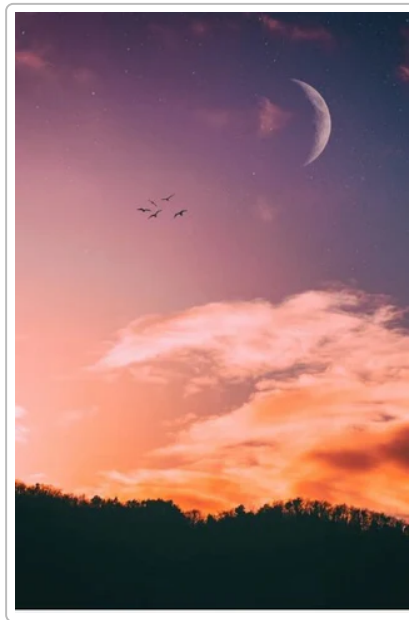
(health, career, relationships, etc.) and shade each sector to rate your satisfaction in that area <sup>1</sup>. This creates a mandala-like snapshot of your life balance, and can be revisited periodically to log progress. Variations include circular mood trackers or habit trackers drawn by hand – essentially *turning journal data into a wheel* instead of a list. Such layouts encourage seeing patterns over cycles (like ups and downs in mood each month) at a glance, rather than only in sequence.

- **Mandala and Art Journaling:** Related to the above, some journaling practices incorporate mandalas or other radial designs to represent personal journeys. Psychologist Carl Jung famously sketched mandalas daily as a way to explore his psyche <sup>2</sup>. Journaling expert Alex Mitchell notes that *“including mandalas in your journaling practice nourishes and enhances your creativity”*, inviting deeper reflection through the rhythmic, cyclic act of drawing patterns <sup>3</sup>. The circular form of a mandala can symbolically represent the *“unity and wholeness”* of one’s life <sup>4</sup>. Though mandala journaling isn’t organized by time cycles per se, its emphasis on cyclic repetition and centering oneself aligns with the ethos of phase-based reflection.
- **Digital Journals with “On This Day” Features:** Modern journaling apps introduce time-loop features to resurface past entries on a recurring basis. For example, the app Day One can send an *“On This Day”* notification that shows you journal entries from the same date in previous years <sup>5</sup>. This effectively creates a cyclic review every year on that date, letting you revisit where you were (mentally or physically) one or more years ago. By regularly comparing past and present on a fixed calendar day, users can observe growth, recall lessons, or re-read meaningful moments. Such features use the **annual cycle** as an indexing system – every entry is attached to a calendar date that will come round each year, prompting reflection and memory reinforcement.
- **Cycle-Tracking Journals:** Some analog planners are specifically designed around natural cycles. The *Cycles Journal®* by Rachael Amber is a printed journal that integrates lunar phases, menstrual cycles, and seasonal changes into its pages. It provides *“weekly & monthly cycle views”* and spaces to note intentions or symptoms in sync with those phases <sup>6</sup> <sup>7</sup>. For instance, each day you might log your mood and see icons for the moon phase and zodiac sign, tying your personal notes to those larger rhythms <sup>8</sup>. The Cycles Journal includes check-in pages for each cycle (*“prep for the next phase”*) and encourages users to *“honor your phases”* rather than treat time as uniform <sup>9</sup>. This is an example of an analog tool that explicitly embraces cyclical time: it treats each month not just as a page in a linear calendar, but as part of overlapping **biological and celestial cycles** (hormonal, lunar, etc.), around which journaling and self-care practices are structured.
- **Circular and Spiral Calendar Apps:** Even productivity apps are exploring non-linear time displays. *CircleTime* is one such digital planner that presents your schedule as a 24-hour clock dial rather than rows on a calendar <sup>10</sup>. The interface shows day/night segments, and even overlays the sun cycle, moon phase, and weather, so your day’s agenda literally *“moves with the sun, moon, and weather”* in a circle <sup>11</sup>. The idea is that life *“flows in cycles”* and a circular view feels more natural than a grid <sup>10</sup>. Users can see recurring daily patterns (like regular workouts or sleep) as loops on the circle. By visualizing time cyclically, such apps help identify phase-based habits: for example, noticing that every day at 3pm you have a slump, or every Monday your schedule starts fresh. This kind of tool blends visual design with chronobiology, essentially giving a **clock-like journal** where entries or events recur around the dial. Another concept is the *spiral timeline*: a data visualization format that *“wraps the timeline inward or outward in loops”*, useful for displaying cyclical patterns like seasons or recurring events while maintaining chronological order <sup>12</sup>. In a journaling context, one could

imagine a spiral timeline of entries, where each loop is a year or each revolution is a month, allowing the writer to see stacked cycles of similar times (e.g. every winter stacked above the next winter). Research on timeline design indeed suggests that for **recurrent datasets** (repeating events), a circular or spiral timeline can be more intuitive to read than a straight line <sup>13</sup> .

In summary, there are many tools already embodying cyclical journaling principles. From hand-drawn wheels and mandalas, to apps that resurface past dates or show your day as a clock, these techniques shift the focus from one-day-after-the-next logging to a pattern of **recurring check-ins**. They provide structure for revisiting certain topics or memories at set phases, breaking the monotony of linear entries and encouraging a more rhythmic self-reflection practice.

## Journaling with Spiritual and Natural Cycles



*Many people align journaling and intention-setting with natural cycles like the moon phases. For example, “moon journaling” involves recording feelings and goals at each lunar phase (new moon, first quarter, full moon, last quarter) to harness the ebb and flow of energy* <sup>14</sup> <sup>15</sup> .

A rich area of phase-based journaling comes from **spiritual, astrological, and seasonal frameworks**, where time is viewed as cyclical and tied to nature:

- **Lunar Phase Journaling:** One popular practice is *moon journaling*, which is essentially journaling in sync with the moon's cycle. The idea is to recognize that our moods and energy may wax and wane throughout the month, possibly influenced by the moon's gravitational pull (anecdotally as it affects tides) <sup>16</sup> . In moon journaling, you make entries or set intentions at key lunar phases:
- **New Moon:** represents a **fresh start**. This phase is often used to plant seeds of intention. Journal prompts encourage identifying what you want to begin or change in the new cycle (e.g. “What are you hoping to accomplish this month?”) <sup>17</sup> . It's a moment to release the past month's baggage and start with a clean slate <sup>18</sup> .

- *First Quarter (Waxing Half Moon)*: about one week in, challenges or obstacles to those intentions may arise. Journal prompts here focus on what obstacles you're encountering and how to overcome them <sup>19</sup> <sup>20</sup>. It's a check-in point to adjust course and commit to actions that support your goal.
- *Full Moon*: the midpoint (about two weeks from new moon) is a time of **culmination and illumination**. Emotions can run high during full moons. Journaling during full moons often involves reflecting on what has come to fruition. For example, writing "*everything you've accomplished during this lunar cycle*" and how it feels to see those results <sup>21</sup>. It can also be a time to celebrate progress or acknowledge surprises and insights gained <sup>22</sup> <sup>23</sup>.
- *Last Quarter (Waning Half Moon)*: about three weeks in, as the moon's light diminishes, the theme turns to **release and closure**. Journal prompts might ask what you need to let go of – e.g. "*What hurdles got in the way this month? How can you set them free?*" <sup>24</sup>. It's a phase for forgiveness (of self or circumstances) and learning, clearing space for the next new moon.

By following this lunar rhythm, one essentially keeps a **circular monthly journal** that resets every ~29.5 days. Every full moon you return to similar questions, creating a rhythmic refinement process: set intentions → take action → reflect and adjust → release and renew. Advocates say this can improve emotional awareness and self-care: "*journaling throughout the lunar cycle is a powerful way to understand your body's connection*" to natural rhythms <sup>25</sup>. Even outside spiritual beliefs, this periodicity simply ensures you're checking in with yourself at least four times a month in a structured way.

- **Seasonal and "Wheel of the Year" Journaling**: Beyond the moon, longer natural cycles like seasons can frame journaling themes. In pagan and nature-centered spiritual traditions, the *Wheel of the Year* marks eight seasonal festivals (solstices, equinoxes, and mid-points like Imbolc, Beltane, etc.). Some people journal on these days as anchor points for reflection. For example, the winter solstice (Yule) is the darkest point of the year, and journaling might focus on setting hopeful intentions as the days begin to lengthen <sup>26</sup>. Spring equinox might prompt writing about new goals and "planting seeds" for the future <sup>27</sup>. By autumn equinox (Mabon), one might journal about balance and what to **harvest** or let go of in life <sup>28</sup>. This creates an annual loop of introspection where each season (or festival) has a traditional theme (rebirth in spring, abundance in summer, release in fall, rest in winter, etc.). Over years, you end up revisiting those themes regularly and can see how your mindset or circumstances have evolved each time that seasonal milestone recurs.
- **Astrological Cycles**: Some journalers also take cues from astrology – for instance, noting the zodiac sign season or planetary transits. A simple version is noting the **sign of the full moon** (e.g. Full Moon in Aries vs Full Moon in Taurus might have different suggested focuses) and writing about corresponding life areas. The aforementioned Cycles Journal includes "*astrological insights*" alongside moon phases <sup>29</sup>. Other examples include people journaling during Mercury Retrograde periods (to reflect on communication and past issues) or on their birthday (solar return) each year to set intentions for the year ahead. Astrology provides many overlapping cycles (monthly lunar cycles, 12 zodiac seasons, personal planetary cycles, etc.), which can all serve as *alternative indices* for journaling entries. For instance, one could keep a "Mars cycle journal" noting motivation and energy levels over Mars' ~2-year journey through all signs, if so inclined. The key is that these frameworks prompt **recurring self-examination at defined intervals** (whenever a certain star alignment repeats).
- **Rituals and Intentions**: In spiritual journaling, writing often accompanies rituals done cyclically (new moon ceremonies, solstice meditations, etc.). For example, many do a **New Moon intention-**

**setting** journaling ritual and a **Full Moon gratitude or release** journaling ritual every month. This ties the act of writing to a larger practice of mindful living in phases. Over time, these journals become a personal record of many small “ceremonies” and how your focus shifts with each cycle.

The benefit of aligning journaling with spiritual or natural cycles is the sense of being “*connected to something greater than yourself*” <sup>30</sup>. Instead of feeling that each day is isolated, you experience time as part of a living rhythm (whether celestial or seasonal). This can combat the monotony of daily life and provide comfort; for example, during a rough period you might think “a new moon is coming soon, I can start fresh” – a built-in opportunity for psychological reset. It also encourages patience and long-term thinking: goals or changes are revisited regularly (e.g. “*every full moon I’ll check in on my monthly goal*”), reinforcing progress in increments.

In summary, spiritual/cyclical journaling uses the **macro-rhythms of nature** as a scaffolding for personal reflection. Whether or not one literally believes in lunar effects or astrological influences, the structured regularity of these cycles can keep a person engaged in journaling and self-review. It creates a looping narrative – you meet your past self from the last cycle, carry their lessons forward, and set up your future self for the next cycle, over and over, gaining wisdom each time around.

## Aligning Journaling with Biological Rhythms and Habit Cycles

Not all cycles are cosmic – many are **biological or behavioral**, and these too can be used to map out journaling or life-logging activities:

- **Circadian Rhythm Planning:** Our bodies run on a ~24-hour circadian clock that influences sleep, energy, hormones, and alertness. Instead of viewing each day as a uniform block of time, a phase-based approach recognizes *phases within the day* – for example, morning might be a peak for creativity for some, whereas mid-afternoon might be a low-energy trough. Some productivity experts suggest structuring your tasks according to these daily phases (often called chronotype-based scheduling) to optimize performance. For journaling, this could mean choosing specific times of day that align with your mental state: e.g. doing gratitude journaling at night when reflecting on the day, or doing an energetic goal-setting entry first thing in the morning when cortisol (a wake-up hormone) is high. There are apps (like **BodyClock** or **Circadian** planners) that help people organize their day around circadian peaks – for instance, scheduling deep work in the morning daylight hours and exercise in late afternoon when physical performance peaks. Using such tools can turn a diary into a *circadian log*, where you note how you feel or perform at different times of day, gradually tuning your routine to your natural highs and lows. The CircleTime app mentioned earlier is a good example: it literally shows daylight and moonlight on your schedule, aligning events with those rhythms <sup>31</sup>. Keeping a journal of mood or productivity pegged to times (morning, midday, evening, etc.) might reveal consistent daily cycles, which you can then “loop” into habit changes (e.g. **always journaling during your lunch break lull** as a way to re-center when energy dips).
- **Ultradian Rhythms and Focus Cycles:** Within the 24-hour day, research has shown we operate in shorter cycles of about 90–120 minutes, known as **ultradian rhythms** <sup>32</sup> <sup>33</sup>. During the first portion of an ultradian cycle, our alertness and physiological metrics rise, then they flag and we crave a break <sup>34</sup> <sup>35</sup>. The famous *Pomodoro Technique* of working ~25 minutes then taking a 5-minute break is a mini-cycle approach; similarly, productivity books like *The Power of Full Engagement*

recommend working in ~90-minute sprints aligned with these natural peaks <sup>36</sup>. To incorporate this into journaling or lifelogging:

- You might do quick log entries at the *end of each ultradian sprint* – for example, after a 90-minute work session, jot down what you accomplished or how you felt, then take your break. This creates a series of time-stamped mini journal entries throughout the day, effectively chunking your day into cycles rather than one continuous blur.
- You could also plan **break-time reflections**: since breaks are needed every 90 minutes or so, one break could be specifically for writing a few lines in your journal. This encourages stepping back regularly to assess progress. It resonates with the idea that “*strategic rest during the day is necessary for maximum productivity*” <sup>37</sup> – using journaling as the restful, introspective activity between intense focus blocks.
- Over longer periods, you might notice patterns like “Every day around 3pm I write that I feel fatigued and unmotivated” – indicating that is a low point in your cycle and perhaps an ideal time to pause or do a different activity. Recognizing these repeating intraday loops can help you optimize your schedule and self-care (e.g. maybe 3pm is never good for creative work, so use it for a walk or a journaling pause instead).
- **Weekly and Monthly Habit Loops:** Behavior change science shows that weekly and monthly cycles create natural checkpoints for habits. In fact, researchers have identified the “**fresh start effect**” – people are more likely to take action toward goals at temporal landmarks like the start of a week or the first of a month <sup>38</sup>. For example, one study found gym attendance spiked by 33% on Mondays compared to other days <sup>38</sup>. We can leverage this in journaling by establishing *weekly review routines*. The GTD (Getting Things Done) method famously prescribes a **Weekly Review**: once a week, go through your tasks, journal, inbox, etc., and reflect on progress. This is essentially journaling on a 7-day phase – each week at the same time, you loop back, process what happened, and plan the next week. Many people find that a Sunday night or Monday morning reflection habit helps “reset” their motivation by creating that psychological fresh start each week. Similarly, *monthly reviews* or *quarterly goals check-ins* are common in productivity systems. These recurring entries ensure that past goals and future plans line up at regular intervals, rather than drifting. Psychology experts advise that to **sustain success**, “*one fresh start isn’t enough... initiate a series of new fresh starts to maintain interest*”, using “*weekly check-ins, monthly reviews, or quarterly progress reports*” as scheduled interventions <sup>39</sup>. In a phase-mapped journal, you might have a section for each week of the year, where you write a summary or answer a set of prompt questions every week (like “What went well? What will I focus on next week?”). Over the year, you’d have ~52 entries that you can then compare against each other, effectively seeing the ebb and flow of your year on a weekly basis.
- **Habit Trackers and Loops:** Another aspect is using cycles to reinforce habits through cue and routine. For instance, if you want to build a meditation habit, you could tie it to a daily phase (say, sunrise). Your journal then becomes part of the loop: every sunrise, you meditate and then journal briefly about how you feel. The consistent timing anchors the habit. On a larger scale, consider the **annual cycle** for big goals: some people set yearly intentions (New Year’s resolutions) and then use monthly or seasonal milestones to check in. A phase-based journal could have entries every year on certain dates – e.g. every birthday, write a letter to your future self; every New Year, review the past year. This creates personal traditions and closes the loop each cycle by revisiting the same intentions. In effect, the journal itself becomes a record of iterative improvement: each year or each cycle you build on the last. It’s akin to *versioning* yourself with each loop.

- **Biological Cycle Logging:** There are also innate biological cycles beyond circadian. For example, the menstrual cycle (roughly ~28 days) has distinct phases (follicular, ovulatory, luteal, menstrual) which affect mood, energy, and cognition. Phase-based journaling could mean tracking symptoms and feelings by cycle day, rather than calendar date. This is exactly what many fertility or menstrual tracking journals do – you might see notes like “Day 15 – mood high, energy high” consistently, indicating ovulation phase positivity. Over months, patterns emerge that help in planning (knowing which phase is best for certain activities). Even for those without menstrual cycles, hormonal or mood cycles exist; some individuals report a roughly monthly emotional cycle or other biorhythms. By journaling keyed to those patterns, one can predict and manage recurring issues (e.g. a bout of low mood that seems to come every 30 days – perhaps tied to environment or other factors).
- **Chronobiology in Productivity:** Chronobiology research suggests aligning activities with when your body is primed for them – sometimes called biohacking your schedule. For example, analytical tasks might be best in your high-cortisol morning phase, and creative brainstorming during a slower phase (when the mind wanders more). Keeping a journal of your performance at different times or tracking your alertness in cycles can guide you to better alignment. There are apps like **myCircadianClock** or **Peaks** that let you log energy, food, sleep, etc., and see patterns. Integrating journaling (subjective notes) with such tools (objective data) can give a comprehensive picture of your daily cycles. Over time, your journal becomes a manual to your personal rhythms.

In sum, leveraging biological and habit cycles means you are *looping your journal entries around your body's schedule*. Instead of viewing each entry as one step on an endless march forward, you deliberately revisit points in each cycle – each day at X time, each week on Friday, each menstrual phase, etc. This can improve self-regulation: you pre-commit to reflective moments at those phases, which can reinforce learning and habit maintenance. It's a way of saying “*Let me not wait 6 months to realize I'm off track – my cycle will remind me in a week or a month to check in.*” The journal thus serves as a cyclic coach, nudging you at proper intervals.

## Psychological Time Loops and Reflective Practice

Phase-mapped journaling isn't only about external cycles; it also connects to cognitive techniques for memory and learning that involve *repetition and revisiting* over time:

- **Spaced Repetition and Memory Journals:** In educational psychology, the **spacing effect** shows that we remember information better if we review it at spaced intervals rather than cramming once <sup>40</sup> <sup>41</sup>. This principle can apply to personal insights or lessons in life as well. Some have suggested keeping a “*memory journal*” where you periodically revisit key concepts or experiences to reinforce what you learned <sup>42</sup>. For example, after reading an impactful book or going through a significant event, you could write a summary in your journal. Then set a future reminder – a week later, a month later, six months – to re-read that entry and perhaps write an update. Each time you recall the memory or lesson, it strengthens your understanding (similar to how flashcards work in language learning). This **time-loop method** prevents important insights from fading away. It's essentially personal spaced repetition: “*every time you revisit information, your brain strengthens the memory*” <sup>41</sup>. If you make it a habit (say, reviewing last year's journal entries each year, or reviewing last week's insights each weekend), your journal becomes a curated archive where knowledge and self-awareness compound instead of getting forgotten.

- **Therapeutic Re-exposure:** In psychology, especially trauma or anxiety therapies, there's a concept of safely revisiting memories to reduce their emotional sting (exposure therapy) or to reframe them. A journaling practice might involve writing about a difficult memory and then intentionally revisiting that narrative later from a new perspective. By doing this on a schedule (for instance, writing a letter to a lost loved one every year on the anniversary of their passing), you create a loop that can aid in processing grief or tracking healing over time. Similarly, positive memories can be revisited to boost mood (often called **savoring** in positive psychology). Researchers note that "*reflecting on the past or imagining the future*" uses the same neural machinery (mental time travel) and is crucial for well-being <sup>43</sup>. Journaling is a natural tool for this: it lets you "*reminisce and emotionally process*" past events and also "*plan for future scenarios*" <sup>44</sup>. By intentionally looping back to past journal entries, you engage in **deliberate reminiscence**, which can reinforce your identity ("Look how far I've come since that entry") or remind you of coping strategies that worked before.
- **Linking Past Memories to Future Goals:** A very direct realization of the phase-loop concept is seen in an AI-based journaling system called *Resonance*. This research project aimed to "*connect a user's past, present and future through memories*" in a journaling interface <sup>45</sup>. When the user logs a new memory, the system suggests a future activity inspired by those past memories, and asks the user to imagine and journal about that future scenario <sup>46</sup> <sup>47</sup>. For instance, if your past entries show you enjoyed nature and stargazing, and today you write about feeling a bit down, the AI might suggest "Why not plan a stargazing picnic with a loved one?" – prompting you to visualize and write about this future positive event <sup>48</sup>. This effectively creates a **time loop** between past positive memories and future plans. In a study, using this journaling method improved mental health metrics like mood and reduced depression, particularly when the suggestions were personal and referenced the user's own past experiences <sup>49</sup> <sup>50</sup>. The key takeaway is that explicitly tying journal entries across time – using past entries as anchors for future-oriented writing – can increase continuity in one's narrative and hopefulness. Even without AI, one could manually implement this idea: flip through old journals, find a "highlight" memory, and then intentionally journal about how you could re-create or honor that memory in the near future. It's like your past self becomes a coach for your future self.
- **Recurring Reminders to the Future Self:** Another simple practice is writing notes or questions to your future self on a schedule. For example, write a letter "To Be Opened in One Year" where you outline your current thoughts and predictions, then seal it and mark the date. When that date comes, you not only read the letter (revisiting your past mindset) but also write a response in your journal. This annual loop can be very enlightening as you see how your life actually unfolded versus what you expected. There are also services that email you your past messages on a schedule (e.g. Timehop for social media, or "FutureMe" for emails to yourself). In journaling apps like Day One, besides the daily *On This Day* feature, you can set custom reminders – though currently they don't support annual repetition in that app <sup>51</sup> <sup>52</sup>, one can work around it. The overarching concept is to treat **time as a circle in your personal growth**: regularly send "check-ins" forward (goals, hopes) and backward (reflections, lessons) along that circle. It ensures that insights aren't lost to time but cyclically reviewed.
- **Fresh Perspectives through Re-reading:** Simply re-reading old journal entries at fixed intervals is a practice in itself. Some people make a habit of re-reading last year's entry on today's date, or re-reading the journal from exactly 5 years ago whenever a major life event happens, etc. The benefit of this time-loop reading is gaining perspective – you realize patterns, or see growth, or even find humor in past worries. As one journalist noted, "*seeing a past entry reminds you not only of the event*



*but what else you were feeling at that time*”, often providing insight into how you’ve changed <sup>53</sup>. This retrospection can reinforce learning (“I’ve overcome a similar obstacle before”) and memory (“I recall more details now that I read this”). It’s like your past self becomes a guidepost at regular waypoints.

To put it succinctly, psychological research backs the idea that **periodic reflection enhances learning and well-being**. By structuring journaling in loops, you harness effects like spaced repetition (for memory), savoring (for happiness through recalling good times), and temporal distancing (seeing past troubles as the “old you” and feeling a fresh start as the “new you” <sup>54</sup> <sup>55</sup>). This can increase motivation and resilience. A journal set up with phase-based prompts is essentially a coach built on cognitive science – it reminds you at optimal intervals to retrieve memories, thus strengthening them, and to envision goals, thus making you more likely to achieve them.

## Interface and Visualization Concepts

Designing a journaling interface around cycles opens up creative possibilities that differ from the standard dated list or timeline. Imagine an app where your journal entries **orbit around a center** – perhaps the center is the current date or your core life theme, and past entries are dots on concentric circles (each circle could be a year back in time, for example). When a future date aligns with a past orbit, the dots line up – visually indicating a phase alignment. This is a futuristic idea, but there are clues from existing designs and research:

- **Radial and Spiral Timelines:** As discussed, circular timelines intuitively represent repeating cycles. A spiral timeline, for instance, can show chronology as a progression while also indicating repetition each loop. It’s *“especially effective for showing cyclical patterns – such as seasons or historical cycles – while still allowing viewers to follow chronological flow”* <sup>12</sup>. In a journal UI, a spiral could plot entries by date, with each turn of the spiral being one year. You would literally see vertically aligned entries from the same date each year on successive coils of the spring. This would make “On This Day” comparisons visual. Research by Sara Di Bartolomeo and colleagues on timeline shapes suggests that for datasets with recurring events, circles or spirals help users interpret the data more easily <sup>56</sup> <sup>13</sup>. This supports the idea that a *circular journal interface* could be more insightful for lifelogs where patterns matter (like seeing all your birthday entries around a circle).
- **Mandalas and Mind Maps:** A more free-form concept is a journal interface that looks like a mandala or mind map, with a central node (perhaps “My Life” or a key goal) and entries radiating out like branches or orbits. Entries could cluster by phase rather than sequence. For example, all your “winter” entries might cluster in one segment of the circle, all your “summer” entries in another. Or an inner ring of the mandala could be *past reflections* and an outer ring *future intentions*, connected by lines when there’s a thematic link (a bit like connecting past and future dots). This mirrors how *Resonance* tool’s diagram connected past memory nodes to future plan nodes <sup>45</sup>. Such visual metaphors make the journal feel like a living cycle rather than a flat list of pages.
- **Clock and Calendar Wheels:** Some modern UIs use clock-like visuals for daily planning (as seen in CircleTime, which shows *“your full day, 24h, visualized as one smooth timeline”* in a circle <sup>31</sup>). Extending this, one could envision a **“wheel of days”** or **circular calendar** for journaling. For instance, a digital journal might display a large circle for the year with 365 spokes (like a radial calendar). Each spoke is a day, and when you rotate the wheel to a particular day, you can see entries from that day across years. Physical “wheel” journals exist too – some planners have a circular year

tracker where you fill in each day as a slice. These are essentially static infographics, but a digital version could be interactive (spin the wheel to any date or phase and drill down into entries). This resonates with analog practices like the *“Year in Pixels”* mood tracker (a grid of colored squares for each day) but it could be circular.

- **Planetary Orbit Metaphor:** The user prompt itself described “entries orbit a center (like planets around a sun).” In a conceptual interface, the sun could represent the present moment or a core value, and each planet is a theme in your life (e.g. career, family, creativity). As time progresses, the planets (themes) revolve – when a planet comes to a certain alignment (say directly in front of the sun from our view), it triggers a prompt to reflect on that theme. This is analogous to how certain dates or phases trigger relevant journaling in phase-mapping. For example, Planet “Health” might complete an orbit every 30 days, prompting a monthly health review. Planet “Friendship” might orbit on a longer cycle, prompting you every quarter to reach out or reflect on relationships. It’s a whimsical idea, but it translates the abstract concept of cyclical check-ins into a visual, game-like system.
- **Feedback and Coherence Visualization:** One challenge in journaling is connecting past and future in a meaningful way. A phase-based design can address this by literally overlaying or linking related entries. Perhaps the interface highlights when you are “in phase” with a past goal – e.g., you set a goal six months ago to write a short story by this full moon, and now it is this full moon: the system could show a notification or symbol aligning those two points in time. If you achieved it, maybe those two entries link with a satisfying color; if not, they link with a different style, reminding you to reconcile the difference. This kind of visual alignment would create coherence in the narrative – you see threads of intention -> outcome across cycles.
- **Emphasizing Non-linear Access:** Ultimately, a phase-oriented interface should make it as easy to traverse time cyclically as linearly. Traditional journals are accessed linearly (flip page by page, or scroll date by date). A phase-mapped interface would have alternative navigation: “show me all my entries during winter over the years” or “jump to every entry made on a Monday” or “find entries when I was in the same mindset or phase of life.” Tagging or AI could be used to classify entries by phase (emotion phase, energy level, etc.) so that, for example, you could pull up all entries marked “low energy” and find patterns in what days or weeks those occur. This is akin to treating mood or mindset as a cyclic phenomenon that can be logged and then visualized in aggregate.

In conclusion, the design space for cyclical journaling is vast. By borrowing imagery from clocks, calendars, celestial cycles, and data visualization research, we can create journal interfaces that highlight **patterns over time** rather than just points in time. The goal is to help users see their personal growth and stories as loops and waves – repetitive, yet evolving – not just a one-directional arrow. This can make journaling more engaging (it’s almost like a game of connecting the dots across time) and arguably more insightful, since many life lessons do repeat until we learn them. A phase-mapped journal interface would essentially hold up that mirror, showing the user: *“Here’s the loop you’re in – and here’s your chance to close it or improve it in the next round.”*

## References

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