

Imagery-Focused Expressive Writing Section

Some Background

Imagery-focused expressive writing is a therapeutic intervention that involves writing about personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings. The goal of imagery-focused expressive writing is to help individuals gain control of their emotions and experiences, and eventually develop greater emotional awareness and regulation.

This is achieved by developing one's capacity for eliciting vivid imagery, even of neutral situations or events. The importance of developing a deep and detailed image is that it can help individuals engage more fully with their experiences. By taking the time to vividly describe a mundane scene, individuals can immerse themselves in the present moment and become more attuned to their thoughts and feelings.

It is important to avoid anxiety-provoking subjects while engaging in expressive writing. Instead, individuals should focus on more neutral, routine experiences, such as preparing and eating breakfast or taking a dog for a walk. By focusing on neutral experiences and avoiding anxiety-provoking subjects, individuals can develop greater emotional awareness and regulation, and ultimately reduce their anxiety symptoms.

Research has shown that both guided imagery and expressive writing can be effective interventions for treating anxiety (e.g., Saulsman, 2019; Sloan, 2019). Part of the novelty of our study is that we are combining these two ideas for the first time.

Reflection Questions

How anxious do you expect to feel if you try to distract yourself from anxiety?

1. Not at all anxious (1)
2. Slightly anxious (2)
3. Moderately anxious (3)
4. Quite anxious (4)
5. Extremely anxious (5)

How anxious do you expect to be if you practice imagining a neutral event for 20 straight minutes?

1. Not at all anxious (1)
 2. Slightly anxious (2)
 3. Moderately anxious (3)
 4. Quite anxious (4)
 5. Extremely anxious (5)
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Neutral Script Exercise

To create a focal script for your imagery practice, please follow these instructions carefully. Your task is to craft a short script that will serve as the center of your imagery exercises.

1. **Choose an everyday event:** Think of a simple and ordinary event that you expect to experience in the near future, such as waking up in the morning, having breakfast, or walking to work.
2. **Keep it emotionally neutral:** Choose an event that is emotionally neutral, meaning it doesn't have a strong positive or negative emotional charge.
3. **Keep it short:** Your description should be no longer than three sentences to focus on the unique characteristics of the event and avoid unnecessary details.
4. **Make it unique:** Come up with a specific instance of the event in mind. Highlight a feature that uniquely describes the event, such as a particular detail or sensory experience.

Examples:

- As I walk down the street, I can feel the pavement under my feet. The sun is setting behind me, casting long shadows across the sidewalk, and I can hear the sound of people talking and laughing in the distance.
 - I wake up to the sound of the alarm and drag myself out of bed. As I stumble to the kitchen, the smell of freshly brewed coffee and sizzling bacon fills the air. I crack some eggs into the pan and watch as they sizzle and cook to perfection.
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Writing Exercise: Important!

The purpose of this exercise is to help you shift your attention away from anxious feelings by focusing on ordinary, everyday experiences. In this exercise, we ask you to write in detail about a neutral experience without worrying about grammar or spelling. Write exactly as you imagine it, using present tense and your own perspective to fully immerse yourself in the situation.

Guidelines:

- **Describe all the little details:** What is happening? Include sensory details such as what you see, hear, smell, and touch.
- **Picture yourself in the moment:** Pay attention to your thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations.
- **Avoid extreme emotions:** Keep the experience neutral, avoiding overly positive or negative tones.

Example:

"I wake up in the morning and prepare for my workday. I gather my laptop, charger, a tuna sandwich for lunch, and a banana for a snack. I put everything in my car and start my commute to work."

If you get stuck, close your eyes and imagine the situation. Think about what would typically happen next and let that guide your writing. Create a structured story with a clear beginning and end, or let your thoughts flow freely.

Key Points to Remember

- Fully immerse yourself in the moment by describing sensory details, thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations.

- If you feel stuck or finish early, start over from the beginning and enrich the details.
- Take your time to explore the experience from all angles. Each writing cycle deepens the level of processing and helps you develop a new perspective on the experience.

Important: You will be allocated 20 minutes for this exercise. If you complete a story, begin another cycle of writing. This repetition helps reinforce the practice and amplify its benefits.

Writing About Your Experience

Your writing exercise will be timed for 20 minutes. Make sure that you are sitting in a quiet place and that you are available to concentrate for 20 minutes straight. Now, take a moment to think about what you would like to write. Hold a specific instance in your mind so that you can experience it in full detail.

When writing, you can choose to write in an organized manner or in a stream of consciousness. If you feel like you're done with writing, go back to the beginning and write again until time runs out. Your task is to write continuously during the whole 20 minutes.

When you are ready, press "Continue" to begin the timer.

Writing Focus

Following is the writing focus that you've composed:

« Insert neutral script here »

Please take 20 minutes to write about it. If you finish writing before the time is up, start over. Your task is to write continuously during the whole 20 minutes.

Here are some principles of writing to keep in mind:

1. **Pick a specific event** with a clear time and location.
2. Use **present tense**.
3. Write in **first-person perspective**.
4. Include **sensory experiences** such as sound, color, and scent.
5. Describe your **thoughts and feelings**.
6. **Keep writing without stopping** – let whatever comes to mind flow onto the page.

Follow up questions:

Did you learn anything about yourself or your fears while writing? Did it give you a new perspective or a new way of thinking about things? If so, What did you learn?

Did you notice anything surprising, or something that did not make sense in what you wrote? If so, What was it?

If you had to do a writing task like this again, would you do anything different? What would it be? (Would you focus on something else? Would you change your style?)

