

See: <https://dayoneapp.com/blog/journaling-to-heal/>

Journaling to Heal: Effective Writing Strategies and Methods

Painful experiences are challenging to work through, but journaling can help you heal.

By [Hannah Van Horn, MCMHC, LPC-C](#) May 10, 2023

[Home](#) » [Day One Blog](#) » Journaling to Heal: Effective Writing Strategies and Methods

Using journaling to heal creates opportunities for reflection, exploration, and self-growth at your own pace. Through journaling, you can examine events and feelings you feel ready to explore without anyone else pushing you. If you're struggling to heal from an emotional wound or setback, you might worry that the painful feelings will never go away. You may need time to feel like yourself again, but journaling to heal can help you on the road to recovery.

Every person experiences something painful at some point in life, whether it be the loss of a loved one, a breakup, or an unexpected difficulty. People process emotional pain differently. Allowing yourself to explore and learn from emotional pain can help your healing process. [Journaling](#) is an introspective practice that can help you to see the things you could have done differently. Regular writing can also highlight your successful coping skills.

How Can Journaling to Heal Help?

Journaling to heal provides an outlet for healing and expression that you can engage in anytime, anywhere. Journaling is a simple and inexpensive tool that can help you in the following ways:

1. Journaling provides a space for you to reflect on your thoughts and emotions. When you write down your thoughts, you can better understand them and identify patterns that may be affecting your mental health.
2. Journaling helps you gain perspective. Writing down your experiences and feelings can help you step back and see the bigger picture. It can also help you gain a new perspective on old problems.
3. Journaling can be a cathartic experience. When you [journal about feelings](#), especially related to [journaling grief](#), you may experience a release of pent-up emotions. This can be especially helpful when you are dealing with strong emotions related to grief, stress, or trauma.

4. Journaling promotes mindfulness. When you journal, you are in the present moment, focused on your thoughts and feelings. This can help you develop mindfulness, which can lead to improved mental and emotional well-being.
5. Journaling allows you to track progress. Journaling can help you track your progress over time, whether you are working towards a specific outcome or trying to better manage your mental health. You can look back on your past entries and see how far you have come on your journey toward healing.

3 Methods of Reflecting and Healing Through Journaling

It's an old but true saying: Life isn't perfect. That's actually a good thing. Difficult times allow you to learn and grow. Yet sometimes, you need a little extra help to process the imperfect moments. Talking with a friend or a mental health professional is always a good idea, but they may not always be available.

Here are three methods of reflecting and healing through journaling:

1. Identify and Understand

The first step in understanding your emotions is identifying them. You could spend years thinking you're angry at someone because of past events. Yet when you write and reflect on those events, you might discover you're not angry at all. Maybe you're actually feeling hurt. Maybe you are envious or feel misunderstood.

Sometimes discussing events with other people can be confusing. Their memories of what happened and yours could be different. This freedom allows you to reflect honestly. Having a photographic memory is not the point. Getting the lessons you need for personal growth is what's important.

As you write about events in your journal, you can break down every part of the experience as needed. Seeing the steps that led to a circumstance and examining how the situation unfolded can provide important insights.

2. Gain Awareness

How do you care for your emotional health? Do you eat a healthy diet and get enough exercise? Do you attempt to work through interpersonal conflicts, or do you try to ignore

them and bury your feelings? Some of your responses may be automatic. There may be things you are not even aware of doing.

Journaling for healing provides a safe place for examining your actions and reactions. When you journal without judging or criticizing yourself, you can become more aware of your own negative and positive behaviors. Through this method of self-discovery, you can adjust your behavior which can contribute to your healing.

3. Process and Accept

When something upsetting happens, it can feel like the end of the world. Intense feelings begin to decrease as your brain filters through the information. This exercise is the natural flow of “processing.”

Some people avoid or deny uncomfortable feelings. Avoidance doesn’t allow your brain to process. When you don’t process your emotions, it can result in feeling stuck. Your emotional reaction to a past event may be just as intense today as it was initially if you don’t allow yourself to work through feelings.

Journaling supports the need to process things emotionally. By [journaling about feelings](#) or events, you are no longer avoiding them. Confronting your true emotions helps you begin to more fully accept your reality.

Exploring Negative and Positive Emotions through Journaling

Positive emotions and optimism are often culturally idealized. Keeping a [positive outlook](#) has been shown to help reduce stress and the health risks associated with stress. But negative emotions also play an important role in overall wellness. Anger, fear, and sadness all have their place in healthy emotional expression.

While wallowing in negative emotions may be harmful, sometimes fear or sadness is the appropriate reaction to a situation. Journaling to heal includes exploring positive and negative feelings because all emotions have value. All emotional reactions can teach you something about yourself and your coping mechanisms.

Write with Uncensored Expression

To get the most benefits from journaling, writing entries without censoring yourself is important. You're free to express anger, disgust, lust, unbridled joy, and any other emotion or thought you're feeling. Journaling about feelings helps release negative emotions and gives you an outlet to examine them, but this process is harder if you aren't honest.

No one but you will see your journal unless you choose to share it. If you're having trouble writing without correcting and censoring yourself, try the [stream of consciousness writing](#) (SOC) technique. SOC is simply writing without stopping for a specific amount of time.

Start by setting a timer for 10 to 15 minutes. Put your fingers on the keyboard, and don't stop writing until the timer goes off. No pausing to think or correcting mistakes. If you feel stuck and don't know what to write, jot down nonsense words or phrases like, "I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write."

By forcing yourself to write continuously, you'll tap into ideas and memories you may not be consciously aware of. You can kick off stream-of-consciousness writing with a journaling prompt to make things easier.

Contemplate Your Strengths

Journaling to heal isn't all about looking at pain and trauma. Journaling is also an opportunity to view your personal strengths in a new way.

To help identify your strengths, consider these steps:

- Step 1: Reflect on journal entries and note how you helped yourself, someone else, or a situation.
- Step 2: Turn your strengths into [affirmations](#), such as, "I am strong" or "I am a loyal friend."
- Step 3: Fill an entire journal page with positive affirmations about yourself, and review that entry when you feel insecure.
- Step 4: Create a personal mission statement based on your strengths and affirmations.
- Step 5: Create an action plan based on your mission statement.
- Step 6: As you work on healing, refer back to your action plan. Ask yourself what steps you can take today to align yourself with your mission.

Another way journaling helps you discover or rediscover your strengths is through the simple act of recording them. When you're trying to cope with stressful experiences, it's easy to forget what transpired.

Your journal is a record of events that can remind you how well you handled a situation. Journaling can show you how far you've come in your self-growth journey. Spending more time contemplating your strengths can help boost your confidence and self-esteem.

Uncovering Trauma

Suppressing, repressing, or avoiding traumatic memories are ways your brain protects you from the full impact of painful events. If you experienced trauma when you were young or at a time when you simply didn't have the skills to process it, "forgetting" about the incident is a type of survival skill.

As you begin journaling, diving into old memories may uncover traumatic experiences you had blocked from your consciousness or have been avoiding thinking about. Suddenly remembering a painful event is understandably upsetting.

Depending on how severely the trauma affects you, it may be best to seek help from a mental health professional. A therapist can help you navigate through foggy memories and deal with the trauma.

Therapists often recommend [journaling about trauma](#) as an aid to trauma healing. Writing about an event can reveal information that you'd forgotten and lead to processing and better understanding. The process is often compared to pulling off a bandage. Doing so might hurt at the time, but wounds need fresh air and attention to heal. Journaling can be a tool that provides the fresh air and attention your emotional wounds have been waiting for.

5 Keys for Journaling to Heal

Starting is the most important step in journaling to heal. When it comes to journaling, there are no rules, but there are some suggestions.

1. Don't Share Your Journal with Others

Knowing your entries are private will help you write freely and honestly. If you really want to share with a trusted friend or therapist, consider just sharing your insights and not reading the entry itself. If you share a home with others, have a safe place to store your journal and protect it from prying eyes.

2. Write Every Day

Journaling is like other new habits — consistency is key. Most experts suggest journaling every day for 15 to 20 minutes.

Because journaling to heal can sometimes be an emotional experience, it's a good idea to leave yourself time to rebalance after journaling. Practicing some deep breathing exercises or taking a short walk can help you feel recharged after an intense session.

3. Take Time for Reflection

Writing is only the first step in the process of journaling to heal. Reflecting on and learning from your entries is the second step.

Some ways to reflect include:

- Accepting your feelings about your life experiences (the easy ones and the more difficult ones)
- Acknowledging necessary changes
- Creating actionable steps toward healing
- Developing affirmations
- Planning life goals
- Acknowledging your strengths and those of others

[Reflective journaling](#) is also a “reality check” opportunity. By looking back through old entries, you can confirm facts and remind yourself of how things actually happened.

4. Complain, but Look for Solutions

A journal is a safe place to rage, complain, and even whine about difficult situations. But, to be beneficial for healing, your journal needs to be more than that. Once you've expressed

your anger or frustration with someone or something, use your reflection skills to find solutions.

At the end of a rant, come up with at least one way you can improve the situation or a piece of context that makes you feel better about it.

5. Use Journaling Prompts

Coming up with new things to write about every day isn't always easy. [Journal prompts](#) can keep your journaling practice fun and interesting. When you use a prompt, do your best to stay on topic, but also allow yourself some flexibility.

For example, if the prompt is, "When was the last time I felt emotionally strong and capable?" but you drift into feelings of fear and weakness, that's OK. Let the writing take you where you need to go, but try to get back on topic before you stop writing.

Some prompts may seem too emotionally difficult. Try not to avoid these challenges. Writing about difficult things may be what you need to do for personal growth. Do something nice for yourself after a particularly [emotional journaling](#) session. Meet a friend for lunch, go to the gym, or spend time with a favorite creative endeavor to lift your spirits.

Writing Tips for Journaling to Heal

There are many science-backed [journaling benefits](#). Studies have shown journaling can help reduce stress and may reduce the severity of symptoms associated with trauma, depression, and anxiety.

But, sitting down with your journal with the goal of "healing" may seem awkward and might not be productive.

Instead of focusing solely on recovering from past pain, journal with these points in mind:

- Write to release
- Write to gain clarity
- Write to uncover hurt
- Write to explore possibilities
- Write to know yourself better

With these goals in mind, healing may come more organically.

3 Journal Writing Strategies for Healing

There are several approaches and [journaling ideas](#) that you may want to try. All techniques can be helpful, but you may find one or two specific methods most useful for you.

1. Free Writing

Free writing is similar to stream-of-consciousness writing. With this technique, you begin writing about anything that comes to mind. You don't need a plan or a topic. Look around your space, and start writing about a shoe on the floor or a bird you can see out the window. The subject doesn't matter.

As you continue writing, more ideas will come. Stay with it. Free writing can sometimes feel like it doesn't make sense at the moment, but if you trust the process, this kind of writing can reveal deep insights about the way you view the world and how you cope with adversity.

2. Intentional Writing with Prompts

Some days, it is difficult to come up with a new journaling topic. Journaling prompts provide a starting point when you need help.

Consider trying these journaling prompts for healing:

- How can I practice self-compassion?
- What thoughts are consistently troubling me?
- What are the positive aspects of my life?
- How am I coping with emotional wounds?
- What things bring me joy that I can make a priority?
- What am I grateful for?
- How can I be kind to myself?

Prompts may sometimes seem simplistic, but if your goal is to know yourself better and explore possibilities, you'll find they can lead to deep insights you may not have discovered otherwise. When you feel ready, explore more [journaling prompts for self-discovery](#) and [journaling prompts for mental health](#).

3. Gratitude Journaling

Keeping a [gratitude journal](#) is one of the most popular and simplest techniques for journal keeping. Taking a few minutes every day to make a note of the things you're grateful for can boost your mental and physical health.

There are various methods for keeping a gratitude journal. You might choose to start or end each day with a list of things you're grateful for. Some people write in-depth entries on a single gratitude topic instead of lists. You may develop a method of your own that feels right.

However you approach it, the point of a gratitude journal is to remember the beautiful things that happen all around you every day.

Wrapping up: Experience Healing and Personal Growth through Journaling

Journaling can lift your spirits, remind you of your strengths, and reveal patterns in your behavior that you may want to change. In all cases, what you learn from journaling will help you build a strong foundation for healing the past and stepping into the future with confidence.