



Journaling for Your Mental Health

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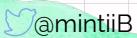
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Agenda for Today



Journaling is Rad



Different Types of
Journaling



Getting Started



Let's Make It a Habit

 @mintlib

Brittney Braxton

Software Engineer at Table XI

Ann Arbor, Michigan

On every slide!
Feel free to tweet
about this event!

 @mintiiB



I live with my husband Nick and our very adorable cat named Coltrane.

Check out my other talks on journaling



Juneteenth Conf 2020

[http://juneteenthconf.com/
sessions-2020/
journaling-as-a-dev/](http://juneteenthconf.com/sessions-2020/journaling-as-a-dev/)



Microsoft Reactor

[https://dev.to/letssketchtech/
visualizeit-workshop-2-creative
-journaling-for-technologists-
brittney-braxton-2mp5](https://dev.to/letssketchtech/visualizeit-workshop-2-creative-journaling-for-technologists-brittney-braxton-2mp5)



Journal Your Year with Appear Works

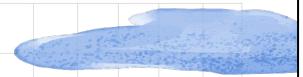
[https://appearworks.
vipmembervault.com/products/
courses/view/1072468](https://appearworks.vipmembervault.com/products/courses/view/1072468)

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The past year has been an exciting time for me to talk about journaling. Please take a look at my previous talks on journaling



I'm not a therapist disclaimer



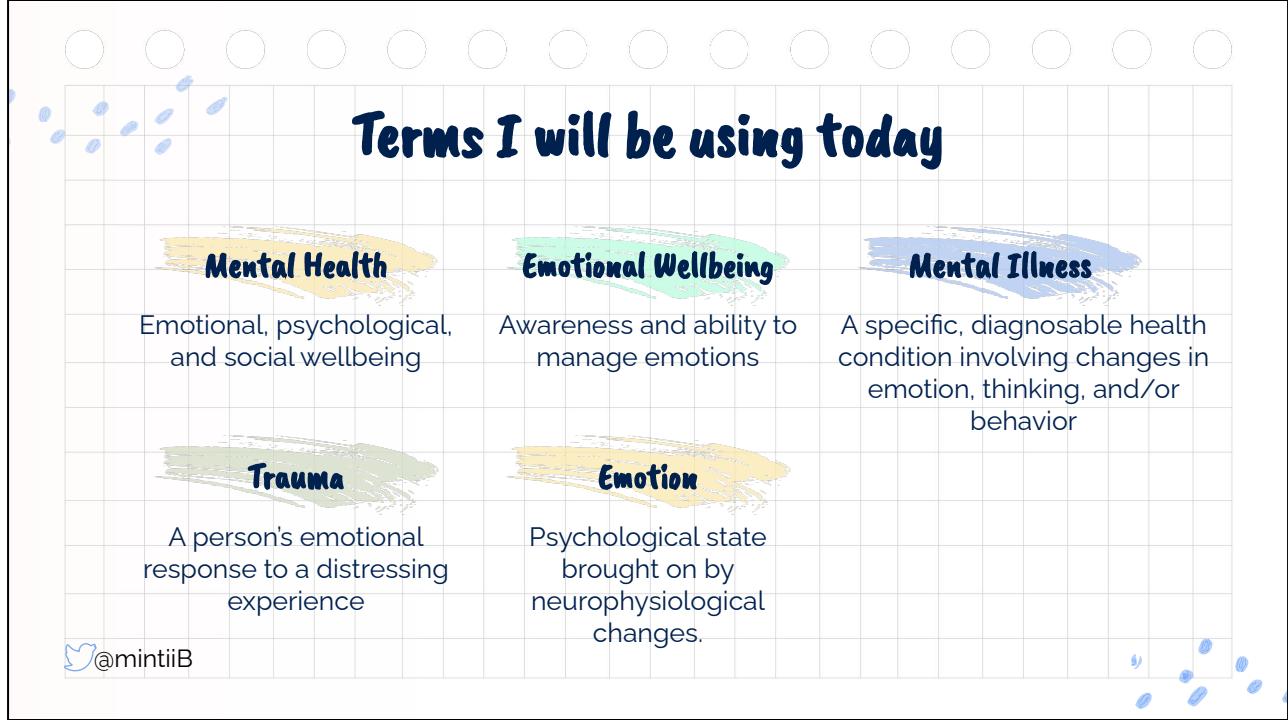
Regardless of the benefits to journaling, it should not replace appropriate medical or psychological treatments; it should be used as an adjunct to standard treatment.

I encourage you to seek guidance and help through your company provided mental health resources or through your health insurance.

If you are feeling suicidal, thinking about hurting yourself, or are concerned that someone you know may be in danger of hurting himself or herself, call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)**. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and is staffed by certified crisis response professionals.

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Terms I will be using today

Mental Health

Emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing

Emotional Wellbeing

Awareness and ability to manage emotions

Mental Illness

A specific, diagnosable health condition involving changes in emotion, thinking, and/or behavior

Trauma

A person's emotional response to a distressing experience

Emotion

Psychological state brought on by neurophysiological changes.

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Trauma -- many types of trauma, like degrees of a burn. And I think it's here where we can all reflect on the past year of the pandemic and explore the trauma we've experienced due to Covid-19.

Emotion-- a very huge topic. An emotion could be simple or complex, positive, negative.

Let's keep this high level for today. "I'm happy when... " "I'm sad when..."



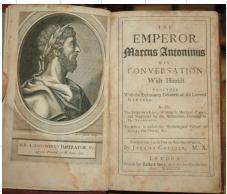
Journaling is Rad!

And why I think you should
get started... TODAY!



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Early Examples of Journals



Marcus Aurelius "Meditations"

Roman Emperor during 2nd Century AD.

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Victorian Diaries

Literacy rates ↑, paper cost ↓

Commercial diaries for sale
Published works

Super early records of journals/diaries would include docs about sales, travels, or agricultural records. Sometimes these include smatherings of other events, but that's not their pure purpose.

What today we call the *Meditations* take the form of a personal notebook, which wasn't intended for publication.

Aurelius called them "Writings To Myself." 12 books
Popular works relating to the philosophy of stoicism.

Journaling / diary keeping wasn't super popular but works are found around the world.

In the 17th and 18th century we see a huge surge in diaries benefited by the rising literacy rates and the reduced cost of paper. In England, stationary specific to this practice was first being sold.

People would publish volumes of their diaries. I'd consider it almost like social media today.

People of all sorts flocked to writing their days and thoughts.

Some published them such as Samuel Pepys (Peeps) who recorded significant events in London.

There were also an emerging literary style, the diary novel like Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights published 1847. Dracula by Bram Stoker is published 1897.

This period is when we see a lot of women begin to write. And this trend shaped the stereotype continued into modern day where diary keeping is viewed as a feminine pastime.

Modern examples include The Diary of Anne Frank, Nelson Mandela, and Mark Twain all have published works of their private writings.

Fast Forward to the 20th and 21st Century...

Interest has waned on journaling in general audience.

Still a very hot topic in research fields.



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Today we're focusing on journaling for RIGHT NOW among everything else in this world.

Neuroscience and Journaling



Parasympathetic Soother

Journaling taps in our body and mind awareness, helping with emotional regulation.



Improve Working Memory

Writing can reduce intrusive and avoidant thinking



Fall Asleep Faster

Writing to-do list for next day decrease cognitive arousal.

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Neuroscience is the scientific study of the nervous system. Lot of positive research available regarding journaling and our brain functioning.

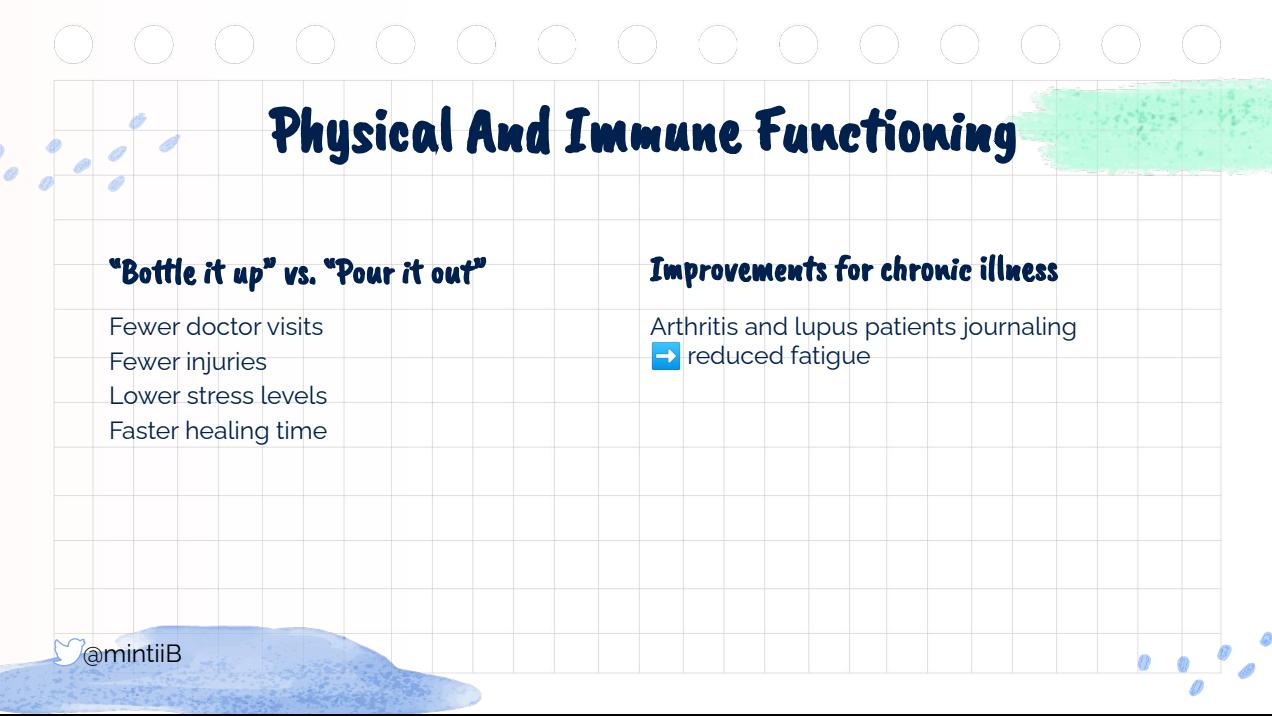
Neuroscience research-- only way we can change our feelings is by becoming aware of our inner experience

1. Your parasympathetic nerves run all throughout your body.

journaling. It has positive effect on numerous psychiatric, psychosomatic, and stress-related symptoms including depression and chronic pain. We also see these kind of reductions with meditation and mindfulness.

2. Students who were anxious about taking a math test and wrote about their fears went on to perform significantly better than those who had high anxiety and sat quietly before taking the test.

1. If you're stressed about something and avoiding it, you will have less capacity to focus on the task and do well.
 - a. We also see improvements in learning competency when people write about what they are learning, than to simply learn through rote memorization.
2. In the study of 57 young adults, researchers from Baylor University and Emory University found that writing to-do lists, rather than **writing about completed tasks**, helped people fall asleep an **average of nine minutes faster—in about 16 minutes versus 25**



Physical And Immune Functioning

"Bottle it up" vs. "Pour it out"

- Fewer doctor visits
- Fewer injuries
- Lower stress levels
- Faster healing time

Improvements for chronic illness

Arthritis and lupus patients journaling
→ reduced fatigue

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"Holding in" the upsetting situations can be very stressful! Writing it out is a form of release.

Writing about disclosed, undisclosed, and imaginary trauma all showed improvements to participants physical wellbeing.

I think journaling is something we all could use more of. In a [study conducted in New Zealand in 2013](#), 49 healthy adults aged 64 to 97 years wrote about either upsetting events or daily activities for 20 minutes, three days in a row. After a time lag of two weeks, to make sure any initial negative feelings stirred up by recalling upsetting events had passed, all the subjects had a biopsy on the arm, and photographs over the next 21 days tracked its healing. On the 11th day, **76 percent of the group that did expressive writing had fully healed as compared with 42 percent of the control group.**

Arthritis and lupus patients wrote about the positive sides to their disease reported reduced fatigue that maintained for 3 months after journaling. (Danoff - Burg et al . 2006)

Journaling and Therapy



Lots of research on mental illnesses and treatment using writing.

Typically coupled with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

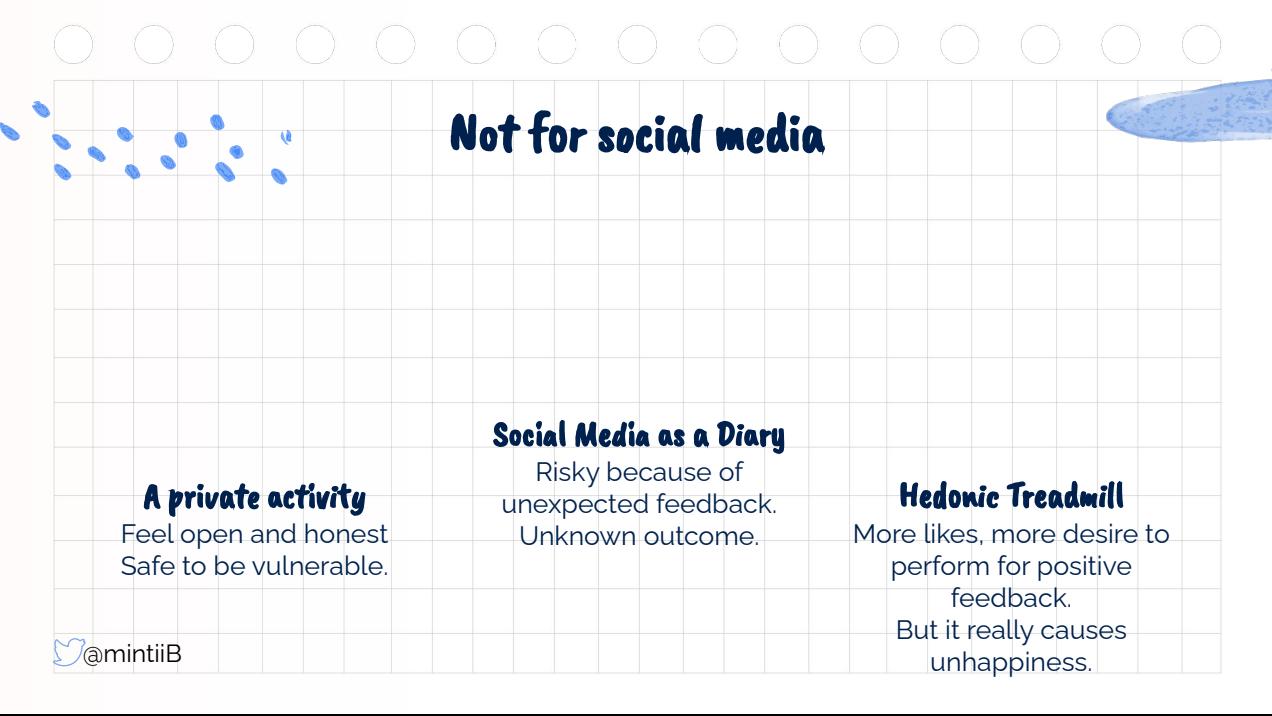


Detailed writing.

Incorporate thoughts and feelings during the situation.

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- Journaling can be helpful in conjunction to traditional therapy settings as seen in research for writing interventions for people with PTSD and couples attending therapy for extramarital affairs.
- Encouraged to provide detail and incorporate the thoughts and feelings of the situation.
- Most often, your journaling is not read by a therapist, but is a facilitator to unpacking stressful events.



Not for social media

A private activity

Feel open and honest
Safe to be vulnerable.

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Social Media as a Diary

Risky because of
unexpected feedback.
Unknown outcome.

Hedonic Treadmill

More likes, more desire to
perform for positive
feedback.
But it really causes
unhappiness.

- Journaling should be a private activity. Social Media is not an appropriate replacement or facilitator for processing difficult experiences.
 - Risky because of unexpected feedback you may receive from it.
 - Journaling is a private space where you can safely be open and honest.

Lastly, engaging in journaling in such a social forum is operating on the hedonic treadmill.

Hedonic Treadmill is a term coined by a Positive Psychologist named Martin Seligman. Positive psychology often studies about what makes humans happy. The hedonic treadmill is the idea that the more you get, the more you want. We'll discuss more about this later!

Throughout this presentation, and I'll emphasize multiple times. Journaling is for your eyes only!

Temporarily Down

Some people may feel negative emotions after writing about a particularly tough topic.

Short-term effects. Like watching a sad movie.

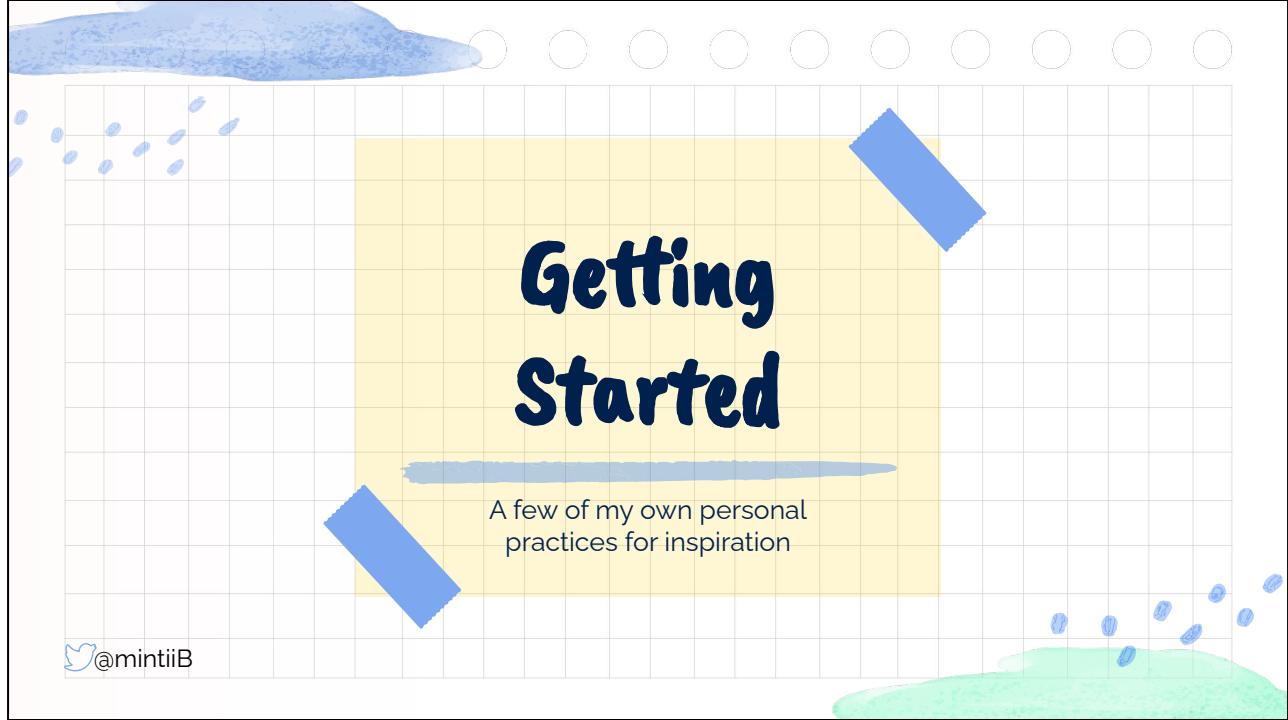
Long-term effects are still very positive.



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- Some folks may have some negative emotions immediately after writing about traumatic events. It's generally short term experience. Like watching a sad movie.
- Long term the effects can be far more positive.

Of course, if these negative emotions persist long after you've journaled, consider bringing it up with your therapist.



Getting Started

A few of my own personal practices for inspiration

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Okay, so I've discussed why journaling is awesome, with some support from the research available regarding journaling and mental health.

I will now talk about how to get started on journaling and a few tidbits on my practice.



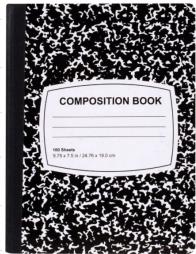
#1 Rule to Journaling

THERE ARE NO RULES!!



- Always remember there are no rules!
 - Step 1 to journaling is that there are no rules.
- A lot of guidelines and suggestions and frameworks on how to journal. But it's all about what resonates with you.

Write in what sparks joy



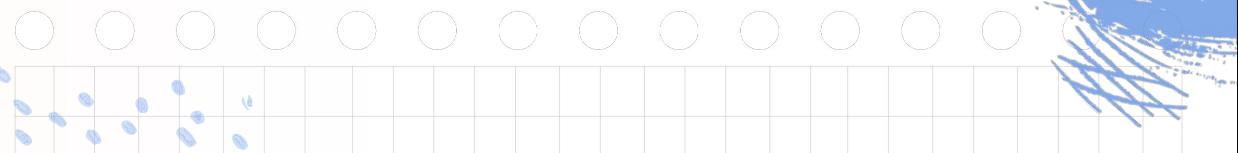
Cheapo Notebook



Fancy and Decorative

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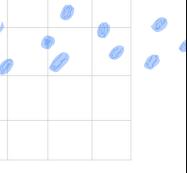
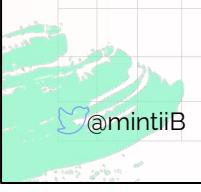
Whether it is a cheapo 50 cent notebook like the classic marbled composition notebooks, or a elaborate and fancy journal like what you may find on Etsy.



Set Aside Time



2, 5, 10, or 20 minutes of writing a day



Start with something small such as 2 minutes a day! We'll discuss more about this with making it a habit later.

Most research focused on writing for 10 or 20 minutes. Do an amount that feels good and something that you can maintain regularity.

Don't Fear The Blank Page



Bullet Points of what's happening can be a great start

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Some people stare at a blank page and begin to overthink it.

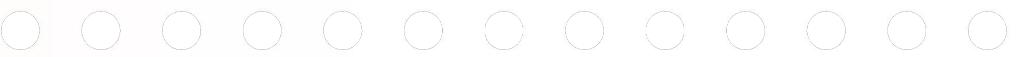
Start your journal process with a few bullet points of what's on your mind.

- Need to go grocery shopping
- I've got a presentation coming up
- I'm so tired.

You may look at those and follow up with a "Why?" And can answer each of them in more detail.

It doesn't have to be perfect. Just get started.

One journaler wrote about how he likes to scribble a few lines on a page to "deface it" just to break over the Blank Page fear.



Pen and Paper is Best

But....



If you've heard me speak on other journaling topics, this continues to hold true. Being able to write out by hand your thoughts and feelings it allows our mind to "slow down" to synthesize what's happening. This same mechanism doesn't happen as well when typing.

But...

Do whatever resonates with you!

Journal by computer

Strong positive effects



Journal by voice

Moderate positive effects



Journal by video?

Weak positive effects

**Write and save it.
Or burn it! 🔥**

Archival by your choice

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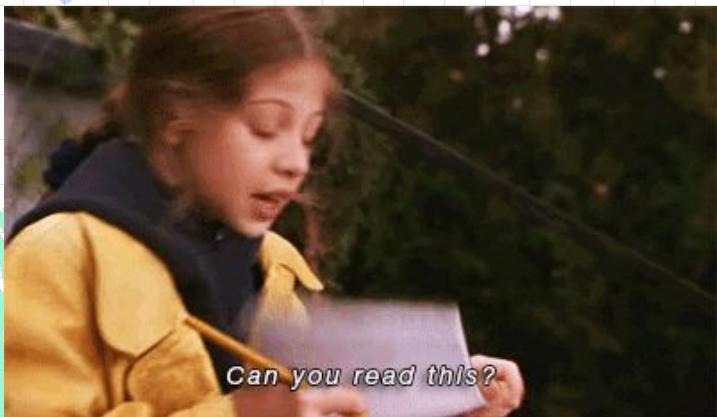
Going off of research on how we can express ourselves and benefit our mental health....

Journal by computer or mobile still has strong positive effects. Don't censor yourself or get distracted with other apps.

Using a voice memo app or something audio based can also hold moderate effects. Be sure to catalog them so it's easier to listen back to.

Just do the burning or disposal safely! 🌎

Okay so there is at least one rule...



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For the 90's kids, this is from the Nickelodeon movie Harriet The Spy. Which was also a popular children's book.

Different Types of Journaling

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Morning/ Evening Pages

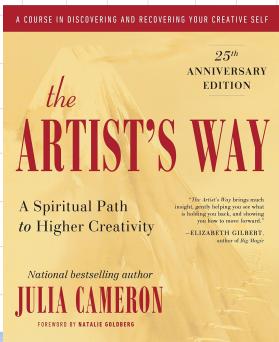


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Whenever there's a news article starting to talk about journaling, the suggestion of morning or evening pages is a popular one.
Essentially this means writing right when you wake up or right before bedtime.

Morning Pages

Julia Cameron "The Artist's Way"



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Write 3 pages everyday about anything

- No topic
- Stream of consciousness
- Doesn't have to make sense

It's a way to facilitate creativity because our minds are less guarded in the morning than at any other part of the day.



Morning Pages

Journal Prompts

- What Are The 3 Most Important Things For You To Spend Your Energy On?
- Write Down 10 Positive Affirmations About Yourself.
- If I Could Do One Thing For Myself Right Now, What Would It Be And Why?
- What Is 1 Thing I Can Do Today That Gets Me Closer To My Goal?

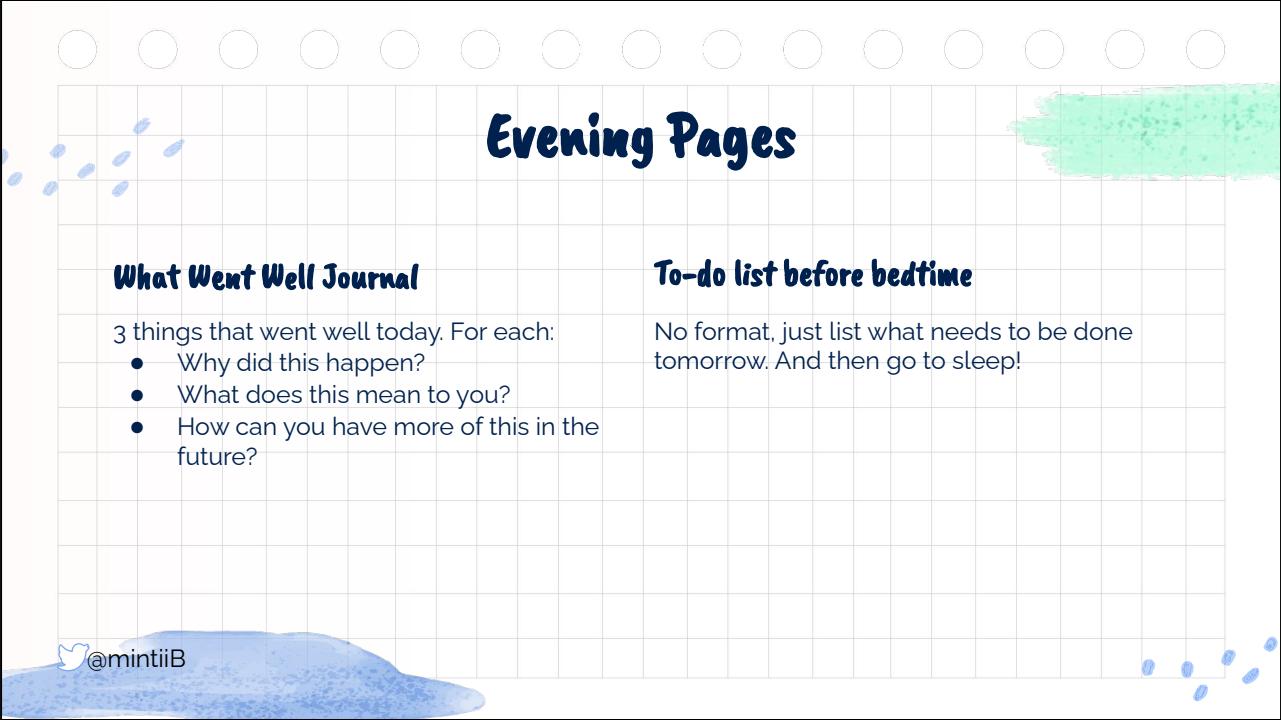
Bullet Journal Spread

- I'm Grateful for...
- Priorities for today are...
- Affirmations/ Mindful Mantras
- Self-Care today will be...
- I'm looking forward to...

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Journal prompts can be both fun and overwhelming. I like to keep a handy collection of prompts to choose from, but sometimes I can be really picky and spend more time on choosing a prompt than actually writing!

Difficult mornings like that I enjoy just making a bullet journal template and answering some prompts like on the right.



Evening Pages

What Went Well Journal

3 things that went well today. For each:

- Why did this happen?
- What does this mean to you?
- How can you have more of this in the future?

To-do list before bedtime

No format, just list what needs to be done tomorrow. And then go to sleep!

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Similarly evening pages can go off of themes like morning pages.

Through focusing on positive events and why they happen, this attempts to improve our explanatory styles and develop optimism. Supports resilience and positive mental health.



Gratitude



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Next type of journaling is gratitude. It can be rolled into a morning page, or you can simply list gratitudes alone

Who am I thankful for?

💡 Try to keep your gratitude specific and grounded.
Otherwise, it's a superfluous exercise.

What am I thankful for?

"I'm grateful for the tacos Jill made for the team"

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When and Where do I find gratitude?

"I'm grateful for the trip to the park where I saw trees blooming"



This is a topic you've probably encountered in various popular media. Writing out your gratitude has lots of research on how positive and effective it is for you.

This is another open format kind of journaling. But here's some guiding questions to get your gratitude gears going.

Keep specific gratitude. "I'm so grateful for the delicious dinner I made. Those tomatoes were delicious!" can be a more reflective practice than "I'm grateful for good food."

And it's okay for there to be days where there's little to find gratitude for.

Doing things like journaling gratitude and savoring what you have keep off the hedonic treadmill. The treadmill causes unhappiness. Thinking about what you don't have or what you don't have enough of will cause people to feel trapped and unhappy. Writing gratitude breaks the cycle.



Tracking

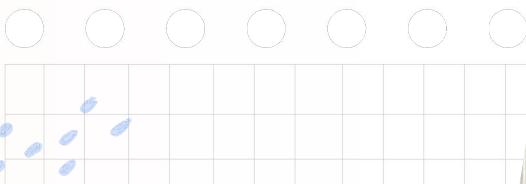
Popular with Bullet Journaling Enthusiasts

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You may see lots of tracking examples in bullet journaling. These are hand drawn or printed forms where you can mark how often something is happening.



Mood Tracker

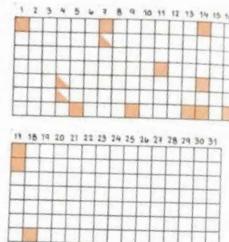


Wellness Tracker

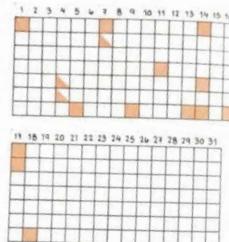
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Symptom Tracker

Sweaty Palms
↑ Heart Rate
Panic Attack
GI Discomfort
Headache
No Appetite
Waking at Night



Sweaty Palms
↑ Heart Rate
Panic Attack
GI Discomfort
Headache
No Appetite
Waking at Night



I am strong.
I can climb every mountain.
I am not alone.

@CRAFTYENGINEERD

Cardio
Group Fitness
Upper Body
Lower Body
Other Activity



Lean for Life

October Challenge
20+ workouts

Physical activity for a duration minutes or greater

- Try to go during lunch to keep

- Search 20min workout rou

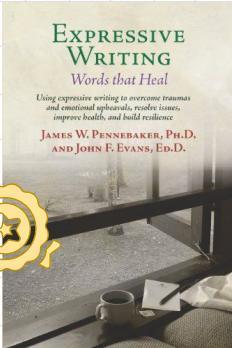
YouTube for work & home

- Get outside and enjoy the

= FUTURE CHALLENGE
November 5 minute
December 75 push
January 250 squ

Expressive Writing

James W. Pennebaker



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A lot of my research on journaling continuously circled back to the decades of research done by Pennebaker at UT Austin.

This book is full of wonderful research on the effects of journaling with even more writing exercises to explore your thoughts, emotions, and trauma. Highly recommend!

Expressive Writing

Write about trauma

Major or minor,
whatever is stressful

01

02

20 minutes

Once you start
writing, don't stop
until time is up



For your eyes only

No rules, but this
rule

4 Consecutive Days

After Day 4, no need
to continue writing

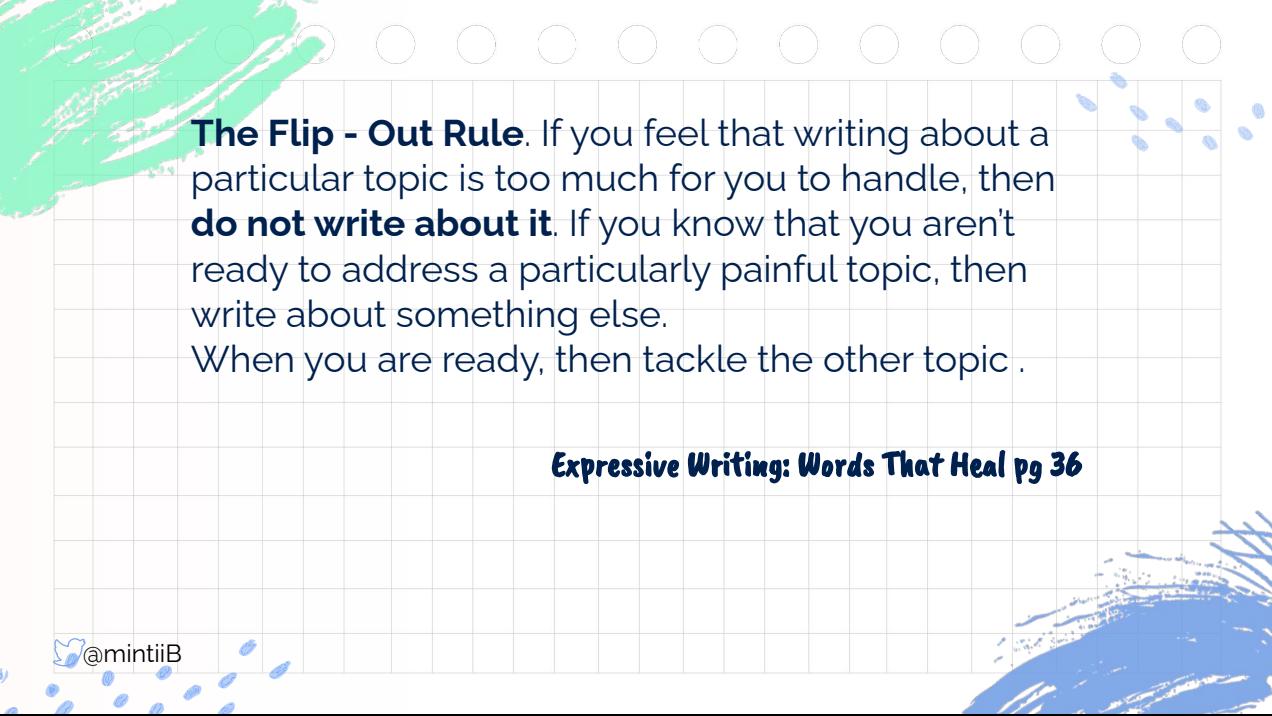
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The general instructions for expressive writing are simple:

For the next four days , you will write about a trauma or emotional upheaval that has profoundly affected your life .

You may write about the same topic for all 4 days, or maybe you'll shift the magnifying glass on various aspects throughout the week. It's even encouraged to try writing about the situation from another perspective. Generally, after 4 days of 20 minutes writing people are left with the choice of needing face and address what is happening, or try to move on.

A lot of the research I've discussed earlier actually focused on expressive writing. There are tremendous effects on your neurological, mental , physical wellbeing.



The Flip - Out Rule. If you feel that writing about a particular topic is too much for you to handle, then **do not write about it**. If you know that you aren't ready to address a particularly painful topic, then write about something else.

When you are ready, then tackle the other topic .

Expressive Writing: Words That Heal pg 36

This is an exercise that shouldn't leave you feeling more emotionally vulnerable than you did going into the writing. Skip what doesn't feel good. Discuss with your therapist what topics feel too much to handle.

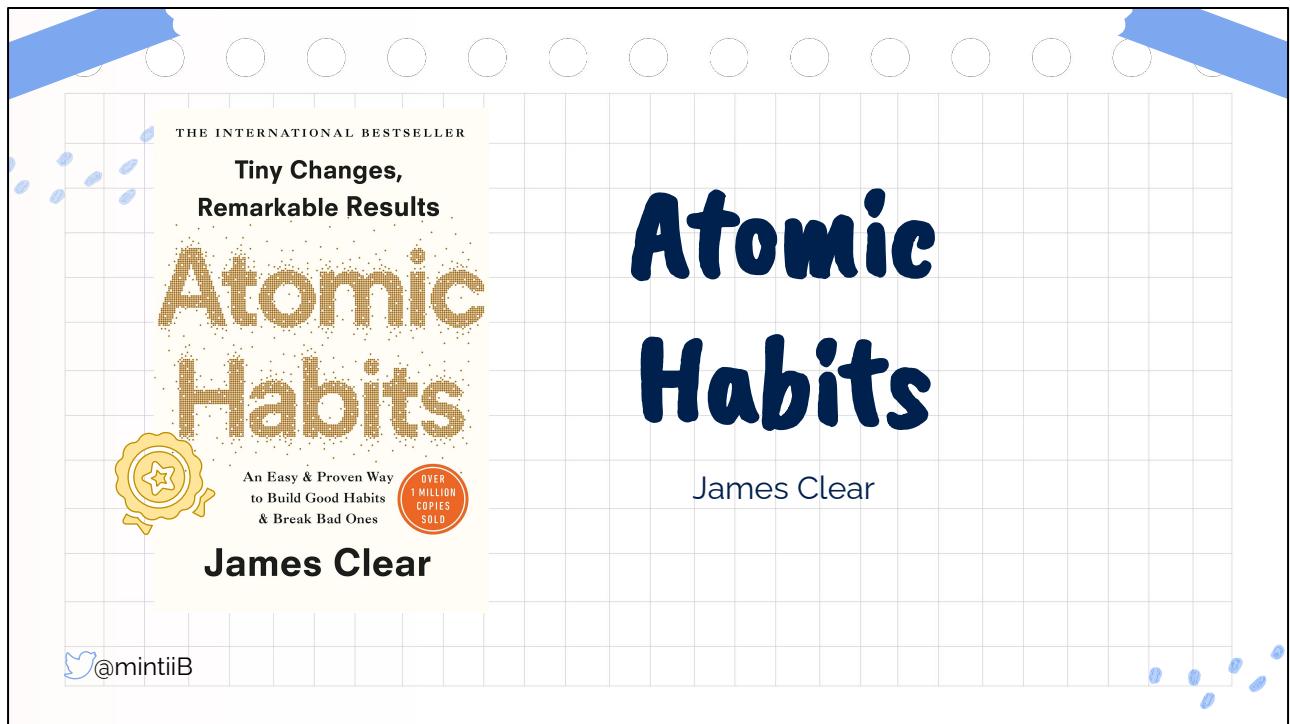


let's Make It a Habit!

Keep the Journal Streak Hot 🖋

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So we've learned about why journaling is great.
We've stepped through how to get started
And we talked about different ways we can journal.
Now let's discuss how we can take all that we know and build positive habits



Another book I'll recommend.

It goes into detail on how we can build positive habits and Break bad habits, It centers on easy to follow “laws” for how achieve solid habits. His book is heavily inspired by the research of operant conditioning from the mid-20th century. This research summarizes that specific consequences are associated with a voluntary behavior through the use of rewards and punishment.

4 Laws To Creating A Good Habit

Make it Obvious

Journal in an easy to reach location.
Do it after a current habit.

Make it Easy

Reduce friction. Minimize the steps to success.
2-minute Rule.
What can be automated?

Make it Attractive

Pair *want actions* with *need actions*.
Build motivation around journaling

Make it Satisfying

Reward completing the habit.
Use a habit tracker and "don't break the chain"
Never miss twice!

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Make it Obvious

Make it Attractive

Make it Easy

Make it Satisfying

Likewise, James Clear discusses how we can break Bad Habits by taking these laws and reversing them.

Make it invisible

Make it unattractive

Make it difficult

And make it unsatisfying



mochithings.com

<https://shop.mochithings.com/products/85344>

A fun way I've been keeping track of my habits are with these beautiful cards from a stationary store called mochithings.com

They sell 100 Day Goal tracking sheets. They've been a great reminder and motivator to have posted on the wall of my office, kitchen, and bathroom of certain habits I want to keep up. Make it obvious and make it easy!

List Of Tools And Supplies I Like For Journaling

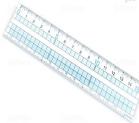
Pilot Dr. Grip 4+1 4 Color 0.5 mm
Ballpoint Multi Pen



Tombow TwinTone Double-Sided Marker



Raymay Easy to See Grid Ruler - 15 cm



Pentel Arts Sparkle Pop Metallic Gel Ink
Pen



Sakura Pigma Micron Pen - Black - 6



Bic Wite Out Correction Tape



Minimalism Art Premium Hard Cover
Notebook Journal, Dotted Grid Page



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Thanks! ❤



brittneybraxton.com/msft_journaling



linkedin.com/in/brittneybraxton



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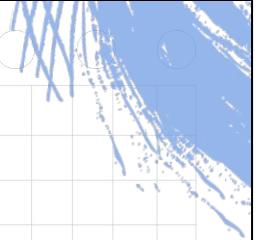
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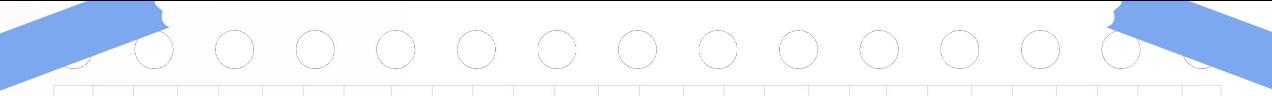
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- Pennebaker, J. W., & Evans, J. F. (2014). Expressive writing: Words that heal : using expressive writing to overcome traumas and emotional upheavals, resolve issues, improve health, and build resilience.
- Cameron, J. (2021). The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity. UK: Profile Books Ltd.
 - * all articles are listed in speaker notes.

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- <https://thedocorweighsin.com/can-journaling-improve-your-mental-health/>
- <https://www.pandemicjournalingproject.org/archive/featured>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/15/learning/12-ideas-for-writing-through-the-pandemic-with-the-new-york-times.html>
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NY Times

“12 Ideas for Writing”

For those who need more ideas! 

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- 1. Journaling
- 2. Personal Narrative
- 3. Poetry
- 4. Letter to the Editor
- 5. Editorial
- 6. Media Review
- 7. How-to Guide
- 8. 36 Hours Column
- 9. Photo Essay
- 10. Comic Strip
- 11. Podcast
- 12. Always Revise and Edit

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CURRENT EVENTS

12 Ideas for Writing Through the Pandemic With The New York Times

A dozen writing projects — including journals, poems, comics and more — for students to try at home.



In Malaga, Spain, Marcos Moreno Maldonado makes drawings that wove around his words, keeping a diary as he watched, beautified and strengthened.



By Natalie Prochnik

April 15, 2020

The coronavirus has transformed life as we know it. Schools are closed, we're confined to our homes and the future feels very uncertain. Why write at a time like this?

For one, we are living through history. Future historians may look back on the journals, essays and art that ordinary people are creating now to tell the story of life during the coronavirus.

But writing can also be deeply therapeutic. It can be a way to express our fears, hopes and joys. It can help us make sense of the world and our place in it.

Plus, even though school buildings are shuttered, that doesn't mean

Use the pages of your journal to explore your world and mind in some other modalities.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/15/learning/12-ideas-for-writing-through-the-pandemic-with-the-new-york-times.html>

We are all allowed to journal in fun silly moods along with the bad things!