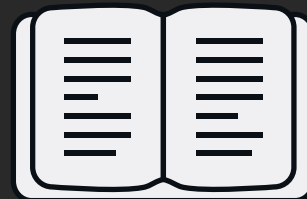


HOW TO USE JOURNALING TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

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What is journaling and why should dancers participate? **Journaling is the practice of expressive writing to help to identify emotions, reach goals, and connect with thoughts.**

Many dancers find writing in a dance journal beneficial in supporting their vision of feeling more confident while performing, and documenting their compliments, cues, and achievements. Many dance instructors use journaling to reflect on what teaching strategies have made the best impact on their students. By writing thoughts down, dancers can learn to navigate their challenges to overcome and flourish in class, rehearsal and on the stage. Since dancers tend to be silent on how to express their emotions, journaling gives them another opportunity of self-expression.



PURPOSE



The purpose of writing in a dance journal is to lift and empower dancers to improve their performances. Dancers can learn from their successes and their failures. It is a mindful practice in that the writing is **non-judgmental and accepting.** Journaling can help dancers review their experiences so they can learn from their mistakes and celebrate their successes, and can also help dancers improve self-image and attitude by reviewing those positive experiences.

HOW TO GET STARTED

The most challenging aspect of journaling is **finding the most beneficial time** for journaling, in today's busy world of school, homework, dance classes and competitions. But any private, quiet time is the right time! Some dancers draft a few thoughts at the end of the day, some write their thoughts down in between rehearsals, others set a goal for the day, such as a reminder to drink water. Getting into a habit of regular journaling will be time well spent - try some of the following ideas:



- 1 Start with five minutes of short, affirming thoughts** about classes or rehearsals that will boost confidence.
- 2 Think of a short-term goal** for improving technique, jot it down. This movement can be visualized or imaged as recommended by Eric Franklin, founder of The Franklin Method. **Using imagery is proven way for improving technique and performance, and has been utilized in both dance and sport for many years.** It is helpful to read over the notes, and deeply reflect on your goal and how to achieve it.
- 3 Think about long-term goals**, write them down, visualize them, read, and deeply reflect on the words.
- 4 Pursue a grateful attitude** and write down a list of items to be thankful for.
- 5 Was there a favorite performance in the past?** Record the favorable thoughts surrounding the delightful feelings of that day.
- 6 Review and note positive constructive cues** received in class or rehearsal, reflect on the words to boost confidence.
- 7 Document and review choreography** to be well prepared in the next rehearsal.
- 8 Review choreography and select movement words** to show/express emotion, for example, if the arms overhead “reach up, shoot up, scoop up”.

The above ideas will go a long way to:

- Support a deeper vision of improving performance
- Promote a healthy sense of control
- Create a positive mind set
- Enhance self-awareness
- Create a stronger connection with feelings

There should be no concerns about spelling or grammar because the dance journal is a personal and private reflection that no one else would be reading.



LET GO OF NEGATIVITY



Expressive writing in a dance journal can **reduce the effects of anxiety and stress by helping to detect unhealthy thoughts.** Having a bad rehearsal or performance happens to all dancers, and addressing the negative thoughts can help release anger or frustration from the bad experience. By examining the pessimistic thoughts surrounding that rehearsal dancers can learn to better cope with their feelings and release tension. Letting go of habitual self-criticism surrounding lousy rehearsals can also reduce the effects of depression.

REFERENCE PAGE

Reference pages can be kept separate with designated pages at the end of the journal. Take a moment to compose a reference page or two with a list of affirmation words. Think of a wonderful performance, what words were associated with the feelings during that performance? List affirmation words such as joy, delight, pleasing, and cheerful which can boost moods and create a supportive environment in a reference page. Reflecting on joyous occasions and moments of the compliments received after a successful solo can enhance your sense of well-being.

A reference page can also be used as a calendar for planning up-coming competitions or performances, as well as a place to list favorite stretches and strengthening exercises. If a teacher or choreographer has shared personal and empowering information about their dance history or enlightening experiences, write it down. A reference page is also a perfect place to write down a list of any health care providers that you have worked with; in case you need them again.

PRACTICALITY

Keeping a dance journal can assist dancers in organizing performance needs to stay on track:

- **Use the journal to be fully prepared**, to not forget the right pair of tights, shoes, or tiara for the competition.
- **Keep an inventory** of dance bag needs, costumes, tights, make-up, and hair items.
- **Formulate a detailed file of essentials** needed to have a stress-free successful performance such as extra music, shoes, warm-ups, first aid kit, water bottle, healthy snacks, and hand sanitizer.
- **Take the journal to the next competition** with reminders for reviewing choreography and corrective cues before the performance as a mental rehearsal.

REFERENCE

Franklin E.N. (1996) Dance Imagery for technique and performance.
Champaign IL, Human Kinetics.

CONCLUSION

Documentation and reflection can help dancers get the most out of class, rehearsals, performances, and competitions, by reducing stress and helping them be more prepared. Encourage maintaining a dance journal for the health and wellness of dancers.

