

JOURNAL THERAPY WRITING TECHNIQUES

1. Free writing.

Sit down for a predetermined amount of time, anywhere from 10 minutes to 2 hours, and write everything that comes into your head. Don't stop. If you get stuck, write, "I'm stuck, I don't know what to say next, I wonder why I'm not thinking or feeling anything right now..." etc. until you get unstuck. The idea is to keep going and not to edit or hold back anything. Don't cross anything out.

Sometimes you can pick a topic ahead of time, like "Memories," "My Family," "Things that Make Me Sad," etc. When that happens, you may find that you are feeling some strong emotions. Just go ahead and write through it even if you're crying--don't stop.

After you've finished, wait until the next day to read it. Then you can underline or circle the important parts. Some people wait until the end of a month before they reread. It becomes like a letter from your deepest, hidden self. There may be a lot of boring, silly stuff, but there will be important stuff too.

2. Lists.

Make lists of anything. Make lists of lists. For example--Emotions, Old Boyfriends, Favorite Foods, Happy Memories, Red Things, Things I'm Curious About, Important Days in My Life, The Person I Want to Be When I Grow Up--you can see that a list can be about anything. Make lists of the issues that are close to you--your parents, marriage, love, etc. These can be titles for your free-writing time. But they don't have to, necessarily.

3. Unsent Letters.

You can write letters to people that you know you will not give them. You can even write letters to the past, for example, "To My Dad When I was Five." You can write letters from other people--"To My Daughter, Love Mom." You can write letters to yourself in the past, to yourself now from the past, or to yourself now from yourself in the future--"From myself, age 35 to myself, age 15." You can write letters from the different parts of yourself--"From the Angry Self to My Parents."

4. Cued poems.

Write poems with any of the following beginnings for lines:

"Before, I used to....
But now, I..." [repeat]

"I wish..." [repeat]

"[emotion] is [color], like [description]" [repeat]

Example: "Sadness is deep violet,

Like the last hint of light in the West before darkness."

5. Portraits.

You can write a description of a person or yourself. Imagine it as a photographic or painted portrait, but include everything about the inner reality as well as the external

reality. Use drawing as a part of the portrait. Again, the drawing doesn't have to be realistic. It can be symbolic or reflecting only a part of the person whose portrait you are doing.

6. Cathartic writing.

This type of free-writing is done in the heat of emotion. When you feel very strongly, especially when you don't know exactly how or what you feel, try writing as a way of expressing the emotion. Don't censor anything.

7. Reflection.

A quiet sort of writing, reflection lets you think about something, examine it, ponder its meaning. Best done in a calm state of mind.

8. Altered point of view.

Try writing an experience from the other person's point of view. Try it from the cat's point of view, or a fly on the wall. Try it from your guardian angel's point of view. Try it from the point of view of yourself, at a wise, kind, generous age 70.

9. Dialogue.

Try writing a conversation. The other speaker may be another person, another part of yourself, yourself at another time, a place, an object, a dream. If something is bothering you, ask it why. Then listen, and write what it tells you.

10. Dream log.

Keep a notebook by your bed and record your dreams. Some will seem nonsensical or funny. Some may have a very direct meaning. Some will be messages from your unconscious mind.

11. Map of consciousness.

Instead of writing, try drawing. Draw yourself as a map, with such areas as the "Dark Sea" or the "Valley of Peace." Explore the landscape and find more and more detail.

12. Journey (guided imagery).

The word "Journal" first meant a record of a journey. Imagine yourself as on a journey through this phase of your life. Create a landscape to reflect where you are now. Put obstacles, helpers, and adventures in your way. Imagine where it is you are going. Then write it down. This journey can evolve, and you'll find many new and interesting experiences occurring as you let it grow.

These exercises can deepen your emotions, memories, and thoughts. By understanding them, and working through them, you gain control over those that are frightening or painful and put them behind you, and you learn to love and appreciate those that are pleasant and good.