

# THE JOURNALING LIFE

*21 Types of Journals You Can Create  
to Express Yourself and Record Pieces of Your Life*

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## Journaling and Its Benefits

Journaling is nothing new. Did you know that in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, journaling was not only fashionable, but very prevalent among those who were able to read and write? In fact, ladies of the European aristocracy kept journals. They documented their social engagements and personal encounters, as well as comments on fashion and politics, in their journals. Much of what is known about the early years of America is owed to the fact that we still have access to the personal journals of men like Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison. Nathaniel J. Wyatt, Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, and many others documented their explorations of the North American continent. Almost every milepost in the growth of America was described in the journals of men and women whose lives were intimately affected by these events.

In modern times, journaling has become something of a lost art although a strong case can be made for keeping a daily journal right now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The benefits of writing daily in a journal can hardly be counted! You may choose to write with a pen or pencil in a regular, notebook-style diary; a dizzying array of styles, colors, and patterns is available in stationery stores. You may sit for five or ten minutes at your computer each day and log your thoughts and feelings. (You can always print out your pages and keep them in a binder for future reference.) Either way, here are some of the benefits that journaling offers.

**Small Cost, Terrific Return.** When you approach it with an attitude of commitment and curiosity, journaling can be extremely rewarding. You can learn a lot about yourself through journaling. And it won't take up much of your time either, just a few minutes. Journaling is not a complicated activity at all; you can simply write down whatever it is you are thinking or feeling at any given time. You can vent your anger, get rid of stress, and express your gratitude for the things that are beautiful in your life.

**A Gift from You to the Future.** Are you into writing? If so, your journal can serve as a memento of you and your life. Your children and grandchildren would undoubtedly love having your journals someday. Your journal is a wonderful heirloom that will give your descendants more insight into who you were. Or perhaps when you are a lot older, you might want to re-visit your journals and remember the person you were in youth, and see the changes and growth you have gone through. And possibly, just possibly, your journal might give a future generation a view of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that would be historically valuable!

**Your Personal Forum for Self-Expression.** Your journal is that one place wherein you can express your opinions about everything and everyone you meet in life. You can say anything you want without fear of retribution. Your journal acts as your forum; it's where you have freedom to say whatever you like about whomever you like. Our society is so nervous about identity theft: a journal is a place where you can put your true identity on the page.

**Very Cheap Therapy.** Often people truly have no idea what they are thinking or feeling. This means they do not know who they truly are. A journal can help you organize your thoughts and bypass the buzz of information constantly filling your head. You can get to know yourself better through journaling. When you read back your journal entries, you may see things that surprise you. Read, and think about those things – to understand yourself, you need to ponder the surprises as well as the expected. Maybe you'll discover what you really want out of life by reading back in your journal and seeing what moved you, what made you happy, what made you uncomfortable. Likewise, your journal can be a way for you to get rid of your fear and stress, anxiety and pressure, right when you are feeling them. This is a good way to take care of your health. You'll be able to see what solutions work for you, and then you'll be able to use them in similar situations down the road. By using your journal to learn how to cope with problems when they appear, you are taking steps to make a better life for yourself in advance.

**Fun with a Friend.** A journal is like an old friend in whom you can confide anytime. This friend is always happy to listen to you rant about your frustrations or talk about your love life. It's actually fun to write in a journal, after you get into a habit. Try it, and see if it doesn't make a difference in your life!



## Guided Journaling Techniques: A Brief Overview

You may have thought from time to time that you'd like to keep a diary or a journal. You may even have started one... or two... or who knows how many, over the years. Perhaps you are one of those people with enough self-discipline to write briefly in a diary every evening, year after year, and start a new volume each New Year's Day! In that case, you have a pretty good record of your doings and maybe even your thoughts about them over time.

There are, however, many possibilities for journaling using various "guided" techniques. To get you started, you may want to give some thought to what you want to get out of journaling. Do you just want to record your memories, as days and months go by? Then a normal diary, or journal, is probably just what you need – that, and a pen. But if you want to get to know yourself better, find the source of some ongoing problem in your life, or give yourself a nudge toward doing some creative writing, then you might consider one of the many guided journaling techniques that have become increasingly popular over the past several decades.

You can expect a certain amount of structure from guided journaling techniques. Each has been developed to meet a particular need. Their very nature makes them excellent tools for people seeking something specific – an increase in self-confidence, perhaps, or insight into the reason you keep choosing friends who turn out to be totally unsuitable in the end. Here are some techniques you can use to find answers to questions.

**Stream of Consciousness.** With this technique, you first clear your mind then begin to write whatever may come into it, with no conscious thought at all. Don't edit, don't worry about spelling or punctuation or sentence structure. Just put down whatever you think. It may be useful to set yourself a time frame in the beginning, perhaps ten minutes a day. Of course, if you want to keep writing after ten minutes, go ahead; but commit to writing for the ten minutes, no matter what. After a while, as you look back over your daily entries, you may see patterns emerging, and you may find those answers you were hoping for.

**Question and Answer.** When you use a question and answer format for your journaling, you will usually ask yourself the same questions on a regular basis and record your answers. Sometimes, depending on the reason for your guided journaling, these questions will be given to you. For example, Alcoholics Anonymous may suggest that members use guided journaling to keep track of their progress and

assess themselves regularly. AA provides a set of questions for you to use in this situation. Or you may be able to create your own set of questions, and seek your own answers to them daily, weekly, or monthly.

**Periodic Reflection.** You can keep a regular diary or journal, writing something in it daily, and then look back on your writings at the end of each month. Your reflection on these writings enables you to evaluate your state of mind over time, your progress in any area, or anything else you want to review. Studies have shown that interactive journal writing – you, having a dialogue with yourself – stimulates both the process of reflection and the personal learning process.

**Dream Journal:** Some people say they never dream, others say they never remember their dreams. The fact is that everybody dreams. Keeping a dream journal can not only make you more proficient in remembering your dreams, but can reveal patterns in your dreams over time that can lead to interesting self-discovery. One popular way of keeping a dream journal is to have your journal next to your bed with a pen handy. If you wake up after having a dream, write it down immediately, as much as you can remember. If you don't wake up during the night, in the morning you can record whatever you recall of your dreams. Some individuals who habitually get up several times in the night to use the bathroom keep their dream journals on the counter there!

Any of these guided journal techniques serves a purpose, whether that purpose is to understand yourself better, answer your own questions, or preserve your memories. You can find a myriad of websites on the Internet that will share other guided journal techniques, or even offer courses – free or not – on how to use such techniques. Whether yours is a pen-and-paper journal or an online blog, if you want to get the most out of your journaling efforts, you will need to remain committed to regular journaling.

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# The Affirmation Journal





## The Affirmation Journal: It Can Change Your Life!

An affirmation, according to the Merriam-Webster Online dictionary, is “a positive assertion.” For the purposes of your Affirmation Journal, let’s make that a little more personal. The affirmations you create are positive things you tell yourself, phrased positively, preferably written down as well as spoken out loud and repeatedly. They are concrete references to specific persons, beliefs, feelings, or thoughts. And each affirmation reflects a particular emotion.

Affirmations can help you change the way you think about situations that are difficult for you, or people who are part of those situations. If you deliberately change the way you think, you will automatically change the way you feel, and the way you react to the situation. You will feel differently about issues affecting you, and that will change the quality of your life for the better. The future is in your hands: affirmations state that the future is, in fact, already here. Affirmations are always phrased in the present tense, so when you repeat them, you are telling yourself that things are as they will be.

Choose your affirmations to be relevant to you. In your Affirmation Journal, you will be working through various issues that are important to you and your life. You may wish to identify these issues by using the “stream of consciousness” writing technique. Clear your mind and just write, without thinking about what you are putting onto the paper. Don’t edit, don’t worry about punctuation or spelling or grammar. Just let it flow. When you read back what you have written, you may discover that certain issues have presented themselves. You can then form your affirmations around those issues.

The trick to creating useful affirmations is using your own negative thoughts, beliefs, and feelings to find what you want to change in your life. You take a negative statement – let’s use “I always have trouble getting to know new people” – and figure out how to state the exact opposite. It might be, “I always find it very easy to get to know new people.” And then, you practice. You say the new affirmation over and over and over, out loud, several times each day. You write it in your journal, over and over. It will feel strange at first because you have believed its opposite for so long. But it will eventually change the way you think and believe about your capacity for getting to know new people. You will perceive yourself differently after repeating the affirmation over time; and then you will find yourself making new friends without even thinking about it. That’s how affirmations work in your life: by changing how you think, believe, and feel about yourself.

Here are some issues you might deal with in your Affirmation Journal:

**Self-esteem.** Most people, even the ones who seem to be quite fond of themselves, are actually lacking in self-esteem! Perhaps when you were a child, your parents, or other adults, made you feel a lack of confidence in your own abilities. To be completely happy as an adult, you need to restore that self-confidence. Affirming that you are a strong and capable person may need to be one of the first items on your list.

**Relationships.** Perhaps you need to work on some of your relationships to improve them. Perhaps other relationships ought to be discarded. It's your task to figure out whether a particular person is good for you, or whether that person has a toxic quality that should be eliminated from your life. Then you'll need to discover the reasons why that person is with you, and create some affirmations either way.

**Outlook.** Many people have a negative outlook, but just as many people have a positive outlook. If general negativity is a problem for you, you will be able to figure out why through journaling. Create affirmations that will allow you to change your outlook to a realistic one, neither pessimistic nor too optimistic. Optimism is always anticipating the best possible outcome, and we know that cannot always be the case. However, no matter the outcome in a particular situation, you can always react to it in a positive way, if your affirmations focus on that.

Your own Affirmation Journal can serve you as a self-help book. Through affirmations, you can take your future into your own hands and reinvent yourself as a better person. Remember, you are the only one responsible for what you think, and you are the only one who can change what you think.



## The Affirmation Journal Jump Start

Begin your Affirmation Journal by thinking about one thing you would like to change in your life. This should be very specific, and should relate to how you feel about something. For example, have you been feeling upset because your boss has been very crabby and short with you lately?

Write it down: "My boss has been really crabby with me lately." Then write some more, describing what has happened, why you think it might have taken place, how you feel about it. Write until you end up with a statement describing those feelings: perhaps, "I feel afraid when my boss is crabby." Whatever you feel, just feel it, and write it down.

Now try to make a general statement from what you have discovered. It might be, "When someone is angry with me, I feel afraid." Then turn it around to its opposite. Be sure not to use negative words; for example, "When someone is angry with me, I don't feel afraid." Instead, use positive words, like "I feel calm." And there you have your affirmation: "When someone is angry with me, I feel calm." Write it several times; say it out loud several times.

Create three affirmations using this technique and this pattern.

