

49 WAYS TO **WRITE** YOURSELF WELL

The science and wisdom of writing and journaling

JACKEE HOLDER



*For all my paper mentors from the
early years to 2012 - thank you.*

Acknowledgements

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49 Ways to Well-being Series



If you have selected this book, you may be looking for practical ways of improving your well-being. If you are a health and well-being practitioner or therapist, you may be helping your clients to improve theirs by encouraging them to practise some of the approaches it is based on. Well-being is a subjective state of 'feeling good' which has physical, mental, emotional and even spiritual dimensions.

Because these dimensions overlap and interact, it is possible to improve well-being by making positive changes in any one of them. For example, taking up regular exercise (a focus on physical well-being) may improve concentration (mental well-being), happiness (emotional well-being) and sense of purpose (spiritual well-being). This series of well-being books is designed to provide a variety of routes to recovering, sustaining, protecting and enhancing well-being, depending on your interests and motivations. While some emphasise psychological techniques, others are based on physical movement, nutrition, journaling and many other approaches.

Each book in the series provides 49 practical ways of improving well-being, based on a particular therapeutic approach and written by an expert in that field. Based on tried and

tested approaches, each title offers the user a rich source of tools for well-being. Some of these can be used effectively for improving general resilience; others are particularly helpful for specific problems or issues you may be dealing with, for example, recovering from illness, improving relaxation and sleep, or boosting motivation and self-confidence.

Enjoy dipping into any 49 Ways book and selecting ones which catch your interest or help you to meet a need at a particular time. We have deliberately included many different ideas for practice, knowing that some will be more appropriate at different times, in different situations and with different individuals. You may find certain approaches so helpful or enjoyable that you build them into everyday living, as part of your own well-being strategy.

Having explored one book, you may be interested in using some of the other titles to add to your well-being 'toolbox', learning how to approach your well-being via a number of different therapeutic routes.

For more information about the series, including current and forthcoming titles, visit www.stepbeachpress.co.uk/well-being

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *49 Ways to Write Yourself Well*. As you explore this guide, you will be learning about and using a wide range of ideas and techniques to improve your well-being, drawn from the broad fields of creativity, contemporary psychology, psychotherapy, journal and writing therapy, coaching, personal development, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) and sometimes plain common sense. The practices and content have been sourced from research into the therapeutic benefits and value of writing and the strong links between our thinking, emotions and behaviour. By sharing some of the research, science and kitchen-table wisdom behind the therapeutic benefits of creative writing, the book shows you how writing can help you gain a deeper and more creative understanding of yourself and what really matters to you.

This guide will steer you around the pitfalls of negative thinking, managing difficult emotions and stress-led behaviours that have an impact on your physical, emotional and mental well-being. You'll learn how to use writing as your own self-therapy, offering insights into your inner life. You will draw on your own creative resources in positive ways to explore your thoughts and feelings, your relationship with yourself and others, and how writing can help you discover yourself in simple and significant ways. You'll discover how writing can help you find answers and solutions to your own questions and how establishing a regular writing habit will guide you towards what is real and important to you.

By the end of the book, you'll be confident to take to the page, write wholeheartedly about your feelings and emotions and use a range of models and techniques to help you with any difficulties or challenges you may be experiencing in your life or at work. Writing is a journey of discovery and you'll be surprised by what is revealed by the imprint of your hand moving across the page, day after day.

WHO THE BOOK IS AIMED AT

This book is written for health care practitioners and the people they work with, and for anyone interested in gaining a better understanding of themselves using writing as a tool. If you're a clinician, therapist, facilitator or group leader, you will find this a rich resource for the people you work with and a reflective and reflexive resource for yourself. We're on dangerous territory when we do not take the same medicine we prescribe to others. Try out the writing practices in your own journal or notebook and you'll be able to offer others a deeper understanding of the practices based on your own experience.

Perhaps you're new to journaling or you're returning to it after a long break. Or maybe you think, as many of us have told ourselves, 'I'm just no good at this writing thing'. Don't worry. Many of the foundations suggested at the beginning of the book for establishing your writing practice will set you free from the fear of grammar and perfection. The good news is that not all of the practices require writing. Some invite you to play and use drawing and imagery in your journals and notebooks, and you don't need to be a Picasso or Rembrandt to do this.

THE 49 WAYS

Each numbered 'way' provides a simple route to recovering, preserving or enhancing your well-being through the process of writing. It will usually include:

- underpinning theory, research, evidence or information on how writing can help and how to use it for your own therapeutic benefits
- a '**Write now**' longer writing or creativity practice to put the theories or models to work on the page
- a '**Tip**' is sometimes included to offer more information or something else you can try
- '**See also**', which suggests other numbered 'ways' that you may find it helpful to look at.

At the back of the book you will find key references, so you can find out more about subjects that interest you.

The 49 Ways are organised into chapters, each with a different focus. Here is a summary of the main chapters.

CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

Chapter 1: Getting Started: Establishing a writing practice to write yourself well

This chapter introduces you to the nuts and bolts of setting up your writing practice. This is the one chapter you are encouraged to read in a linear form. Once you are past these early pages, you are free to roam and move through the book in your own time and at your own rhythm. Writing is a practice that requires regularity and focused attention, like taking a yoga or tai chi class and this chapter will help you establish your own practice and systems that will help you to write on a regular basis. It introduces you to the reasons for keeping a journal or notebook and why

writing first thing in the morning really does work for many individuals. It covers where and how to write, and establishing the best places and spots that work for you. It introduces the methods of free writing and morning pages*, shows you how to establish your writing rituals and habits, and guides you in creating and using your own collection of writing and visual prompts.

The chapter ends with you meeting and connecting with your 'inner wise writing self'* and grounding the practices that will support your writing, as well as a centring practice that you can use at the start or close of any of the writing sessions you engage in. These practices underpin the contents and spirit of this book and the cultivation of a more healing writing practice. Learning to embody these practices will enable you to grow and know yourself through writing, and to gain from the healing benefits writing will bring to you and your well-being.

Chapter 2: Escape the Digital: Why writing by hand with pen and paper works

This chapter looks at why writing by hand makes a difference and explores creative ways of engaging with your journals and notebooks. The digital world is rapidly taking the place of the ancient tradition of writing by hand. This chapter outlines some of the benefits of writing by hand and how it differs from writing with a keyboard and computer. You will discover the benefits of writing with your non-dominant hand* and how to use it to gain and mine your own inner wisdom. By connecting with the messages and language of your non-dominant hand* you can try out the 'Write now' practice of identifying your inner animal by using both the dominant and non-dominant

hands*. You will have fun drawing and discover how drawing in your journals and notebooks can improve your observational abilities and allow you to sit more in the present moment. You will learn how drawing or using images can capture the language that words on a page sometimes miss. You can also practise taking a problem or challenge on a writing walk on the page through the sacred ritual of 'walking the labyrinth'.

Chapter 3: Managing Your Emotions: How to write for emotional balance

How we respond to our emotions can be a blueprint for our everyday actions and behaviours. Emotions can sometimes feel overwhelming but you will learn that it is more rewarding to face your emotions than take flight. This chapter will help you gain a better understanding of how emotions work and offer practical ways of handling emotions and beliefs that get in the way of your emotional, mental and often physical well-being. It will take you through identifying your specific moods, flushing out those core beliefs and identifying ways to give your emotional life balance through the 'Write now' practices. This chapter ends with a look at intuition* and how developing this sixth sense can help create a better you and help you make better choices and decisions by using your intuitive intelligence.

Chapter 4: Therapy on the Page: Therapeutic models to challenge your thoughts and beliefs

There is much to be gained from traditional therapy that will help you gain insights into yourself. This chapter combines powerful techniques from psychology, therapy and coaching and introduces therapeutic



models and theories that you can use quickly to process and gain insights into your relationships with others and your own actions and behaviours. With regular practice, alongside your free writing and morning pages*, you will build and develop your own inner wise writing self* as you gain greater perspective on your relationships with yourself and others.

Each of the 'Write now' practices in this chapter shows you, the 'author', how to take charge of your own learning and growth by embedding these techniques as writing practices that will become second nature to you.

You will be shown how to use the rational emotive behavioural therapy ABCDE model to confront your beliefs if you are experiencing self-doubt or a lack of confidence. Not sure what impact positive and negative words hold in writing? This chapter will teach you about research that highlights the importance of

balance in the use of negative and positive words when writing about traumatic events. Having a conflict with a colleague or family member? The chapter explores the neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) model of perceptual positions. You will learn about life scripts, drivers and the Karpman Drama Triangle*, all of which are models and theories originating from transactional analysis work.

The chapter ends with a focus on a set of transformational questions that you can try out on yourself to self-coach your way from problem to solution. This chapter will help you to better understand the dynamic and interpersonal relationships between you and others and between others and yourself, and interpersonal communication in groups in both formal and informal settings.

Chapter 5: Writing Therapy: Change the script!

How often have you felt, 'If I could only change my life story'? Well now you can, by applying

some of the techniques and approaches of narrative therapists Michael White and David Epston. Much of the content of this chapter has been inspired by the real possibilities that narrative therapy* offers you to re-author your life story. By engaging in the 'Write now' practices in this chapter you will learn how to re-author and reframe your own life experiences on the page. Rather than settle for 'This happened to me', you will learn how to reframe and rewrite your story to give it your own meaning.

This chapter shows how fiction writing can create a 'safe enough' distance between you and your life experiences to allow you to achieve a different and useful perspective on your own life story. We take a look at forgiveness and how writing about forgiveness brings its own healing and benefits, how to make best use of your perceived failures and how to transform them on the page. The chapter ends by considering how writing can help you to 'unpack' your personal history and your relationship with money, on the page.

Chapter 6: Nature Wisdom, Body Wisdom and Writing Wisdom

Nature has always been an inspiration for writers and this chapter opens up a space for you to explore your own relationship with nature, as a writer. It highlights the very important connection between nature and writing. Research and studies repeatedly confirm the many health and psychological benefits of being with nature. With this in mind, the idea of walking is explored and reveals how walking as a practice is a valuable activity for deepening our well-being and practice as writers. And there's nothing like a bit of poetry to ground you in nature and walking so we explore the value of poetry and how to use

it for therapeutic purposes. We then move in to explore the body through the senses, along with exploring the psychological and health benefits of starting a 'gratitude journal' and cultivating a 'gratitude practice'. The final 'ways' aim to rekindle the almost lost art of personal letter writing by encouraging you to write letters to your younger and older selves. The chapter closes with a ritual to bring your writing journey to a place of genuine acknowledgement and appreciation.

GLOSSARY

There is a glossary at the back of this book, which explains some of the terms used in the text. Any word or words that appear in the glossary have an asterisk next to them in the text, like this*.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Finally, I have listed some 'writing prescriptions', a personal list of recommendations of writing and healing books.

STARTING OUT

While you can start using the ideas and activities in this book in any order, I would encourage you to begin with the 'Getting started' practices in Chapter 1. These are designed to set up your writing practice and get you going. Beyond that, please use this book in any way that most appeals and is helpful to you, working through it chronologically or dipping in and out, and finding your own 'flow' through the exercises.

Many of the techniques introduced in this book work most effectively when you pause and give yourself the time and space to write without expectation or judgment. Whilst the book is structured with the 'Write now' practices, you have complete permission to go off topic at any point of your writing, with any of the suggested activities. This book is about writing from your heart and the mystery of the writing process alone determines that, most of the time, this route cannot be prescribed.

Whilst the health and psychological benefits of writing are becoming clearer to us, the greatest wisdom lies in your moving your hand across the page, daily, weekly or as often as is realistically possible. Your repeated mining of your own lived and felt experience will reveal to you, often in the most unexpected ways, the wisdom of your writing and what it has to say to you, when you allow yourself to be open to what emerges. Not only will you gain from many of the psychological and physical benefits writing offers but you will also gain from accessing your own inner wisdom.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED FOR YOUR WRITING JOURNEY

The key essentials for your writing toolkit are a pen, pencil and collection of crayons, colouring pencils or felt tips (pencils can be freeing and easy to write with and take us back to times as a child) and a notebook. You'll need a couple of your favourite pens. Find pens that are light and easy to use or that write quickly and smoothly. It's not essential to have a computer; in fact, we'd much prefer you do as much writing as possible by hand.

Ideally, have in your possession a couple of blank notebooks in which to record your responses from each of the chapters as you work through them. It's a good idea to date each entry and include the chapter number, so you can cross-reference when you read back through your notes.

A NOTE OF WARNING

Many of the exercises in this book could trigger and put you in touch with strong emotions. Some emotions may emerge from painful or difficult experiences from your past that you may not feel equipped with to deal with on your own. While writing therapy can and is effective with working through emotions it is not to be used to address trauma or significant physical, emotional or mental health problems. If feelings arise that feel overwhelming, please seek appropriate medical and professional help or support. It's a good idea to have a friend or family member you can trust who can be contacted at short notice and with whom you can talk things through.

We would suggest that this is essential if you are experiencing any of the following:

- undiagnosed pain, physical symptoms or sleep problems
- symptoms of depression, such as loss of motivation, loss of appetite, changes in sleeping habits, persistent negative thinking
- high levels of anxiety or anger or recurring panic attacks
- substance misuse or self-harming behaviours
- social isolation due to severe lack of confidence or self-esteem
- persistent relationship difficulties.

EMOTIONAL RELEASE

Be prepared for some expression of your emotions as you work through the book, so you'll need a packet of tissues. At some point, and I cannot say when, your own journey will determine that you'll shed a tear. Tears are

good. I once heard that there are 20 toxins released in each teardrop. The poet Robert Frost (1949) declared, *'No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader'*.

I imagine that many of you may have fears and concerns or doubts about the cans of worms your writing may open up. Writing in this way is on many levels letting go of control. You may connect with unfamiliar parts of yourself that survive underneath the surface. Writing, if you allow it to, will take you below the surface. If left to its own devices it will bring unexpected tears but it will also clear the way for better, more informed understanding. It will shake things up – but in a good way. I encourage you to stay with it. In her book, *Write Yourself*, Gillie Bolton (2011) shares, *'People do cry at their writing. Handled well and sensitively, these are healing tears.'*

I hope you enjoy your writing journey and inner explorations.



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Chapter 1

GETTING STARTED: ESTABLISHING A WRITING PRACTICE TO WRITE YOURSELF WELL

This chapter introduces you to the nuts and bolts of setting up your writing practice. This is the one chapter you are encouraged to read in a linear form. Once you are past these early pages, you are free to roam and move through the book in your own time and at your own rhythm. Writing is a practice that requires regularity and focused attention, like taking a yoga or tai chi class and this chapter will help you establish your own practice and systems that will help you to write on a regular basis. It introduces you to the reasons for keeping a journal or notebook and why writing first thing in the morning really does work for many individuals. It covers where and how to write, and establishing the best places and spots that work for you. It introduces the methods of free writing and morning pages*, shows you how to establish your writing rituals and habits, and guides you in creating and using your own collection of writing and visual prompts.

The chapter ends with you meeting and connecting with your 'inner wise writing self'* and grounding the practices that will support your writing, as well as a centring practice that you can use at the start or close of any of the writing sessions you engage in. These practices underpin the contents and spirit of this book and the cultivation of a more healing writing practice. Learning to embody these practices will enable you to grow and know yourself through writing and to gain from the healing benefits writing will bring to you and your well-being.

WAY 1

Journal writing and notebooks

'Paper and pen are endlessly patient, present and never make a comment.'

Gillie Bolton, 2011 (consultant in reflective writing)

JOURNAL THERAPY

Journal therapy is the practice of writing down your thoughts as a way to make sense of them and come to a better understanding of yourself and the issues you are experiencing.

The roots of journal therapy stem from the work of the psychologist Dr Ira Progoff, psychotherapist Christina Baldwin and expert in journal writing Tristine Rainer. Dr Progoff was instrumental in the early development of journal therapy after recognising that his clients were able to achieve outcomes rapidly by writing about their experiences.

By keeping a journal or notebook, you're doing a number of things at the same time that will bring you therapeutic benefit as well as personal fulfilment:

- It's a way of focusing your life and extracting what is meaningful.
- Writing is evidence that you exist outside your roles and the job you do.
- It slows you down and gives you space to be more mindful.
- It's an inexpensive way of getting troublesome or worrying thoughts out of your head and onto the page.

- Through a regular practice of writing, you'll discover new things and be surprised.
- People who journal experience higher levels of self-awareness and are able to reduce their anxiety levels.
- Journaling allows you to view situations from a different perspective.
- It's an objective space that won't judge you, where you can capture the good, the difficult and whatever sits between the two.
- Journaling has been proven to have both psychological and physical benefits. (You'll find more about the research findings later on in the book.)
- It helps you to identify what you really want and create ways of reaching your goals.
- It prevents you from projecting unresolved issues onto others.
- It allows you to make connections with your inner, wiser self.
- It's a great way of getting to know yourself better.

Even though this book lays out guidelines for keeping a journal or notebook, you can essentially write about anything you want. You can whine and moan, or write about the weather or what you had for dinner, as it's for your eyes only. It's safe to write down your thoughts about someone that would be upsetting to tell them face to face. Equally, it's the ideal space to capture a quote that lifts your spirits or an idea that you want to develop.

Quotes that resonate

1. Poet Susan Goldsmith Wooldridge (1996) says about her journal writing, *'I'm free inside myself to create my idea of beauty or mess up. I explain with no one watching and it keeps me alive.'*

2. Author and creative genius Sark (2008) writes, *'I love journal keeping because it has helped me to discover and uncover myself, to encourage my own bravery, sort out difficulties with other people, to invent new ways of being.'*

3. International freelance consultant in therapeutic writing and reflective practice

Gillie Bolton (2011) believes that, *'Writing is actually a process of deep listening, attending to some of the many voices in the self that are habitually blanketed during our waking lives.'*

Strong and powerful words, don't you think? Which of the above quotes most resonates with you? Perhaps you'd like to scribble down your thoughts and reflections in your journal or notebook as your first 'Write now' practice, to get you started.



Tip: Your notebook is special. It's an extension of you and is to be handled with care.

By this, I mean taking care of your notebooks is an extension of taking care of you.

So treat your notebook well and know that it's about to become a delightful laboratory, holding in its pages true reflections and recordings of who you really are and who you're about to become.



CHOOSING YOUR JOURNAL

There is no need for fancy equipment and you won't be required to go to any great expense. For your journey, you'll need a couple of notebooks for your writing. It's up to you whether you call it a journal or a notebook. You'll be using your journal or notebook to record your responses to the 'Write now' writing practices contained within these pages, and to capture your reflections, observations and ideas that emerge from any of the practices outlined in the book.

Your notebook is your personal playing field. So it's up to you how you organise it, and what and how you make it look and feel. Be creative. You could stick in images and photographs, doodle, copy poems and passages from books and articles or write a favourite quote on the inside cover or first page. How about personalising the front cover? On days when nothing comes to her, poet Molly Gordon copies out passages from books by hand and novelist Janet Fitch always reads poetry before she writes, to sensitise her to the music and rhythm of language.

Play with your journal. Turn it upside down and write in different colours for different

days of the week. Gillie Bolton is a reflective writing consultant and author of several books on the creative writing process.

One person she worked with wrote, '*I like green ink: it is soothing and healing*' (2011). Bolton also suggests that children, along with health care and medical professionals, all love coloured paper and pens and that having these are a sign of respect. The sky's the limit. When keeping a journal or notebook feels more like play, it will pull you towards it rather than push you away. This is your journal initiation, the creative and original way you'll bring your notebook or journal alive.

The kind of notebook you choose is up to you. You may find it easier to have a notebook with lots of pages so you don't feel restricted and can spread yourself out. Or if that feels intimidating, maybe a small, pocket-sized notebook would work for you. You may prefer lined paper or an unlined notebook that gives you more freedom. Choose a notebook or journal that feels right for you.

Make sure you date your pages, so you can track your entries.

WAY 2

First things first

'The seeds of the day are best planted in the first hour.' Dutch proverb

I hope by now you have your notebook and that you're raring to go. But before you dive in, it's worth considering the time of day you'll dedicate to working through the 'Write now' writing practices. I'm a strong advocate of 'first things first', a management concept popularised by the late Steven Covey in his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (2004). The idea is that you place the most important task of your day at the top of your to do list and this becomes the first thing you do. Interestingly, there are writers who talk of feeling out of sorts when they miss writing for a day, something I notice I feel too.

You'll be encouraged to practise writing first thing in your day before you do any other tasks, as far as possible. This will be difficult for many of you, but not impossible. Even though you may be wondering how you'll find the time to make it happen, know that for many writers this is their normal practice and they make it work. So whether it means getting up 30 minutes earlier or setting off earlier so you can grab half an hour over a cup of tea in the café on your way to work, consider what might need to change to fit it into your schedule. Use your journal to make a list of ways you could fit your writing in as one of the first things you do in your day.

A second reason that many well-intentioned individuals fail to write and make space for writing is that they haven't given enough thought or consideration to what time of day

they'll schedule their time to write. Whether it's first thing in the morning or last thing at night, scheduling the time and place makes a big difference. It's so easy to zone out and believe that your good intentions will be enough to get you onto the page. Years of trial and error have convinced me that this is often not the case. Wishing doesn't amount to action and I'll show you why.

In his book, *Be Excellent at Anything*, Tony Schwartz (2011) introduces the concept of 'implementation intentions'. In one study carried out by Automaticity researchers (Gollwitzer & Brandstatter, 1997), a group of students was asked to write a report over the holidays describing what they'd done on Christmas Eve. Half the group identified specifically where and when they would write. The other half weren't given specific instructions about when or where to write. Only a third of the second group completed the task. However, more than three quarters of the first group completed the task. This was further reinforced in another study with chronic procrastinators carried out by psychology professor Peter Gollwitzer (1999). Chronic procrastinators who set a specific time to complete a task were eight times more likely to do so. It appears that when we work out the logistics we expend less energy thinking about the task and we get on and do it.

In another study, a group of subjects was asked to exercise for at least 20 minutes during the next week (Schwartz, 2011). Only 29 per cent of the group met the challenge. A second group was given the same challenge along with detailed information about the significant role exercise plays in reducing the risk of heart disease. Only 30 per cent met the challenge. A third group was invited to commit to

exercising at a specific time, on a specific day, at a designated location. Engagement for this group more than doubled, to 91 per cent.

By knowing when and how you approach a task, you will reduce the amount of energy you'll expend on getting it done. I had this experience when I was a long distance runner. I would wake up every morning at the same time, 5am. I'd have my running clothes ready at the foot of my bed and my keys on the floor at the front door. I ran for almost 365 days every year for three years, in all weathers.

I ran even when I didn't feel like it – and I felt like that most mornings of the week. Running became an automatic habit and second nature.

SEE ALSO

- **WAY 3: Free writing** (page 26)
- **WAY 4: Morning pages** (page 28)
- **WAY 6: Writing habits and rituals** (page 32)
- **WAY 7: Writing prompts** (page 34)
- **WAY 8: Visual writing prompts** (page 39)

Making a commitment

As we have seen, it seems that being specific makes a difference to your level of commitment and engagement. So while we're hot on the subject, how about deciding on the following and writing them in your journal or notebook.

- Days of the week you will write
- Time of the day you will write
- Space your writing will take place in
- Date you made this commitment with yourself



Tip: You might want to consider how your energy levels vary throughout your day. When is your energy at its peak? When does your energy level slump? Notice the time of the day when you're most distracted. There does seem to be support for the effectiveness of writing first thing in the morning, before you do anything else in your day. However, if this doesn't work for you, then a better, more convenient time to write might be when your energy levels peak. Once you've identified when that is in your day, you can schedule this into your diary as your time in the day to write.

Business coach Charlie Gilkey has a really good downloadable tool on his website called a Productivity Heat Map (www.productiveflourishing.com/how-heatmapping-your-productivity-can-make-you-more-productive/) that will help you determine when those different energy states are during your day. You'll find the download details in Useful Resources on page 146.

WAY 3

Free writing

'A good way to start is to start badly.'

Robert Holden, 2012 (author and coach)

The roots of free writing (or free-fall writing as it is sometimes called) originated in the work of Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer on free association*. Free association is a method of psychological analysis in which a person speaks or writes all the thoughts that come into their mind, whether the thoughts are related or not. It allows individuals to make connections consciously and retrieve repressed feelings without being judged.

Writer WO Mitchell further developed and introduced the free-fall method for creative writing. In his preface to *Free-Fall, An Anthology of the Writing Division*, Mitchell wrote that the method helped writers find their *'unlimited supply of: sensuous fragments, bits of people, dialogues, emotions and insights'* (Garner, 2009). He believed that his free-fall method, which he also called 'Mitchell's Messy Method', allowed writers to overcome their *'critical judgment'* and draw from their *'uncritical spontaneity'*.

There are many ways to empty the body – running, walking, gardening, boxing and any craft that uses the hands. Consider free writing as the mental process for emptying both the body and the mind. There is a freedom about free-fall or free writing. Many people freeze when it comes to a blank page. Free writing

will help you to fill it. This technique gives you, the writer, permission to write without a destination or agenda. With free writing, you don't have to know what you're going to be writing about. Just go with the first thoughts that come into your mind and get it down on the page, then the next, and the one after that and so on. The rest will come.

At its core, free writing undoes the instinctive habit of editing and censoring your writing as you go along, a behaviour you may be familiar with and one that can unconsciously sabotage your attempts to get it onto the page when writing therapeutically. This domain is controlled by the voice of your inner critic*. You'll learn more about this in **WAY 9: Inner wise writing self** (page 40).

The inner critic* likes it when you go slowly, so it has the time to pick at your words, phrases and images – so write fast. Think of your inner critic* dozing off to sleep as you free write. Because of the lack of a destination and because you don't need to pay attention to grammar, your inner critic* can well be fooled into thinking that what you're doing is of very little substance. But this is a mistake. It's not that everything you free write will make great writing material but rather that this form of writing affords freedom for self-expression without any strings attached, and creates room for surprising and unexpected thoughts and discoveries to emerge. You may be surprised by the richness that is generated through regular practice and engagement with free writing.

Free writing practice

Remember there are no mistakes with free writing. How about starting now with your first free writing practice? Turn to a blank page in your notebook and free write for 20 minutes. Start with the very first thought that comes into your head. When you've finished, take three deep breaths, close your notebook, stretch. Take a couple of minutes

away from your writing space and go for a short walk. In **WAY 7: Writing prompts** (page 34) you'll find a collection of prompts that will help you with free writing when you get stuck or don't know what to say.



Tristine Rainer (1978) says in *The New Diary*, 'Write fast, write everything, include everything, write from your feelings, write from your body, accept whatever comes'.

The guidelines for free writing are simple:

- You can write about anything.
- Write as fast as you can.
- Write for no more than 20 minutes.
- Writing by hand is the preferred method.
- Don't worry about grammar or spelling.
- It doesn't have to make sense.
- If you get stuck, write what's in your head.
- There's no need to edit or censor, just get it all down on the page.

SEE ALSO

- **WAY 2: First things first** (page 24)
- **WAY 4: Morning pages** (page 28)
- **WAY 6: Writing habits and rituals** (page 32)
- **WAY 7: Writing prompts** (page 34)
- **WAY 8: Visual writing prompts** (page 39)

Tip: Free-fall writing is a writing technique that will warm you up so that you don't arrive cold to the 'Write now' exercises. Try free writing for 20 minutes before you start these. You can also use the free-writing method to keep on writing throughout your day. This is a refreshing and cathartic method for emptying the mind as much as possible in advance of starting other writing practices.

WAY 4

Morning pages

***'Every time you write, something valuable will occur.'* SARK, 2012 (author)**

Morning pages* are a version of free writing but with a twist. The technique originated from the work of writer Julia Cameron and was introduced in her best selling book *The Artist's Way* (1982).

Having done work in recovery and the 12 Steps programme, Cameron uses the morning pages* technique to help her maintain and sustain her own recovery. She attributes her daily practice of writing morning pages* as the real champion of her inner work. Morning pages*, like free writing, is stream of consciousness writing but with specifics built in.

- First, you write first thing in the morning. This is one of the cornerstones of the morning pages* writing practice, the idea being that your thoughts are in their most natural and pure state first thing in the morning, and you're more likely to capture these raw and uncensored thoughts when you write as soon as you awake.
- Second, you write a stream of consciousness by hand only, a point Cameron has stuck to over 25 years of teaching her fundamental creativity practices.
- Third, you write three pages only and go no further (although, of course, you don't castigate yourself if you do more).

- Fourth, you write as fast as you can. That way, your inner editor won't be able to keep up with your pace. In one of her books, Cameron describes the editor as moving at 35 miles per hour; when you write fast, you are writing at around 70 miles per hour. I like the idea of speeding past your editor.

At first glance, what you produce might feel like a moaning shop – and it might well be that way. But have faith because over time you'll notice subtle and sometimes substantial shifts in your writing. Danny Gregory, author of *The Creative License* (2006), sees many potentials in the use of his journals, including shifting from a place of catharsis to one of contemplation. He suggests that the journal should not be a dumping ground but a place to create, recognise and celebrate. Even so, your moans and groans are now out of your head and safely contained on the page, making space for your creative brain to take over. Cameron advocates that morning pages* give you the space to dump those toxic thoughts and create room for the more creative and imaginative thoughts that are often lurking beneath the surface. It's a writing practice that unclutters the mind.

By writing as fast as you can, without censoring or editing what you write, Cameron believes you write straight past your inner critic*, shape-shifting past its determined efforts to put the brakes on your writing and creative pursuits.

You can read more about morning pages* in one of Cameron's many books on writing, creativity and spirituality. My favourites are listed in the Useful Resources section on page 146.

First thing tomorrow

Tomorrow morning, before you even get out of bed, turn to a blank page in your journal or notebook, date the page and write three pages in longhand as fast as you can, capturing whatever thoughts are in your head or whatever you are thinking or

feeling. If you come to a blank, simply write, 'I don't know what to write' and follow this up with whatever comes next.



Some of the benefits you'll gain from free writing and morning pages* practices include:

- engagement in a mindful practice that brings your awareness and attention into the here and now
- a non-traditional form of meditation that may be more suitable for your way of learning
- a helpful way to solve problems and find solutions
- a useful mirror to reveal both strengths and weaknesses
- a gateway for suppressed emotions and feelings to be released
- access to the sixth sense of intuition* (sometimes referred to as your inner-tuition) through the discoveries, and often recovery, made through the practice of writing morning pages*
- strengthening the core of your inner wise writing self*
- deepening your resilience as you cultivate a resource that will strengthen your inner being
- you're more likely to consider impulses or random ideas that are easily dismissed at other times of the day.

SEE ALSO

- **WAY 3: Free writing** (page 26)
- **WAY 6: Writing habits and rituals** (page 32)
- **WAY 7: Writing prompts** (page 34)
- **WAY 8: Visual writing prompts** (page 39)
- **WAY 23: A paper ritual for releasing your emotions** (page 76)
- **WAY 48: A letter to you** (page 138)

Tip: Writing morning pages* is a good way of waking up to yourself on the page and performing a writing dump before you approach one of the 'Write now' exercises. Writing by hand slows you down and allows you the time and space to connect with yourself on a deeper level.