

The Write to Flourish

By Fiona
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Fiona's articles are [here](#).

What started as a casual diary in my early teens is now a daily ritual, as essential as the caffeine that accompanies it. I'm talking about writing a journal, my life enhancing, inner-peace striving way to juggle my obligations and wants. So imagine my delight when I discovered that, in terms of positive psychology, the practice can create personal and spiritual growth, and improve one's purpose in life. The question is, how?

Each morning, I use journaling as a way to cleanse, calm, and center the start of my day. I'll write about whatever is on my mind, dreams half remembered, or my hopes and fears. I'll document the endless minutiae about the machinations of the days, weeks, and months ahead. This stream of consciousness allows me to keep up with my to-do list. It re-connects me to my goals, reducing the sense of being overwhelmed that might otherwise engulf me.



Writing tools

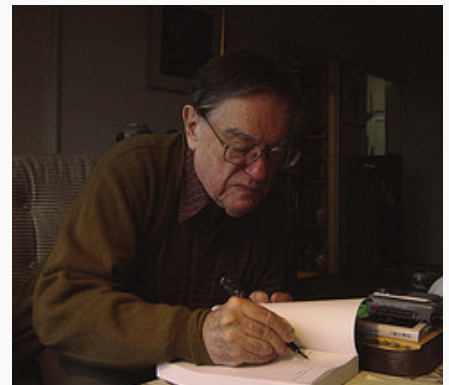
Last year, I attended a journaling workshop that made many references to positive psychology. What inspired me was how it can help an individual deepen self-awareness and move towards goals.

The Power of Positive Words

Several writing techniques used in positive psychology experiments have proven to be very powerful. In 2001, Professor Laura King pioneered the *Best Possible Self* exercise, in which participants write for 20 minutes about an imagined future best possible self. The exercise produced positive outcomes in well-being. I have found this technique links me to hope and reminds me of my goals and values. It allows me to savor a positive future.

The concept of the *Gratitude Journal* has been extremely well researched in positive psychology, with outcomes indicating improvements in happiness and well-being. With this exercise, writers focus their minds on the positive aspects of their lives by expressing thanks or gratitude. Robert A. Emmons, Ph.D., is the world's leading scientific expert on gratitude and has produced research over the last decade which he highlights "has linked gratitude to a host of psychological, physical, and social benefits: stronger immune systems, lower blood pressure, more feelings of joy, and a greater sense of social connection."

James Pennebaker's well-documented studies highlight the sense-making role of writing to help people build physical and emotional resilience and a new sense of hope after trauma. Recent studies from Rebecca North and her team look at how *Expressive Writing* produces positive results by helping people reassess their problems and find happiness even in negative emotions through writing. The emphasis here is on expression and acceptance of negative emotions associated with a problem along with an active search for



Writing Concentration

possible positive consequences.

Jackee Holder has written in *Coaching Today* about the role that creative, reflective writing can play in a coach's professional development. She offers an excellent [Journal Journey](#) workbook that includes exercises and some great references for the history and role of journaling.

Well-thumbed journal

Looking Back at Earlier Journaling Approaches to Well-being

The work in this area is growing significantly, but as well as contemporary work, I have found myself intrigued with looking back as well as forward.

One significant proponent of journaling was psychotherapist and depth psychologist Ira Progoff. He was interested in helping individuals develop fulfilling lives. He found that journal writing helped his clients work through their issues more rapidly. From his research, he developed the methodology known as the *Intensive Journal Method*.

The Intensive Journal Method Explained

The journal method enables us to answer profound questions, such as: what is my life trying to become and where am I now in the movement of my life?

As you may expect from someone who studied and worked with Jung, Progoff pays significant attention to dreams and other symbolic images such as feelings, intuitions, and hunches. The emphasis is to draw on these inner processes to find meaning and direction.

By attempting to answer profound questions, the individual can discover inner strengths, resources, and talents as well as and new possibilities.

Putting Theory into Practice

Progoff's methodology explores four different dimensions, using structured exercises and meditation:

1. **Life / time** – our life story, choice points
2. **Dialogues** – our relationships with ourselves, our bodies, others, society, religion, and culture
3. **Depth** – connecting us to dreams, symbols, intuitions
4. **Meaning** – integrating wisdom and lessons into our values and priorities to create renewed clarity, meaning, and wholeness

Writing as Exploring

These exercises are a way to clarify and savor our values and priorities, and to gain wisdom from life lessons, past or present. The ultimate aim is to find more meaning, more energy and more fulfillment to life.

This summer, I'm off to learn the intensive journaling processes that accompany the Intensive Journal Method. I will report back whether it changes my way of journaling, or if my current cathartic, brain-cleansing, idea-catching, contemplative, welcoming of the day stays as my default journaling technique. I suspect, after 30 years of untutored journaling, I'm ready for an upgrade.

Journaling as a route to a flourishing life? A means of problem solving? An opportunity to savor the future? I'd love to know how you use yours.



Resources

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[Well-thumbed journal](#) courtesy of Walt Stoneburner

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