

WHAT IS JOURNALING?

Journal writing is an effective way of getting to know yourself better. It's a powerful way to gain a greater understanding of who you are, how you came to be that way and where you're heading at any one point in your life. Keeping a track of your thoughts, feelings and events makes the process of journaling a very honest and revealing art! It's a way to hear yourself, record and then re-approach problems or difficult situations with greater clarity. Journaling lets you affirm and challenge your beliefs about yourself.

JOURNALS ARE NOT DIARIES

Some people confuse the concepts of journals and diaries. Journaling is not like keeping a diary; it doesn't simply detail external events and situations. A journal can take on many forms too, including words, pictures or drawings, and is based on revealing the architecture of our thought processes and how we feel and respond to events and people in our lives. Thoughts can be like lightning bolts of energy and this "mental chatter" occurs so quickly that the content is often missed, leaving us only feeling the resulting emotions. Journaling can offer a way to slow down these rapid thoughts and give you an opportunity to reflect back some of the links between them and the reasons why we feel certain ways at particular moments of our lives. The process is real, raw, challenging and rewarding.

WHY KEEP A JOURNAL?

Since the journal acts as a means to affirm and challenge your beliefs about yourself, the inherent value of a journal as a tool allows you to explore possible patterns to your feelings over time and the quality of your interactions with key people in your life. For example, what is the dominant tone of your writing? Are you usually confident, or are you down on yourself? Do you hold yourself to high standards or perfection? Criticise yourself constantly? Do you only write when you're depressed? If the answer to any of these questions is "yes", can you think of a way to use your journal to restore some balance to your life? If you have recurrent dreams and thoughts, journaling may provide a way for you to explore the themes and meanings in these. Often you may not be consciously aware of the way you feel about yourself or others until you slow these thoughts down and reflect on them in the written form.

Studies with individuals who were encouraged to journal their distressing life experiences have revealed these individuals have improved moods, more positive outlooks and greater physical health. Subsequent experiments have shown that journaling boosts health in a myriad other ways, including strengthened immune function, a decreased reliance upon pain medication and improved performance at work and school.

REASONS TO KEEP A JOURNAL

- To achieve clarity and new perspectives.
- As an outlet for your angst. In much the same way physical exercise helps release pent up energy, journaling can release your mind and emotions.
- To track and remove blocks and brainstorm ideas for problem solving.
- To uncover ideas and dreams, which can re-connect you with your passion and purpose.

HOW DO I USE ONE?

Don't be misguided into thinking that it has to be an exercise of perfection or beauty, because you may never start one! Journals may be started in many ways including: writing about the first thing you think of, your thoughts around words such as love, peace, conflict etc., an event that happened in your childhood, something that happened yesterday or something that you can't stop thinking about. Pictures, colour and drawings in your journal may enhance your ability to bring out your deeper emotions and thoughts.

- Try to write in your journal each day, even for just a few minutes.
- Encourage enjoyment by using a journal with an attractive cover and high-quality paper, or a special pen.
- Don't underestimate the emotional energy involved in writing about traumatic events. Plan to do a transition activity, such as watering the plants or reading a magazine, before resuming normal activities, like studying.
- Beware the temptation to use writing as a substitute for action.
- Don't use your journal as a forum for uncensored complaining. Blindly venting anger may make you feel angrier.

ONLINE JOURNALS

Many websites allow you to post your journal entries or store them online. Some professionals suggest that something may be "lost" when keeping a journal electronically. When you personalise your thoughts with your own unique handwriting style using pen and paper it then challenges you to "own" those thoughts more honestly and brands them as uniquely yours.

SHOULD I SHARE MY JOURNAL WITH OTHERS?

This is an individual decision, but since a journal is an intensely private and personal journey, writing them with the knowledge of others viewing them may subconsciously cause you to censor your thoughts and be less open about how you feel.

Journal Guides to help you get started:

- The Journal Wheel and Guidebook. Deborah Bouziden
- Writing Down the Bones. Natalie Goldberg
- How to Keep a Spiritual Journal. Ronald Klug
- Living Words: Journal Writing for self-discovery, insight and creativity. Stephanie Dowrick

Life is a learning process and journaling is one way to remain conscious and connected to your experiences, and learning as much as you can from them. You've got a lot to gain, and nothing to lose by keeping a journal. Whether it's for fun or for solving difficult problems, for writing poetry or writing about your last counselling appointment, a journal gives you a quick and easy way to talk to, support and value yourself.

WANT TO CHAT TO SOMEONE?

For a confidential – and free – chat about your general situation, please contact Psychological Counselling Support to make an appointment at any of our campuses.

✉ counselling@ecu.edu.au 📞 (08) 6304 6706

Alternatively, you can discuss study techniques and tips with a Learning Adviser in our Academic Skills Centre.

✉ learningadviser@ecu.edu.au