

Transformational Journaling for Coaches, Therapists, and Clients

A Complete Guide to the Benefits
of Personal Writing



EDITED BY LYNDA MONK AND ERIC MAISEL

Transformational Journaling for Coaches, Therapists, and Clients

In *Transformational Journaling for Coaches, Therapists, and Clients: A Complete Guide to the Benefits of Personal Writing*, more than 50 coaches, therapists, and journaling experts from around the world share their best practices and explain in detail how they use journaling to improve their work with clients.

This edited collection brings together the leading voices of the journaling world into one ground-breaking volume, providing practical techniques and tools to use with clients. Applicable and accessible, over 50 journaling luminaries share their experiences and insights across eight sections, including the logic of journaling, techniques and applications, using journaling with clients, journaling in groups, journaling for mental health and wellness, growth and healing, spirituality, creativity, and more. Through theoretical and practical applications, it illustrates the transformational process of journaling in helping clients grow, heal, and achieve their goals.

This book is essential reading for coaches, therapists, and other mental health professionals, as well as those interested in using personal writing for growth and self-awareness.

Lynda Monk is the Director of the International Association for Journal Writing. She is the co-author of *Writing Alone Together: Journaling in a Circle of Women for Creativity, Compassion and Connection*. She created *Life Source Writing: A 5 Step Reflective Journaling Method*.

Eric Maisel is the author of 50+ books, among them *The Power of Daily Practice*, *Lighting the Way*, *Coaching the Artist Within*, *Mastering Creative Anxiety*, and *The Van Gogh Blues*.

“This compendium of wisdom on journal writing offers sage advice on the promises, pitfalls, perils, and pleasures of journaling as a path of self-knowledge, insight, and healing. Eric Maisel, Joyce Chapman, Sheila Bender, Kathleen Adams and a host of other experts join voices in this book that holds everything you will ever need to know about what it means to love your journal as companion, mirror, and guide.”

Mark Matousek, *Writing to Awaken: A Journey of Truth, Transformation, and Self-Discovery*

“I know the amazing benefits and transformational power of journaling firsthand, both in my personal life and in my work as a coach. Now I have this great resource to use, one that gathers together field-tested journaling exercises from all over the world. What an excellent addition to the coaching and therapy literature! Highly recommended.”

Jacob Nordby, *life coach, author, The Creative Cure and Blessed are the Weird: A Manifesto for Creatives*

“Journaling can be as straightforward as taking pen in hand, opening to a blank page, and simply beginning. But imagine having access to a compendium of fifty journaling techniques and methods compiled by leading professionals from around the world. *Transformational Journaling for Coaches, Therapists, and Clients* is just such a resource. A rich and practical contribution to this ever-growing field.”

Judy Reeves, *writing teacher and author, A Writer’s Book of Days*

“I’ve been a therapist for more than fifty years and have been journaling since I was in college. This new book edited by Monk and Maisel is a powerful and practical resource for those who want to help themselves and help their clients survive and thrive in today’s topsy-turvy world. You could spend thousands of dollars at conferences developing new skills and not get the value you will receive from this wonderful book. I highly recommend it.”

Jed Diamond, *PhD, author, The Enlightened Marriage and 12 Rules for Good Men*

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For Peter, my true love
and our sons, Jackson and Jesse,
my two greatest teachers.
And for journal writers everywhere.

For Ann, forty-three years into this adventure
and for the grandkids,
Ethan, Abigail, Elise, Kamila, and Katya



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Editor's Introduction

There are many valuable tools that we, as helping professionals, can have in our toolkits to support the growth, well-being, and transformation of both ourselves and the clients we serve. In this book, we focus on one of the most powerful tools for cultivating self-awareness and personal growth, and that is journaling.

Personal Story

I have been a journal writer since I was a young girl. I wrote in a small pink personal diary with lock and key, and it was all very top secret. I hid it away and hoped that no one would ever find, or more importantly, ever read, what I wrote.

As I grew to adolescence, journaling emerged as something that I did to solve problems, express my feelings, and capture my special memories of daily life. I did not write every day, but often enough that I considered it a hobby of mine. Parallel to this, I was also an avid pen pal and had nearly 20 pen pals from all over the world. This letter writing felt more like a journaling exchange, especially with one pen pal in particular who, when I was about 14, became a best friend. She lives in Switzerland and to this day, we are still connected and our letter writing has been replaced with frequent text messages.

I have engaged in a wide variety of journaling practices and have kept many different kinds of journals over the years, including dream journals, gratitude journals, life vision and planning journals, travel journals, and more. At times, I am a daily journal writer, even if only for a few minutes a day, and at other times long stretches of time can pass where I get away from journaling. One

of these dry journaling patches happened in my twenties when I was working as a frontline social worker in often high stress and high trauma situations. The days were long, filled with emotion and exposure to difficult stories and painful life events for many clients who I supported and served. Eventually, life got in the way. I was too busy to journal as I was working full time, tending to the early years of my first marriage, and studying for my master's degree part-time.

However, I began to notice that there were certain times I would journal, particularly after a difficult day at work. I would instinctively go to my journal to process my emotions from the day. I noticed it served to help me feel calm and balanced. Journaling acted as a way of clearing the emotional debris and impact of the work, in a profession known to be high risk for burnout—as is true of many helping professions.

In the chapter titled *Journaling for Coach and Therapist Self-Care*, I speak more about this and offer you insights into how journaling can be a very important self-care strategy, particularly when engaged in the types of work that are often focused on caring for and serving the growth and well-being needs of others, our clients.

Transformational Journaling

Not all journaling is transformational. That is not to say that journaling isn't generally helpful or useful as a cathartic form of self-expression, a place to vent, daydream, say thanks and more. However, I have grown to discover, both from my own first-hand experience with journaling, as well as my work in guiding thousands of other people to the page to know, grow, and care for themselves through journaling, that certain things make personal writing transformational. These include writing first to *raise awareness* about the self, others, and the world we live in and second, to *take action* on the awareness that is cultivated through this type of personal writing and exploration on the page.

I often say to my clients, so what, now what? Taking a moment to pause and reflect on one's journaling is often where the nuggets of insight, ideas for inspired actions and seeds of growth are planted.

About This book

This book presents many different perspectives and applications for journaling for coaches, therapists, clients, and journal keepers. We hope that you will find affirmation of the transformational power of journaling as well as very specific

activities, prompts and exercises that you yourself can benefit from and that you can introduce within the transformational work you do with your clients.

The book is organized into various categories, including the following:

- The Logic of Journaling
- Using Journaling With Clients
- Journaling for Mental Health and Wellness
- Journaling for Growth and Healing
- Spiritual and Nature Journaling
- Journaling and Creativity
- Journaling With Groups and Leaders
- Techniques and Applications

We have done our best to organize these varied chapter contributions into a cohesive whole for you, our readers.

The authors who have generously contributed to this book are experts in their respective fields. Some are counselors, coaches, and researchers, while all contributors are writers and journal keepers. Some journal daily, some write sporadically when trying to solve a problem. Some are poets and memoirists, others are artists. We hope this rich array of perspectives, tools, and offerings will inspire you to keep exploring how journaling can enrich your own life as well as your clients' lives.

You might want to journal or at least take notes as you read this book. You might engage in reflective learning while you read by asking yourself the following questions:

What is standing out to you?

What has value for you?

What do you want to remember?

What do you want to try?

What surprises you?

What inspires you?

From the Pages of My Journal

Before embarking on co-editing this book with Eric Maisel, I decided to journal about my decision. Here is what I wrote:

What do I know? I know that I would love to work with Eric. I have admired his books and writing for many years now, and in more recent years, through our connection as a result of the IAJW, I have grown

to really admire him as a person. I would learn so much from working with him. I like working with people who take action, who move along fairly quickly, who can work with the details but also stay in the macro lens on a project and get things done. I don't want this project to take years, but rather months, and one-year tops. I believe working with someone like Eric, this would be doable and possible.

Why would I say "yes" to doing this book? I am absolutely passionate about the transformational power of journaling. I have been teaching others how to use journaling as a self-care and wellness tool for over twenty years in some form or another. I love teaching on this topic and I love learning about it too! What better way to learn than to invite experts in the field of coaching and therapy, to write about how they use journaling in their specific work, and then have the chance to read, edit and engage with what they write. I also love helping other people get their messages and wisdom out in the world. Books are a great way to share thought leadership, my own and others too. An edited book like this one, allows for many voices to be shared and read. It is a win-win for authors and readers alike!

If we do proceed with this book, what do I hope for? I hope that it can be published by a great publisher. I hope that it will help a lot of people to really see the breadth and depth and possibilities and benefits of transformational journaling in their own lives and how it can be a great asset in their work with clients too. When I think of all my clients who I have supported to journal, and the ways we have used their journaling insights to inform the coaching work we are doing together, and more importantly to inform the lives they are living, I really want as many coaches and therapists and other helping professionals to bring journaling into their life-enriching work with clients.

I can think of so many examples of insights and actions that have flowed from my clients' journaling, combined with our coaching work together. Inner truth and wisdom really can rise up from within through journaling. How amazing is that? To be able to simply sit down and write—with only pen and paper as our tools, we can truly tap into and respond to the truth and desires in our lives.

So, what's my decision about this book? Yes! Yes, yes, yes. I want to give some time, care, energy and resources to make this book happen. I think it can have value for a lot of people. Writing, teaching and making a difference are among my life purposes. Bringing this book into being supports me to do all of these things. It also helps me support others to do the things that are important to them.

Once again, a win-win.

Why Did I Share This Excerpt From My Journal?

First, the obvious, because this is a book about journaling. The best way to teach the power of journaling is to engage with it. Go to the page and write. Notice what you see when you are there. Reflect upon your own reflecting. What do you notice? How do you feel? What's different? What do you want to do now?

As you can see in my own journaling excerpt, I wrote about my thoughts, my feelings, my questions, my experiences and then I came to a conclusion about what I wanted to do, in this case, proceed with creating this book.

Journaling is not magic. But it can be transformative!

Lynda Monk

Editor's Introduction

Every helping professional develops his or her own style of helping. Some of these are rooted in the mental disorder paradigm, where the helper diagnoses and treats. Other helpers are very Rogerian and nondirective and steadfastly return the work to the client. Many coaches focus on the art and practice of helping clients set goals and then monitoring their progress toward achieving those goals. Each helper arrives at his or her own style—usually flowing from and even dictated by that helper's personality.

I am a directive coach who makes suggestions, helps clients set goals, makes sure that clients leave the session with “the right” homework, and holds clients accountable by inviting them to check in with me daily via email. I am also a coach with many “tools” in his “toolkit”: ideas that I regularly share, say, about the difference between life purpose and life purposes; invitations that I regularly make, for instance, the invitation that clients create and maintain one or more daily practices; exercises that I suggest, for instance, a three-step cognitive exercise designed to help clients think thoughts that serve them; and so on.

As a coach who believes in “tools” and as a helper who is convinced that when a client works on increased self-awareness, that helps the client with all aspects of his or her life, I am an advocate of client journaling. Because I specialize in working with creative and performing artists, including many writers, I regularly need to underline a certain distinction: that journaling is not the same thing as working on their book. If they have journaled on a given day, that doesn't mean that they have “gotten to their writing.” That important proviso aside (and it's an important one if you're working with creatives), there's no better way to gain and maintain self-awareness than through journaling.

In this book, I present clients with a certain sort of journaling “method” that I call the focused journal method. It helps a client move step by step from the identification of a problem or a challenge all the way through to announcing solutions and intentions to ultimately aligning one’s thoughts and behaviors with those intentions. That’s a lot for a simple method to accomplish! I recommend that you take a look at my chapter on the focused journal method and, as a corollary activity, maybe dream up your own “method.” There’s no better way to add a “tool” to your “toolkit” than by creating the tool yourself!

This book is chockful of such tools. We’ve brought together an excellent group of practitioners who have a longtime, firsthand experience of journaling and who also regularly invite their clients to keep journals and who provide their clients with unique and innovative journaling exercises and experiences. Our contributors come from all over the world and work with clients in all sorts of settings. We think that their breadth and depth of experience will impress you and that their offerings will help you in your work with your clients.

We are eager to hear from you. We’d love to hear your thoughts about this book and also any stories you might like to share about how you’ve benefited from introducing journal keeping into your own life or into your helping practice. All thoughts and comments welcome! We hope you enjoy this compilation and benefit from it.

Eric Maisel

Acknowledgments

Thank you to all of our coaching and counseling clients over the years who have taught us so much about compassion, resilience and what it takes to grow.

A heartfelt thanks to our families and our beloved spouses, Peter and Ann—who love us and hold up so much of the backdrop of daily life to make the space possible for our respective creative work and writing.

Deep gratitude to all of the incredible contributing authors to this book, this offering would not exist without you. We created the container, you each filled it up with your heart and stories and teachings and brilliance. Thanks to one and all.

A huge thanks to our editor Heather Evans and others, including Ellie Duncan, Katherine Tsamparlis, Ramachandran Vijayaragavan, and others at Routledge, who helped edit, design, and make this book a reality. We were in the first weeks of the COVID-19 global pandemic when we forwarded our proposal for this book to Heather and a short time thereafter she said yes. “Yes” makes everything possible!

Thank you to Eric Maisel for turning a seed of an idea into a full growth experience. It has been a true joy and learning experience to have you as a mentor and co-editor on this project, our first project together, but not the last.

And finally, our appreciation and acknowledgment to journal writers everywhere and to those individuals who have not journaled yet, but will soon, as a result of this book.

The Logic of Journaling

**PART
I**



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A Therapist's Guide to Using Journaling With Clients

Susan Borkin

This chapter highlights three organizing principles for therapists who want to use journaling with their clients. First, I describe therapeutic journaling and how my own origin story weaves into this narrative. Next, I look at therapeutic journaling as an adjunct to clinical practice. Finally, I address how therapeutic journaling actually works and I provide a broad overview of best practices for integrating therapeutic journaling into your work with clients.

Therapeutic Journaling

Therapeutic journaling is any type of writing or expressive process intended for personal growth or psychological healing. It is an evolving, creative, organic process with few actual rules.

The intermingling of words and feelings has been a theme in my life. As a child in middle school, I remember my class sitting on the gym floor for some kind of real or imagined misbehavior and writing on the floor with my finger to express my anger at what I felt was an unfair punishment. This early form of writing out my feelings helped me feel better. In college in the late '60s, I jotted down the phrase, "Writing as therapy. . .?" in my personal journal.

A few years later, I had moved from the Midwest to San Francisco and joined a women's group. I loved it so much that for months I had no idea that it was actually a gestalt therapy group. Among other things, I experimented with using a method from gestalt therapy. I took dialogues, a conversation

between two conflicted parts of the self, and wrote out dialogues between them in my journal.

When I had the opportunity to start graduate school in psychology in 1977, my committee accepted my thesis, *Journal Writing as Self-Therapy*. At that time, so little was known about the topic that my thesis was considered radical. Next, I took what I had been exploring and learning on my own and began teaching workshops called “Journal Writing for Personal Growth.”

As I taught, I watched workshop participants writing in Free Form, a manner of rule-less writing without stopping. I watched participants scribbling “I Want” lists and dialoguing with themselves and with troubled relationships in their lives. I saw faces change, little bursts of understanding, moments of insight and awareness that minutes earlier had been unconscious. I watched participants return from a Walk and Write exercise outdoors, beaming with new understanding. I witnessed personal growth and psychological healing.

Therapeutic Journaling as Adjunct to Clinical Practice

As I continued teaching workshops and working with clients in private practice, I learned that as powerful as journaling is, it is best used as an adjunct in clinical practice. Journaling is an enhancement to and not a replacement for sound clinical work and judgment. Therapists must always rely first on their experience, their skill as a clinician, their relationship to a particular client, their attention to the presenting therapeutic issue and, of course, their care for the safety of the client.

Interestingly, at times, a client’s response to a suggested journaling exercise can also provide clinical data. For example, a client’s excessive difficulty selecting a physical journal may speak of perfectionist standards or obsessive-compulsive disorder. Or, extreme reluctance to write may indicate an underlying trauma or perhaps performance anxiety if the trauma was related to shame or humiliation.

How Journaling Works

Journaling has much to contribute to therapeutic work. Suppressing emotions takes energy. Journaling can release stuck energy and provide a safe place to explore feelings. Traumatic memories are frequently stored in bits and pieces as disorganized pieces of a puzzle. Creating a written narrative makes a story

whole, bringing these disparate pieces together. Journaling can also lead to self-reflection, which in turn may self-empower clients.

As much as you can, begin with a clear clinical picture before introducing journaling to a new client. As you create a working diagnosis, selectively choose how and when to best integrate journaling. Bringing therapeutic journaling together with solid clinical work provides a richly enhanced experience for your clients.

Even though I have stated the flexible nature of therapeutic journaling, there are nonetheless numerous guidelines, suggested methods, and best practices for integrating therapeutic journaling into your work with clients. These are available from additional sources, including from my own book on the subject, but I will provide a sampling here.

If, for example, your client's diagnosis falls into the category of an adjustment disorder, it can be useful to begin with a *QuickList*, a rapidly written unedited list to identify underlying issues. A *What's Bugging Me List* is an example of this. Depression might be eased by *Giving Depression a Voice*. In issues of grief and mourning, one of the most important tasks is letting go without forgetting. *I Wish I Could Tell You* in either the form of a list or a letter can be repeated over time to remember one's loved one.

While most clients are unlikely to identify low self-esteem as the presenting issue, it is almost always present in some way. Positive psychology offers both a *Strengths Introduction* and *Three Good Things*. In a *Strengths Introduction*, a client is asked to write a story, introducing herself via her strengths. In *Three Good Things*, a client is asked to write down three good things that happened each day for at least a week. In what I think of as *Three Good Things Plus*, a client is additionally asked to identify her part in creating these positive experiences. The addition of the causative piece makes this exercise additionally powerful.

How journaling is introduced to a client can significantly affect the results. I have found it best to emphasize the positive benefits to the client. For example, I frequently ask a new client to write a brief autobiographical statement at the beginning of our work together. There are several advantages to this approach. Writing about your history stimulates memories and events. As I review a client's autobiography, I look for patterns, the structure of the family system and coping mechanisms my client has used. I also explain to a client that this written information is cost-effective in that it will save hours of interview time. Indirectly, too, this written assignment can help a client become engaged with the therapeutic work and feel responsible for his or her own progress.

Similarly, giving a client between-session assignments is a useful way to keep the therapy coherent and moving forward. One such tool I created is

ATTENDDD, a mnemonic device for tracking thoughts, feelings, and distractions. Another is W.R.I.T.E., for becoming aware of and shifting belief systems (for details on both tools, see Tips for Helping Professionals next).

There will be occasions when a client is reluctant or resistant to journaling. This may be a clinical issue to explore or it may be something more basic. For example, dyslexic clients may find writing too challenging. Clients with a known or unknown learning or processing disability may also be reluctant to write. Journaling is simply not for everyone. Work with your client and yourself to find creative alternatives.



5 Tips for Helping Professionals

1. **ATTENDDD**—Try this mnemonic to help clients organize responses to their experience, particularly between sessions. Ask them to pay attention to:
 - A**wareness (Have you noticed any changes in yourself?)
 - T**ension/Physical sensations (Are you feeling any tension in your body? Where?)
 - T**houghts (Has your thinking changed in any way?)
 - E**motions (Are you feeling happy, sad, angry, relieved? Do you feel elated, joyous, fearful, depressed?)
 - iN**tuition (Do you feel differently about your inner sense of “knowing?”)
 - D**reams (What are you noticing in your dreams?)
 - D**istractions (What has been distracting you lately?)
2. **W.R.I.T.E.** can be useful when working with clients on their beliefs.
 - W**—What are your current beliefs?
 - R**—Which beliefs are no longer working for you and need to be released?
 - I**—Identify memories, search for beliefs from family, friends, and teachers
 - T**—Transform into new beliefs (note: especially useful with EMDR)
 - E**—Empowering new beliefs; how would you like to live with new beliefs
3. If the client wants to share what they have written, that’s absolutely fine. However, therapeutic journaling does not require the therapist

to see, read, or know what the client has written. The therapeutic value for the client is in the writing itself. This is an excellent point to use when explaining the method to clients.

4. I can practically guarantee you that if you do your own journaling work, you will feel much more at ease when presenting journaling to your clients. Therapist, heal thyself.
5. Lighten up. There is very little about journaling that is right or wrong. Explore, experiment, and enjoy!



5 Tips for Clients and Journal Keepers

1. QuickLists. To answer a question or brainstorm ideas, quickly make a list without editing. This rapid-fire list-making may be in the form of kernel sentences, short phrases, or even a question. For example, "What are five things I can do right now to improve my health?" Or, "If I found myself with a completely open day, I would . . .".
2. PenVisioning combines both positive and negative visualizations. Move back and forth between a positive visualization and a visualization in which something goes wrong, taking notes after each picture. Move back and forth between these two pictures until you feel relief or clarity on how to proceed with your positive visualization.
3. Feeling sluggish with your daily journaling? Get outside, walk and breathe some fresh air. Sit down and try writing again.
4. There will be times when no matter what you do, your journaling will feel stuck. Try shaking things up a bit. Write with your nondominant hand.
5. Write four or five nouns in different colors on a large sheet of paper. Write a short, short story that includes all of the words you have written down.



3 Journaling Prompts

1. This is a three-part prompt, but it can be highly effective in drilling down on an issue. One after another, respond to these three questions

and repeat until some clarity is reached: what am I doing? What am I feeling? What do I want?

2. If I could be or do anything I wanted right now, what would it be?
3. Close your eyes and feel, see, and hear a favorite memory. When you are ready, write down what you remember. What did you notice?



About the Author

Susan Borkin, PhD, is a psychotherapist and speaker. Since 1978 she has pioneered the field of journal writing. Borkin is the author of three books on the transformative power of journaling, *Writing from the Inside Out*; *When Your Heart Speaks, Take Good Notes*; and, most recently, the award-winning *The Healing Power of Writing: A Therapist's Guide to Using Journaling with Clients*.

Journal Therapy

Foundations of Practice

Kathleen Adams

Expressive and therapeutic writing is hailed by therapists, facilitators, and writers worldwide as a holistic practice that is accessible to nearly everyone, requires very little skill or training beyond basic literacy, and can be a powerful agent of transformation.

Yet relatively few people are aware that there is evidence-based theory and standards-based practice that guide the writing process toward best outcomes in a reliable and sustainable way.

In this chapter we'll look at four foundations of practice that are central to maximizing the potential of writing as a tool for healing, growth and change.

Five Qualities of Therapeutic Writing

The Journal Ladder is a theoretical construct I developed to help writers match their cognitive and emotional processing styles, preferences, and desired outcomes with writing techniques that would help them get there. Built into the Ladder are five qualities:

- **Structure.** Every journal technique has a structure, from sentence stems (“finish this sentence”) to freewriting (“write whatever comes”). More structure helps when time is limited or the client wants quick answers or information.
- **Pacing.** Writing can go to deep internal places. Pacing is about diving deep and surfacing, taking a breath, having a stretch, relaxing the mind, and then returning.

- **Containment.** If a client is spinning or spiking out of control, encourage good journal containment skills. Draw a shape on the page and write within it, or write for one paragraph and stop, or write for three minutes and stop.
- **Balance.** Everyone has areas of overfocus and underdevelopment. Balance in the journal offers fresh and even startling perspectives. Find an area of imbalance (e.g., self-criticism) and counter with its yin or yang (“3 Things I Did Well Today”).
- **Permission.** There is no wrong, just write. Encourage clients to rethink limitations they may be putting on their own process. It’s their journal, which is to say, it’s their life. Permission granted!

The Reflection Write

Journal coach Joyce Chapman taught me the reflection write about 30 years ago, and it’s been a mainstay in my practice since. The reflection write comes after a journal entry is written and read back. It focuses on the process of writing and observes details such as physical and emotional responses, surprises, insights, or notations of areas for further exploration.

The reflection write is often only one or two sentences and begins with, *As I read this, I notice*—or *I’m surprised by*—or *I want to*—or whatever organically arises.

This simple starter, *As I read this, I—*, often leads to immediate insight, clarity, or even an “aha” moment. The reflection offers a predictable capacity to synthesize and codify insight and awareness of cognitive or emotional shifts within the write itself.

The following guidelines aren’t a linear checklist but rather a way of thinking about the writing process. The reflection write might center in any of these areas:

- Where did this write or the read-back “land” in your body?
- What did you notice immediately upon reading back?
- What was your emotional or cognitive experience during the write? During the read-back?
- Any surprises, “aha” moments or flashes of insight?
- What else happened during the write or read-back?

In my own journal, I make my reflections stand out by writing them at a 45-degree angle across the page, then drawing a thick box around them. When I’m keyboarding, I boldface them and put them in a bright color.

The Journal and the Self

The relationship with the journal is often a reliable predictor of the relationship with Self.

Some writers struggle with self-concept. They might have problems with self-doubt, have a strong internal voice of criticism, or have another disempowering state of mind and being. Their journals often reflect this disempowerment with entries filled with tension, self-recrimination, or self-judgment. When asked to give three words or phrases that describe their relationship with their journals, these writers often respond with words like *conflicted*, *unproductive*, *downer*.

But when they're encouraged to shift into more positive writes that affirm better outcomes, convey more gentle messages, and take other steps to shift toward an empowering state of mind and being—their self-concept and relationship with Self begin to change for the better.

On the other hand, some writers who struggle with self-concept have journals filled with hopes, desires, and goals for a more balanced life, even if they don't know how to get there. These writers often use words such as *friend in need*, *supportive*, *anchor*, *safe place* to describe their journals.

Encourage them to explore the “self” that writes nurturing and supportive messages. Teach them how to support that “self” in taking small action steps toward goals or other empowering action. These clients are thus primed to grow into the healthier, happier selves that they've been predicting in the journal.

As with any healthy relationship, the client and the journal will grow together. Choices may change as the relationship evolves. This is not only normal but something to be celebrated. The self is catching up with the Self, and the journal is scribe for the journey.

Silence

“As it is in poetry, silence is part of the form,” said Tristine Rainer in *The New Diary*. Journal silence is not only normal, but it can be a valuable messenger. Here are three types of silence and what each might signal.

- **When life gets in the way.** Time and energy don't always leave space for writing. If there's nothing left in the tank or on the clock, give permission for the client to let it go without self-recrimination. Suggest a list of three, which takes under a minute, or an action plan in a Five-Minute Sprint.

- **When one is rendered mute by trauma, fear, or rage.** Some stories are bigger than can be emotionally managed or sometimes even named. The client might feel sickened by the idea of writing. Trust that instinct; respect that boundary. Instead, focus on strength-based writing. What's the client's superpower? What's a ray of light from today that can be captured in prose? How is the client experiencing beauty in everyday life?
- **When it isn't yet word-ripe.** This is the silence that falls on the 19th day of really wanting to write and not writing. This is the silence of the not-yet word-ripe, a write-in-process that hasn't yet surfaced. Encourage the client to stay with the silence, think of it as an incubator, and imagine this journal entry growing strong roots. Creative arts, bodywork, meditation, and other integrative practices are viable languages for this silence.



5 Tips for Helping Professionals

1. **Predictors of client success.** If even one of these predictors is in place, the capacity for a client to effectively use a journal in treatment is enhanced.
 - Prior experience with journal writing, even if it didn't turn out well in the past
 - Motivation (e.g., if writing offers a pathway to something they deeply desire)
 - Positive experience in general with writing or literature
 - Strong alliance with therapist
2. **The power of writing in community.** "There is nothing so wise as a circle," wrote the poet Rainer Maria Rilke. The many powerful aspects of writing groups include the capacity to bear witness and be compassionately witnessed; the role-modeling of courage, resilience, or creative adaptation that is shared among peers; and the opportunity to feel accepted and valued for being "real." These benefits can be equally effective in person or on a video platform.
3. **The journal as agent of neuroplasticity.** Washington, D.C.-based psychotherapist Deborah Ross has codified intentional and purposeful writing as a form of self-directed neuroplasticity, much like mindfulness meditation, in her signature work *Your Brain on Ink*.

4. **Three feeling words, top and bottom.** Feelings change with time and process. To demonstrate this, I ask clients to write three words describing how they feel before they start a write, and again after they have completed the reflection. This gives real-time data on how writing helps feelings shift (usually, but not always, for the better) in very little time, using the process of writing.
5. **Budget an in-session Five-Minute Sprint.** When a client is on the edge of insight, discovery, or integration, we “stop, drop, and write.” Slide a pad of paper over and ask the client to write what’s going on, then read the entry or a reflection to you. It’s often the most powerful five minutes of the session.



5 Tips for Clients and Journal Keepers

1. **Protect your privacy.** Find a way to keep your journal safe and secure. Paper journals can be discreetly stowed in bookbags, briefcases, or backpacks. Digital journals can be password-protected or stored in folders with neutral names.
2. **Date every entry.** This one habit practiced in the present allows your future self a historical lens through which to note how this present moment unfolded across time.
3. **Be authentic.** Practice being you, with no expectations or obligations. Who would you be, what would you do, how would you express yourself if it were emotionally safe to do so?
4. **Write from your own lived experience.** Bring in details—the fuzzballs on the cardigan sweater, the moon shining crimson through the smoke of the forest fire, the smell of autumn decay.
5. **Forget the “rules.”** Write what you want, how you want, when you want. Write in a notebook or on a keyboard or in a phone app. No wrong, just write!



3 Journaling Prompts

The following journaling prompts are adapted from *Journal Therapy for Calming Anxiety* © 2020 Kathleen Adams, Sterling Publishing:

1. **Rays of light.** No matter how challenging things may be, there's always at least one thing that's going well. It might be a stable relationship, a cause that fills you with purpose, a pastime that sparks your imagination. Write about a ray of light that is shining on you right now.
2. **Your superpower.** We might not be able to cast Spider-Man webs from our palms, but everybody's got superpowers. Often, they hide in plain sight. Maybe you're a good listener, or you're great at organizing, or you create lovely spaces. Make a list of things you're naturally good at. Choose one and write about it. How might it help you manage stressful situations?
3. **Can you change this?** Some things you can't control (the weather) and some things you can control (your choices). A great journal question is, "Can I change this [experience, feeling, circumstance]?" If no, then passively disregard it, say "oh well," and move on. If yes, write about what can be changed and list a few action steps to start.



About the Author

Kathleen Adams, LPC, is a psychotherapist and registered poetry/journal therapist in Denver, Colorado. She is the founder/director of the Center for Journal Therapy, the Therapeutic Writing Institute, and Journalversity. Kathleen is the author of 13 books on journal therapy, including the best-selling classic, *Journal to the Self* (1990), *Expressive Writing: Foundations of Practice* (2013), and *Journal Therapy for Calming Anxiety* (2020).

How Journaling Benefits Your Coaching and Your Clients

A M Carley

When I began writing to myself in a green spiral notebook, I was a confused 13-year-old, desperate to make sense of life, whose only jobs at the time involved babysitting and housecleaning. I'd never considered becoming a coach. Over the decades, my journal has become a portal to my wisest, best self. I'm happy to report that my journal's value to me increases every day, for both my life and my work. Its form has changed, from smaller to larger blank books, and its contents now cover many more topics and kinds of expression.

A written journaling practice (there are other kinds) works for many people, including those who don't consider themselves writers. Because journals are personal and private, writers and nonwriters alike can explore and enjoy a singular freedom of expression. All you need to do is put pen to page and see what happens. You can also use digital devices, although perhaps there are some additional benefits to writing by hand.

In the context of coaching, I see journaling as a key tool for myself as a coach, and also for my clients. Many times when I welcome a client, I notice that, as she settles in, she pulls out a bound book and a pen before she feels ready to begin.

Self-Coaching for Coaches

In effect, my journal is an important self-coaching tool for me. Each day before work, I consider the interactions I'll be having with clients, and see if I notice