
WRITING AND HEALTH - SOME PRACTICAL ADVICE

Writing about emotional upheavals in our lives can improve physical and mental health. Keep in mind that there are probably a thousand ways to write that may be beneficial to you. Thinking of these as rough guidelines rather than Truth. Indeed, in your own writing experiment on your own see what works best.

Some people find it helpful to do their writing in the form of a letter to the main person involved in the past events.

GETTING READY TO WRITE

Find a time and place where you won't be disturbed, ideally pick a time at the end of your working day or before you go to bed. Promise yourself that you will write for a minimum of 15 minutes a day for at least 3-4 days. These may be consecutive days or there may be several days in between periods of writing. Once you begin writing write continuously, don't worry about spelling or grammar. If you run out of things to write about just repeat what you have already written. You can write longhand or you can use a computer. If you are unable to write you could also talk into a tape recorder. You can write about the same thing on all three or four days of writing or you can write about something different each day, it is entirely up to you.

WHAT TO WRITE ABOUT

Something that you are thinking or worrying about too much, something that you feel is affecting your life in an unhealthy way, something that you have been avoiding for days, weeks or years, something that you are dreaming about.

Write about your deepest emotions and thoughts. Really let go and explore your feelings and thoughts about the experience. In your writing you might tie this experience to your childhood, your relationship with your parents, people you have loved or love now, or even your career. How this experience related to who you would like to become, who you have been in the past or who you are now. It is critical that you really let go and explore your deepest emotions and thoughts.

It is important when writing about past events to write about what you would do differently now, in hindsight, if you were experiencing the same event again.

Warning

Many people report that after writing they sometimes feel somewhat sad or depressed, like seeing a sad movie. This typically goes away in a couple of hours. If you find that you are getting extremely upset about a writing topic simply stop writing or change topics.

WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR WRITING SAMPLES

The writing is for you and for you only. The purpose is for you to be completely honest with yourself. When writing you may plan to throw away your writing when you are finished. You may want somebody else to read it. Whether you keep it or save it is really up to you.

Some people keep their samples and edit them, ie they gradually change their writing from day to day. Others simply keep them and return to them over over again to see how they have changed.

Here are some other options

Burn them, erase them, shred them, flush them, tear them into little pieces and toss them into the ocean or let the wind take them away.

(The recommendations in this handout come from Dr James Pennybaker, Clinical Psychologist, Texas, USA).