

from the
creativewritenow
Journaling for the Health of it™ series

WHO are you



HOW TO use
journaling THERAPY
TO KNOW and
grow your LIFE

by Mari L. McCarthy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
The Process: Why Journal?.....	4
Why Use a Journal for Self-Discovery?.....	7
Focus on handwriting	7
Nurture your inner self	9
Make Journaling a priority	10
Taking risks.....	11
Respect your self	13
Basic exercises for getting out of your own way	14
Just jump	15
Journaling Feng Shui	16
The Seven Principles of Journaling	17
The Prompts: Journaling and Personal Growth.....	21
Journaling a Letter to Your Former Self	22
Journaling with Your Inner Critic and Inner Coach	24
Dream Journaling Lets Your Unconscious Speak	27
Summary: Journaling for Self-Discovery.....	30

introduction

One major motivation for establishing a journaling practice is the longing to respond to that classic question: “Who am I?”

It is a seemingly simple inquiry, but it encompasses many more questions within it— What kind of person am I? What makes me tick, what makes me ticked off and what makes me happy? What are my dreams and fears? Where have I been and where am I going? Keeping a journal can bring you closer to giving confident, meaningful replies to these questions and ultimately getting to know yourself better.

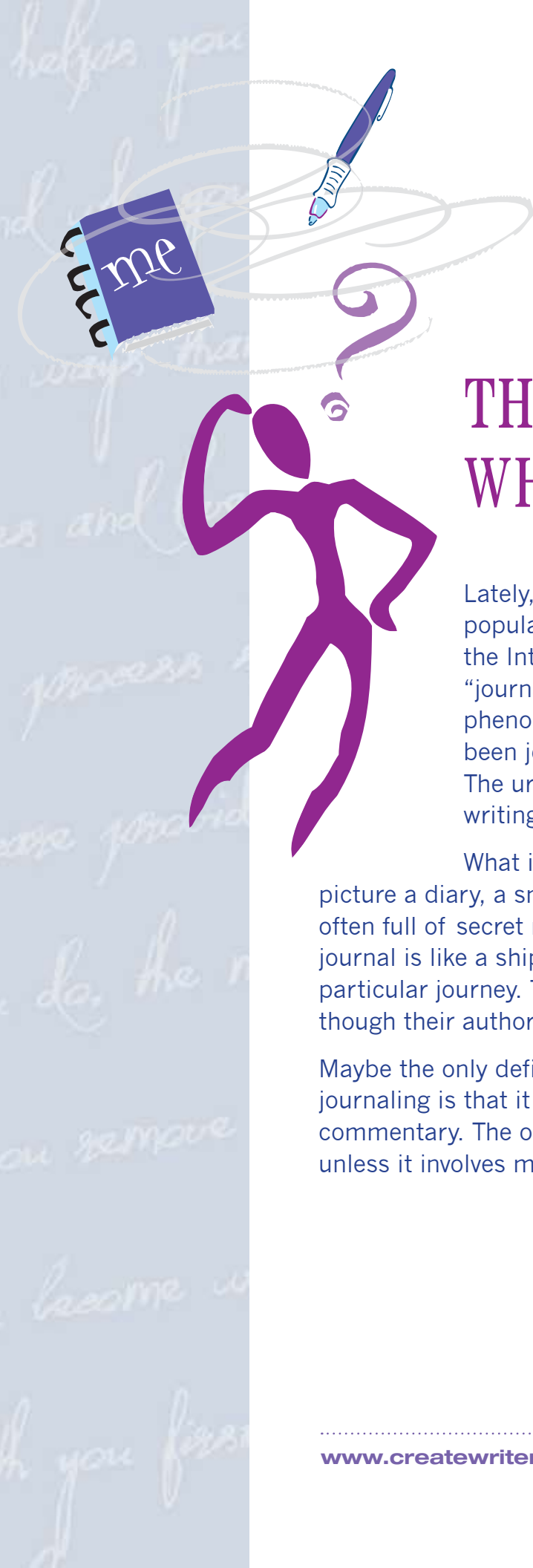
In order to give a clear picture of how to use journaling for self-discovery, this e-book examines the basic process of journaling and then provides a few prompts, or variations on the basics, that can spark your imagination and enrich the potential of your journal writing.

Even if you are one of the few lucky people who never has any trouble thinking of what to write, the prompts will help you focus your journaling practice better. By challenging yourself to focus on certain topics, you will discover new information about your inner self and achieve significant breakthroughs.



Good luck, and WriteON!

Mari



THE PROCESS: WHY journal?

Lately, journaling has been enjoying renewed popularity. This may be partly attributable to the Internet's ease of communications and the "journal-like" character of that uniquely online phenomenon, blogging. However, people have been journaling ever since writing was invented. The urge to record and explore through personal writings is time-honored and universal.

What is journaling, exactly? Some might picture a diary, a small volume bound with a lock and often full of secret romance. To others, the idea of a journal is like a ship's log, recording progress through a particular journey. These are both examples of journaling, though their authors and purposes are very different.

Maybe the only definition you can confidently suggest for journaling is that it is a regular practice of written reflections or commentary. The operative word here is "regular." It's not a journal unless it involves many successive entries over a period of time.

the process: why journal?

If nothing else, journaling is habitual; it's a discipline that requires dedication. You can benefit by journaling one time only, but then you reap the benefits one time only. When you journal as a regular part of your everyday life, the practice can reach its full potential and return its most gracious rewards.

Just as in any diet program or exercise regimen, making it a part of your lifestyle is the ultimate answer. Journaling involves adopting a new activity and making it as natural a part of your day as brushing your teeth.

Beyond this fundamental characteristic, however, journal writing can take an infinite variety of forms. You can journal any experience, from your Army Boot Camp to your teenage romance, from your search for work to your vacation in the mountains.

So why journal? Why decide you are going to make this commitment, dedicating your time and energies to regular reflection?

You might simply wish to make a record of your life, or some aspect of it. Or maybe you're working towards a goal and you want to journal as a way to get motivated or organized. You might use your journal as a friend when other friends are not around.

Many people choose to start a journaling practice because they suspect it will bring them closer to their core selves. Journaling is unparalleled in its ability to reveal new information about our inner life, conditionings, experiences and thoughts.

the process: why journal?

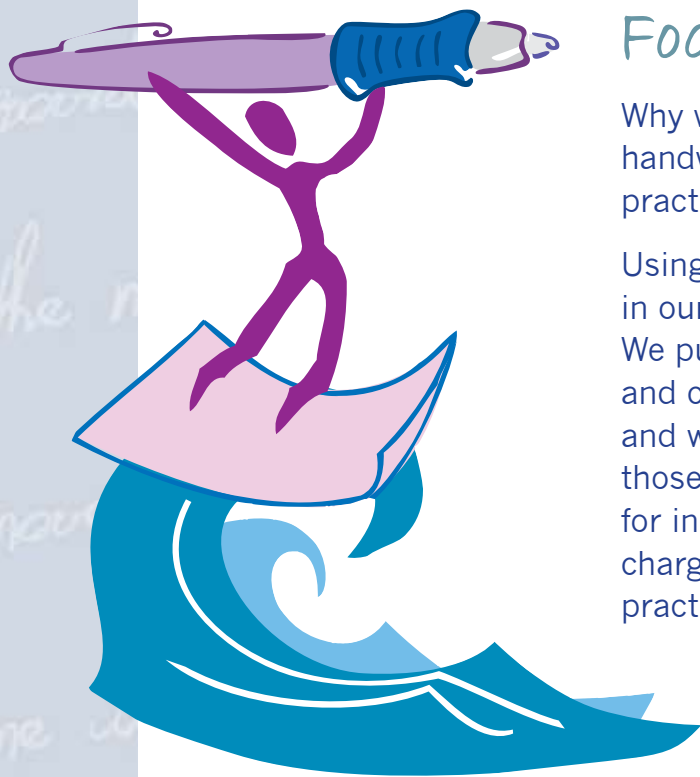
Your reasons for journaling may include phrases such as:

- make a change
- improve my attitude
- increase my emotional intelligence
- find something to believe in
- figure out why I keep making the same mistakes over and over

This e-book **especially addresses** the use of journaling for the purpose of **self-discovery**, and it will be a supportive companion for you on your journey.

WHY use a journal FOR SELF-DISCOVERY?

Journaling is an effective method for unearthing self-knowledge. It aligns body and mind; it focuses regularly on the inner self in a nurturing way; and it unveils the infinity of resources that is always available to us.



Focus on handwriting

Why would you want to focus on handwriting? Because it provides practice in connecting mind and body.

Using handwriting is a rare activity in our daily lives in the 21st century. We punch keys on our phones, tablets and computers. Taking pen in hand and writing is often relegated to those insignificant moments when, for instance, you sign for credit card charges at the store. There's little practical need for handwriting anymore.

why use a journal for self discovery?

But a unique and otherwise inaccessible brilliance lies in the coordination of hand, eye and mind. Each of these capacities equally contributes to the result. It is through their balanced interaction that discoveries are made.

When you write in your journal by hand, you make use of that coordination, and the movement of the pen in your fingers often takes on its own will, revealing insights that can be astounding.



Nurture your inner self

Spending measurable time on self-discovery can feel contrary to your accustomed values. You may worry that you're being selfish or wasting time. Dedicating to a journal writing practice means budgeting time on a very regular basis, and it's time that you spend myopically focused on Number One. Some of the people around you, or maybe even you yourself, might disapprove.

But because journaling can lead to a healthier You, neglecting the practice is actually inconsiderate of both yourself and those around you. Your good health benefits all; your dis-eases benefit no one.

Journaling can become your Inner Coach, providing support that is constant and uncompromising. Journaling is a way to become powerful at your core, providing a balance to external influences.

You should care about nurturing your inner self; it's how you gain the confidence and self-knowledge to achieve your goals. With an invincible core, you have a good chance of coming out on top when you navigate life's challenges.

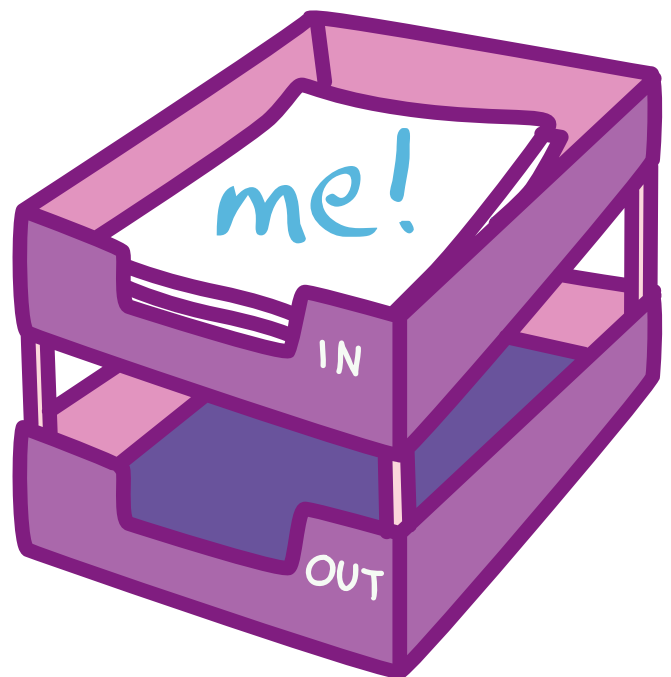
Make journaling a priority

These fine words do little, though, to modify actual behavior. Even though you are really committed to self-discovery, to increasing your self-awareness, to improving your wellness and your soul's health; even though you truly do want to be a better, healthier, happier person, there are so many other things to do that are more urgently requesting your attention at this particular moment. Journaling all too rapidly drops to the bottom of your to-do list.

You won't ever journal unless you actually sit down with your notebook and pen. That may seem a simple enough act, but in truth we rarely stop moving long enough to do it.

The common sense of journaling is very close to the common sense of meditating. Our frenzied forward motion needs commensurate quiet time; our hell-bent hurtle into the future begs to be completed in its opposite, which is slow and careful reflection.

To journal, you must have enough self-respect to sidestep your own objections, get out of your own way and to get to the page.





Take risks

Are you willing to risk? Are you willing to try? To take a chance? To say, “Yes!” Even though you might not yet know what you are saying “Yes” to?

A journal writing practice requires choosing to take a risk while simultaneously developing a deepened respect for your weaknesses.

Do you like yourself? What about love? Would you say “love” is a good word for the way you feel about yourself? If not, would you like to feel love for your self?

take risks

How deep is your wish for change? Is your co-dependent life actually what you want, or is your thirst for healing becoming increasingly insistent?

How much are you aware of all the things you don't even know that you don't know? How much do you respect that which is beyond your awareness? Do you want to open up your awareness?

Sometimes you're placed at risk, more than choosing to take one. Life sometimes makes demands that cannot be ignored. Perhaps your willingness to take a risk is fueled by some challenge that the Universe has sent you, some condition that leaves you no choice but to take action and to evolve.

Respect Your Self

Journaling is very easy, ridiculously easy, just like it's easy to keep to a healthy diet once you are used to it. Eating a healthy diet is not the hard part. What is hard is transitioning from French fries and milkshakes to a healthy diet and making it an integral part of your life. The transition is the problem, not the resultant change. It's helpful to understand this distinction.

After the adrenaline rush of starting a new regimen fades, any regular exercise for self-improvement can easily start to seem like an imposition or an inconvenience. Worse, you may come to view it as a promise that you made to yourself and therefore a promise that doesn't really have to be kept.

Doing good for yourself is something that's easy to put off until another time, and another time and another time, until suddenly you notice that years have passed.

Think about all the time you spend working on changing external realities. You work to nurture your financial well-being, your home, your children's future, your pool of resources. How much time do you dedicate to nurturing your inner self? Probably very little, in comparison. And yet, how can you be an effective presence in the world unless your inner self is strong, creative and confident?

Think of someone you respect. Would you approve of that person spending time writing in a journal? Would you actually encourage that person to do so? Would you deny yourself the fundamental respect you give others?

Get out of your own way

There are two ways to start journaling. These relate to the very beginning of your journaling practice, as well as to those times when, though a regular journaler, you feel as though you don't know what to write.

You can use either tender or tough love

In the tender love approach, you are profoundly kind to yourself. You are careful to take a few moments to focus inward and calm your breathing. Then you gently ask the questions; "Okay, what's going on? What's happening?" in an understanding, soothing tone of voice.

The trick with tender love is to accept whatever you encounter, not allowing any manipulation, criticism or judgment. Acceptance and understanding give the tender love approach magical powers.

In the tough love approach, you use an objective challenge to force the movement of your pen. This may be any one of an infinite number of exercises or prompts, but the fundamental practice is that of free-writing, or stream-of-consciousness writing.

In free-writing, you put pen to paper and go, without thought or pause, for a set amount of time, even if all that comes out is pure gibberish. The direct connection between mental impressions and hand movements forges a channel to greater understanding of the inner self. Conscious objections are simply bypassed.



Just jump

Why would you want to jump off a psychic cliff?

In a way, because you are reading this e-book, you already know the answer to this question. You know you thirst for something above-and-beyond, something miraculous, something that suggests more palpable meaning to your experience.

You know you have to make better sense of your impressions. And in this search, you don't expect handouts. You know your life depends on being willing: to participate, to learn, to serve, to experiment, to experience, to give. But mostly, to grow.



journaling FENG SHUI

Set yourself up for a smooth journaling ride by arranging your environment to be as conducive to writing as possible.

The Eastern practice of feng shui observes that clutter brings low, confusing and draining energy into your environment, which is detrimental to your energy and well-being, not to mention your journaling aspirations. (You have experienced this if you have ever walked into your home or work office and groaned at the sight of an overflowing inbox and piles of papers to be filed.)

Resolve to clear at least enough of the clutter to make room for a cozy and inviting journaling niche.

Be highly selective about the objects you include in the space, and don't forget to consider such elements as lighting, temperature and background music. If you feel silly spending any time on this task, recall that the brief investment of your energies now will serve you well into the indefinite future.

Finally, get your hands on a notebook and pen. What kind of notebook and pen? Ones you like and can afford! Don't get too picky in this area, but don't deny yourself some indulgence if it's within reach. To be miserly or careless in your selection of journaling tools can result in disappointment with the process. Understand that your search for materials and your decisions regarding them will affect your practice.



THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF JOURNALING

Very often, the things that are the most simple and obvious are also the most profound and difficult—such as love, or money, for instance. Journaling falls into this category as well.

Here are a few principles to keep in mind, to calm your anxieties and help open the door to journaling bliss.

1. Always journal the right way.

What's the right way to journal? There is only one right way to journal, and that is your way. When, why and how you do it is always your personal choice. Never let anyone tell you otherwise. Journaling the right way is journaling, whatever form it takes. Period.

2. And also journal in divergent ways.

You may, however, experiment with journaling for certain definite purposes, and you may even do some guided journaling.

You might try journaling a trip, or drawing your journal instead of writing it or journaling at night if you usually write in the mornings. Change things up now and again, just for fun, so you avoid any ruts and remind yourself not to take anything too seriously.

3. Don't judge your journal by its cover.

Think you have to have a beautiful moleskin or silk-bound volume to hold your journal? On the contrary, it's probably best just to grab an old notebook that's been lying around, or one that you quickly pick up at the drug store. Nothing's more disappointing than buying a beautiful, expensive journal and then waiting for the absolutely perfect opportunity to use it. You'll find yourself saying, "I bought this beautiful journal about four years ago and I have been meaning to get to it, but ... "

Leave the gilt-edged tomes to the museums. For journaling, simple and immediately accessible is best.

4. Note changes in yourself.

We love to see the results of our efforts, so as you establish your journaling practice, keep an eye out for signs. Within two to three weeks, you'll notice some change in yourself. You may walk a tad more lightly, smile a bit more readily.

On the other hand, you may be sobered by new perspectives on your life that your journaling has revealed.

Whatever the small changes, you can document and discuss them in your journal.

5. The times when you least feel like journaling are the times when you need it most.

When you find yourself feeling stressed, unproductive or frustrated, do a big data dump with your journal. Ask it a question. Have a dialogue with it.

the seven principles of journaling

When you're sluggish, and the last thing in the world you feel like doing is journaling, it is a perfect opportunity to find out what's really going on inside. By facing your resistances squarely, journaling about your anti-journaling feelings, you can discover new layers of self.

6. No one is grading your journal, so ignore your inner critics.

Start with, "Today I feel..." and write in stream of consciousness for 10 minutes. Barrel past your worries about writing by simply writing, full-speed, completely ignoring the voice that says you can't do it.

It doesn't matter if you write the same thing over and over, or even if you write gibberish. Move the pen on the paper, and you are making progress.

7. Can't find the time to write? Ask your journal for advice.

It's not easy to get into the habit of making time for yourself. Often, even a period of five or 10 minutes seems too much.

If you need help making time, use your journal to find the answer. Write the question, "How can I find the time to journal?" and see what your pen tells you.



We have the answers inside of ourselves. We think that we don't, but we really do.



THE PROMPTS: journaling and personal growth

You have now been presented with the basic tools and concepts of journaling in this e-book. Anything in addition to these basics is an elaboration or expansion of the fundamentals. Journaling is profoundly simple and enormously complex, both at the same time.

We can focus our journal writing by using one or several of the many applications of the basic structure. We can devise and use special journaling exercises or “prompts,” as they are known in creative circles. These can help us achieve specific goals through journaling.



the prompts: journaling and personal growth

A prompt jump-starts self-expression, facilitating that crucial moment when the pen first hits the page. A prompt whets the appetite, causing us to respond before we know it and before we can raise objections. A prompt can elicit the spontaneous expression that otherwise eludes us.

Guided journaling uses prompts to set a path for personal revelation. Prompts help get the writing going when inspiration falters. A prompt can also keep you focused, if you are journaling for a specific purpose. Prompts can come from an infinite variety of sources; they are limited only by the imagination.

In this book, we'll look at just a few of these prompts, those that are tailored to personal growth. The next three chapters detail journaling prompts that are meant to inspire and support your journey of self-discovery.

journaling a letter to your former self

An excellent prompt to help get you going in a quest for self-discovery through journaling involves reflecting on your past. When we look back on the past—whether just yesterday or many years ago—sometimes we think, “I wish I knew then what I know now.”

Try working with that wish in your journaling practice. Go back to that previous time for a dialogue with your younger self. Say all the things you wish you had heard at the time. The process is likely to turn up greater understanding than you expected, with insights into your present life as well as healthy perspectives on past events.

In your journal, write a letter to your past self, following these steps.

1. Take several minutes to make a mental picture of a time in your past that was stressful. Why was this period so challenging for you? What were your feelings? What kind of support would have helped you cope better? Are there mistakes you wish you could go back and redo? Are there decisions you made at the time that you still stand by?
2. Then make a mental list of what you have learned since that difficult time. If you could sit with your younger self and share an important piece of advice, what would it be?

journaling a letter to your former self



3. On a fresh page in your journal, start a letter to yourself. Include as many details as you can remember of your life at that stressful time. Be completely empathetic with your former self; be respectful of the feelings you had and understanding of the decisions you made.
4. Now give some advice to your younger self. What can your present self offer that might have helped you at that time? Say whatever you think would have been a wake-up call for you then. Be gentle, blunt or funny; be kind but firm.
5. Before putting your pen down, be sure your letter includes a statement of love and forgiveness for your earlier self. Be sincere and generous, and reassure your past persona that you will be okay. After all, you survived and made it to today!

When you're done writing, consider for a moment whether the advice you just shared might be relevant to any current issues in your life.

What do you think your future self would say to you now?

journaling with your inner critic and inner coach

Sooner or later, in every personal growth odyssey, you'll be confronted by the star players in this prompt.

People are often stalled in their attempts to learn and grow because of something called the Inner Critic, that judgmental voice from within that demolishes both courage and creativity. For example:

- You want to make a career move, but your Inner Critic says you are worthless and you'll never succeed.
- You want to approach someone to whom you're attracted, but your Inner Critic keeps telling you you're ugly, stupid and unlovable.
- You'd like to try your hand at a new skill, but your Inner Critic says you will fail.

Most of us remember being offered opportunities which we rejected because we listened to that inner voice and let it control us. Often, we may regret making the choice to play it safe. Electing not to stretch yourself can leave you feeling empty, depressed or even physically ill.

journaling with your inner critic and inner coach

Your Inner Critic will never go away completely. Its restrictions, in many ways, are there to protect us from harm and to help us mature. Without the Inner Critic, we'd become narcissistic addicts and waste away.

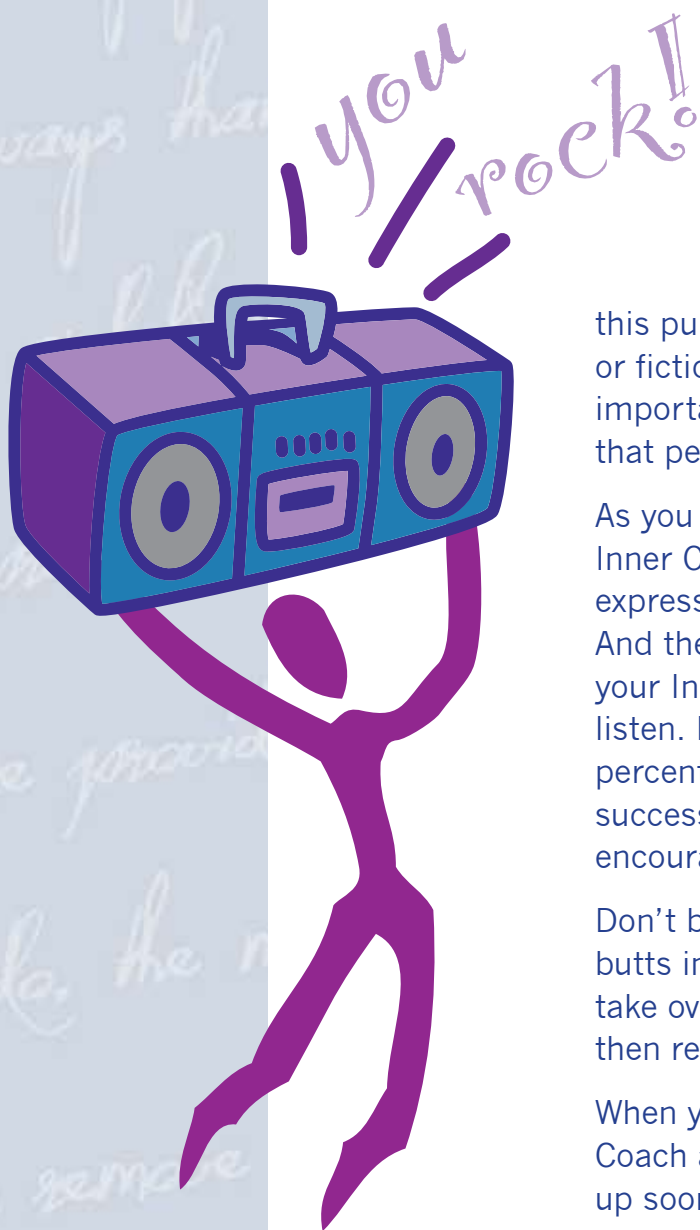
But if we let the Inner Critic rule virtually unopposed, we become severely imbalanced. With a little practice, you can learn to control its sneers and reduce its destructive power. For starters:

- Become mindful of when and how your Inner Critic talks. Start with noticing the words it uses and write them down. Notice the patterns of what your Critic says and how it makes you feel. This will create awareness of your negative self-talk and the effect that it has on you.
- Explore the sources that have fed your Inner Critic. Consider who in your life disappointed you by being critical rather than helpful. Remember that many people think that being critical is useful, even loving. That idea is misguided and can cause unintended hurt.
- Interrupt your negative self-talk and replace it with a neutral and encouraging inner voice. As you repeat this process over and over again, it will become easier.

The best way to get ahead of your Inner Critic is to nurture your Inner Coach. Your journal is an essential tool to assist you in this process.

Imagine that your Inner Coach is sitting next to you as you write in your journal. Base your image on a real person: perhaps a teacher or other mentor who has had a significant influence on your life. If you can't think of an actual person who could serve

journaling with your inner critic and inner coach



this purpose, choose someone from history or fiction, or even make up a personality. The important thing is to be able to clearly visualize that person's face and hear his or her voice.

As you journal, write as if you are talking to your Inner Coach. Whatever your subject or theme, express it as a conversation with this mentor. And then, most importantly, pause to listen to your Inner Coach's response. Close your eyes and listen. Remember that this inner friend is 100 percent supportive and wants nothing more than success and well-being for you. Write down 10 encouraging statements from your Inner Coach.

Don't be at all surprised when your Inner Critic butts in with its own opinions. But don't let it take over, either. Calmly acknowledge it and then return your attention to your Coach.

When you're done writing, thank your Coach and make another date to catch up soon. Write down the appointment on your calendar and be sure to keep it!



Dream journaling LETS your UNCONSCIOUS SPEAK

A time-honored and highly productive journaling prompt for self-discovery is about exploring your dream world.

Dreaming is what Sigmund Freud called “the royal road to knowledge of the unconscious.” The nightly narratives of dreams - whether scary, strange or sweet - are clues to what’s happening with us deep down inside.

History is full of examples citing the influence of dreams in decision-making, art creation, and general mental health. Freud thought that dreams represent our unfulfilled and repressed wishes and desires; many artists have said the inspiration for their masterpiece came from a dream.

dream journaling lets your unconscious speak

When you have a decision to make, isn't it often a good idea to "sleep on it" before finalizing your choice?

Mysterious as it is, dreaming is a major factor in life. By pausing to study your dreams and consider their meanings, you can discover tons of new information about your self.

Our nights are loaded to the gills with stories. The mind's fantastic storytelling contains many useful nuggets of truth. Through journaling, you can ferret out those nuggets and benefit from their intimate wisdom.

Dreams contain bits of real events and emotions that our minds and bodies are processing. They can be interpreted on any number of levels, but simply remembering them—without even wanting or trying to interpret—is a powerful way to raise your consciousness.

One of the best techniques for remembering your dreams is through regular dream journaling.

When you begin the practice, you may not remember any dreams.

But very quickly, snippets will start coming back to you as you write each morning, and before you know it, you'll run out of time before you run out of narrative.

Something in the ritual of journaling and in the writing itself, makes remembering your dreams increasingly easy.

It's worth your time to follow these simple steps to productive dream journaling:

1. Designate the physical journal or notebook, and have it handy, along with a pen you really like.
2. Each night before you fall asleep, tell yourself that you'll remember your dreams.
3. If you continue to have trouble remembering, try setting your alarm for 10 minutes ahead of the time you normally wake up. Before you do anything else, jot down what you remember of your dreams. It can be in narrative or bulleted form, and it doesn't need to make sense.
4. After you tell the story of your dream to your journal, reflect about its meaning to you. How do you feel emotionally when you remember the dream? What part of your life might be relevant to the dream?
5. Every week or so, take a few minutes to track your progress. Can you detect any trends in your dreaming? Do your dreams seem to focus in any one area? Do they relate to a certain part of your life? Do they suggest new ways of dealing with issues; do they frighten or disgust you; do they reveal your self to you in new ways?

Look closely at your dreams for clues about your self. Interacting with dreams through your journal is a technique that enhances both journaling and dreaming. By working in tandem, they both become more complex, meaningful and vibrant.



summary: journaling For SELF-DISCOVERY

Like the ancient Chinese practice of Qi Gong, journaling can provide a connection between the mind and the body. A more holistic state of health can be developed once the mind and body start communicating.

As part of your journey of self-discovery, using your handwritten journal plugs you into more sources of information than you are normally aware of.

Journal writing lets us realize and appreciate that mind and body are naturally connected. And this recognition is an early step towards using your journal as your own private—and remarkably healing - therapist.

By connecting the opposite sides of yourself, your mind and body, your inside and outside, you develop a new sense of wholeness.

Soon the journal has become your daily companion. You carry it with you and no matter where you are, you can take a few minutes to practice the moving meditation of writing. Perhaps you write for awhile each morning or evening, and use this time to center yourself, to pull the disparate parts of you together again.

summary: journaling for self discovery

Learning to connect the mind and body in this way can result in physical healing, emotional nurturing and mind strengthening. Moreover, it prepares the individual for epiphanies or breakthroughs, by opening the consciousness and increasing observational skill.

Journaling is appropriate for any age, gender or type of person. Sometimes people hesitate to try journaling because they don't consider themselves to be good writers. They're worried that their lack of writing know-how will hold them back.

But skill in writing, proper grammar, good penmanship and all those structures mean nothing in the world of journaling. Your focus is on other things: the process of writing; the movement of the pen across the paper; the emotions you coax into clarity through the practice; the understanding that deepens so profoundly.

When you journal, you are seeking, journeying, digging. You are writing to know and grow your life.

Enjoy the journey!

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