

## OVERVIEW

Therapeutic writing is a kind of structured journal writing. It is a self-care tool to encourage deeper and clearer reflection, processing, and discovery. Therapeutic writing can help you heal, grow, and thrive.

- Writing prompts are offered as frames—it's up to you to decide which content is most useful to examine through these frames.
- In therapeutic writing, the process is more important than the product: not the sentences that you craft on the page but the experience of writing.
- You can also refer to your journal entries later as a resource—to read what you've written and track your progress.
- Therapeutic writing, like any form of journal writing, is a place where you can have a conversation with the person who knows you best: you.
- Some people find further healing through sharing their reflections with others. But whether you share your work is up to you. Therapeutic writing is a deeply personal process, so for it to be profound and meaningful just to you is enough.

## MANAGING STRESS AND ANXIETY THROUGH WRITING

Writing has been found in many studies to reduce feelings of depression, anxiety, and stress. Learning to tolerate and decrease these feelings of distress can have physical, psychological, and emotional benefits—including improving sleep; reducing bodily expressions of stress (headaches, stomach pain/digestive issues, rapid heart rate, neck and shoulder tension, etc.); resisting catastrophic thinking; developing more rational thought reframing; and de-escalating emotional responses to more manageable levels.

**Distress tolerance:** Choose a current challenge or a past one that still feels unresolved. Examine your thought and emotion patterns in trying to deal with it. Do you automatically jump to relieve your distress, perhaps by avoiding, denying, or suppressing it? Imagine instead sitting with the discomfort, noticing it with curiosity and without judgment in order to learn from it and pass through it organically, not rushing that process. When is tolerating the distress productive/useful for you, and when does it cross the line into spiraling/stuckness?

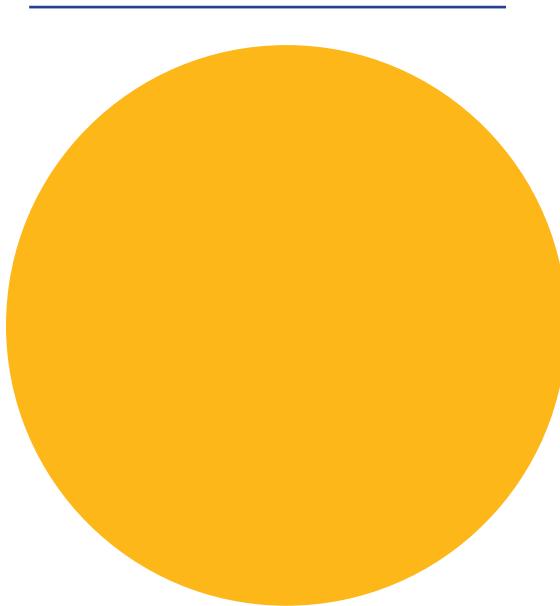
**Where is the work?** Think of one to two current or past challenging situations. Is the work external—that is, to identify actions you can take to make positive changes in the circumstances? Or is the work internal—that is, to shift your attitude/thoughts/feelings about the existing circumstances? Allow for the possibility of multiple perspectives and strategize in each situation what external or internal adjustments you could make to achieve greater peace.

**Success:** How do you define true success? Has your definition of success evolved over time? Try to allow for the possibility that the concept of “success” or “failure” can be personal to you, depending on how you interact, mentally and emotionally, with the circumstances. Explore some specific ways, large or small, that you can be “successful,” whether you’re already doing them or they’re aspirations. Make some self-care commitments to yourself, in a way that feels like a gift rather than pressure (keeping in mind nonjudgmental mantras like, I’m doing my best, This is good enough, etc.).

**Certainty/uncertainty:** In unpredictable times, whether in the larger world or in our own lives, we can feel that nothing at all is certain. As a grounding exercise, first list three to five things that you don't know right now or are uncertain about; explore the emotions connected to those uncertainties that arise. Next, list three to five things that you do know right now or are certain about (nothing is too small!). Explore the emotions connected to those certainties that arise.

Our emotional state is directly affected by our beliefs – *rational* beliefs lead to *healthy* emotions (positive or negative) while *irrational* beliefs lead to *unhealthy* emotions.

**False negative self-beliefs:** Draw a circle and put your name at the top. To the left of the circle, write six negative, or limiting, beliefs about yourself/your life—just a word or a phrase each. Then, write any evidence to prove those negative beliefs. Next, write evidence to disprove those negative beliefs. Lastly, to the right of the circle, write six positive, or expansive/affirming, beliefs about yourself, which now feel earned—rational, and therefore, emotionally healthy.

**Negative/Limiting Beliefs****Positive Beliefs**

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**Safe place visualization:** Think of a real or imaginary place (or real place that you improve upon however you like) where you feel safe and at peace. Create that place in your mind using all your senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste. This exercise draws upon that connection between the external/physical and the internal/emotional. You may also find that you conjure a particular time in your life, as well as a place, when you felt utterly safe and at peace. This is a meditation that you can take with you wherever you go and put it into practice whenever you need it.

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