

33 Ways to Use Your Journal for Self-Discovery and Self-Expression

As a therapist, I often suggest to clients that they explore their feelings and thoughts by keeping a journal. Sometimes clients ask for a bit of direction with this process. Here are some journaling ideas if you're not sure where to start:

1. Write down what happened today and how you felt about it.
2. Write a letter to a person you are angry with. Say everything you are feeling and wish you had the nerve to say.
3. Draw a picture of the person you wrote the letter to in #2.
4. Make a list of all the things you are grateful for. List all the big things, all the small things, and everything in between that you can think of.
5. Circle the three most important things on the list you made in #4. Write a paragraph for each, expressing your appreciation to the person who had the most influence over it. If possible, turn this into an actual letter and send it.
6. Make a list of the things that you feel upset about right now. Write down as many as you can think of until you can't think of any more. Then choose the top five.
7. For each of the top five things you identified in #6, list 10 things you can do to gain control of the situation. Circle the top three from each list.
8. Make a timeline that represents your life. Fill it in with the most significant events that have shaped you: your early years, your teen years, and each decade that has followed. Draw pictures or icons next to the most important events. Use crayons or markers if you wish.
9. Write a few pages about your feelings about the timeline.
10. Describe how your life would be different if _____ had or had not happened.
Here are some examples:
 - a. If your parents had divorced
 - b. If your parents had remained married
 - c. If your parents had been married
 - d. If your mother hadn't passed away
 - e. If you hadn't moved to _____
 - f. If you had gone to college
 - g. If you hadn't gone to college
 - h. If you had gone to _____ College
 - i. If you had never met _____
 - j. If you hadn't broken up with _____
11. Make a list of all the things you wish you could do before your life is over.
12. Make a list of the things no one knows about you.
13. Write about your junior year in high school.
14. Write about what life was like before you became a parent.
15. Write about what you wish you had known before you became a parent.
16. Make a list of the things you still want to learn about being a parent.
17. Describe what it was like when you first met your partner.
18. Write about what you wish you had known about your partner before you married him/her.
19. Write about what you wish your partner had known about you before he/she married you.

20. Write a letter to yourself as you were at age 10. Tell yourself:
 - a. What your life is like now
 - b. What you have learned since you were 10
 - c. What you want him or her to know
 - d. What you want him or her to beware of
 - e. What you want him or her to enjoy every moment of
21. Write a letter to your own parents. Tell them what your life is like now.
22. Write a letter to someone from your childhood or adolescence who didn't appreciate you or who misunderstood you. Tell the person what you want them to know and how you feel about the lack of connection between you.
23. Think of someone you never acknowledged for something important. Write that person a letter and acknowledge him or her.
24. Think of someone who never acknowledged *you* for something important. Write them a letter and tell them what you want them to know.
25. Make a list of five miracles you want to happen in the coming year. Write a paragraph or two describing each one and how your life will be better if it happens.
26. For each of the five miracles, make a list of:
 - a. Five barriers or forces that block or prevent it from happening
 - b. Five positive influences, things that encourage or support its happening
 - c. Five things you can do to reduce the barriers and strengthen the positive influences
27. Write about the five things you most like to do.
28. Write about the five things you most dislike doing.
29. Make a list of five places you'd like to visit. Describe what you imagine them to be like.
30. Write about three things you most regret doing or not doing. Describe what happened and how you feel about it.
31. Write a letter to your children, even if they have not yet been born. Tell them what you want them to know about you.
32. Write a letter to your grandchildren, even if they have not yet been born. Tell them what you want them to know about you.
33. Write a letter to your descendants one hundred years from now. Describe what your life is like today.
34. Add your own ideas here:
