



CREATE
WRITE
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We Are All Writers: How to Use Your **JOURNAL**

to Cure Writer's Block Now

by Mari L. McCarthy

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How to Use Your Journal to Cure Writer's Block

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INTRODUCTION

We all are writers. Yes, you read that correctly. **WE ALL ARE WRITERS!** And as we take something for our colds or headaches, what we take to remedy writer's block is a large dose of journaling.

I'll bet that you want to be healthier and happier. Most of us do. People spend lots of money each year on self-help books, retreats, and therapy. What you might not realize is how simple it is to advance toward health and happiness through journaling. Journaling empowers you to be your own Primary Care Provider. It provides you with a structure to explore your true self: letting go of unhealthy beliefs, creating your own voice, and reviewing the progress you've made.

Most of us carry around internal judgments and beliefs about ourselves that do not serve us. In fact, they can manifest themselves in physical symptoms, from a minor upset stomach to a major life-threatening illness. Wouldn't you like to be free of these burdens?

Your journal can help, by letting you release the negativity and fear inside of us. Writing them down separates them from you. It allows you to identify your inner demons and exorcise them.

The challenge is, getting started with journaling may not feel simple. It might feel daunting. Sitting down at a blank page might trigger what I call "page fright," which shows up as resistance. When you sit down with your journal, you'll suddenly think of ten things that are more pressing than journaling, like reorganizing the files on your computer. Your inner critic springs into action, bombarding you with messages like, "You're a terrible writer," or "You have nothing interesting to say." Your subconscious might be afraid of the de-

mons that might emerge when you put your pen to paper.

What is known as writer's block, or feeling stumped when you sit down to write, generally boils down to two challenges: personal obstacles and lack of inspiration. When your mind senses that you might get uncomfortable when you sit down to write, it interprets this as risk and triggers your fight-or-flight instincts. It's much easier to run away and avoid the discomfort altogether.

It's easier to give into avoidance, but it's not satisfying. If you want to move toward your healthiest, happiest self, you must push through the resistance that comes up. Clear out distractions, collect inspiration, and unearth what's deep inside you: your one-of-a-kind true self. This book will teach you to do that, in less time than you would think, using a simple but powerful tool: your journal.

Think I'm exaggerating? My journaling has worked wonders for my Multiple Sclerosis, which is thought to be an incurable illness. Every day journaling helps me get stronger by getting to the root of the "diseases" deep within my body that manifest in physical symptoms.

Whatever issues you want to work through, your journal will help. This ebook offers you five short timed exercises, designed for you to complete in sequence, that will help you break through your writer's block and open yourself up to **journaling for the health of it™**.



Mari L. McCarthy conquers her Diseases through Journal Therapy and started **Create Write Now** to teach others the art of **Journaling for the Health of it™**. As a Writing Therapy Specialist, she helps clients explore their inner lives to improve their psychophysical health.

INTRODUCTION

Is this ebook for me?

We Are All Writers is for anyone who is committed to health of mind, body, and spirit, and needs a nudge to get started. Whether you are working through an emotionally trying time, searching for your dream job, or trying to heal a physical illness, **journaling for the health of it™** will send you on your way to achieving your goals.

If you find yourself blocked specifically around writing a piece for publication, this ebook is for you, too. You will find that once you break through your writer's block, things will come more easily for you—including your work.

What can I expect from this ebook?

The ebook will guide you through five steps to breaking through your writer's block, each with a 15-minute exercise (75 minutes total) to get your pen to the page immediately. The book is designed for you to participate in the exercises, not just to read the text. It's essential that you play ball on the court, not watch from the stands! At every step, you will receive a dose of encouragement and coaching to keep you motivated.

What do I need to get started?

- A journal or notebook (any will do)
- A pen
- A kitchen timer or a cell phone with an alarm on it
- A writing surface in a place without distractions
- A willingness to participate fully

How do I make the most of this ebook?

Schedule a date with yourself when you will have quiet, uninterrupted

time. Put the appointment on your calendar if you need to.

Go through the steps in sequence. I recommend taking 75 minutes on one day and doing the exercises one after another.

Repeat the process whenever you feel that you've gotten off track.

Remember:

1. If you think that you don't have time for these exercises, think again. No matter how busy you are, you do have 15 minutes to spare. How many 15-minute blocks have you burned on email, Facebook, or TV without blinking? To break through writer's block, you'll need to break into your schedule!
2. You don't have to show your writing from any of these exercises to anyone. Ever.
3. You don't have anything to lose except your writer's block: the obstacle between you and your goal to get healthy.

So what are you waiting for? **Let's get started.**

Ode on a Writer's Block

*I see you're with me all the time,
You love to screw up all my rhymes
But I've searched everywhere and now I know
Working with you makes me grow.
I no longer run away,
I'm interested in what you have to say
I created you of that I'm sure
And grasping this makes me secure
So as a team back to the page we go
To invent new lines for the world to show!*

STEP 1: DRAIN THE SWAMP

Michelangelo once said, “I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.”

Your equivalent of Michelangelo’s angel, your true and healthy self, is there inside you. You just need to carve away whatever’s obscuring your view of it.

Your mind is probably so cluttered with thoughts and worries and emotions and memories, the sum total of which I call “crazycrap,” that you’re not sure what you really want to say.

It’s important that you start with the following exercise. If your mind is cluttered, you won’t be able to focus on the others. Clear out that crazycrap and set your angel free!

Exercise 1: What’s On Your Mind?

Time: 15 minutes (Ten minutes of writing, five minutes of reflection)

1. Take out your journal and pen, and set your timer for ten minutes.
2. Turn to a blank page and write the question, “What’s on your mind?” at the top. Start the timer.
3. Without taking your pen from the page until the timer sounds, write down anything and everything that comes to mind. Write questions. Write observations. Do not stop. Do not cross anything out. If your mind goes blank, write “I don’t know what to write” or “blah blah blah” until you think of something else.
4. Take five minutes to reflect on what you wrote. Read it over and circle places that jump out at you with the message: “This is what I really want to say.” It may be just one word or a phrase that emerges from pages of writing. It could be anything.
5. Realize this: What you’ve circled is a glimmer of your “angel in the marble.” You can see it once you push your mental and emotional clutter out of the way. Isn’t it powerful?

Let Music Move Your Pen

Listening to music can make any experience more fun, from cleaning house to writing. Putting on soft music in the background while you do stream-of-consciousness writing may help inspire you. Lyrics can generate ideas, and melodies can trigger memories. The pace and mood of a song can influence your emotions, and the speed with which you move your pen on the page.

Here’s some of the music that inspires me:

1. Beethoven, especially the 6th and 7th Symphonies
2. Rock ‘n’ Roll, especially David Cook, Kelly Pettit
3. Piano, pop songs, or songs I know the lyrics to
4. Turning my iTunes on shuffle
5. Jason Mraz/Reggae
6. Whatever song I wake up to (in my mind)
7. *The Barry Thought of You*, Mari L. McCarthy

STEP 2: ASK NOT *WHAT* TO WRITE, BUT *WHY*

Many of us look at the blank page and freeze up. We experience what I call “page fright.” One of the major causes of page fright is not being able to choose what to write. It’s intimidating. It’s frustrating. I’ll bet that it seems much easier to avoid the whole business and not write anything at all.

Let me ask you this: Do you want to write your way to health? If you’re reading this, I trust that you do. There is no “I should.” There is only “I want to.”

Even if you know that you want to get healthy, you may not have thought about why you do. Write all of these reasons down. You might write “To be pain-free,” or “To get fit.”

Once you clarify your reasons for wanting to get healthy, you will be on your way to using your journal writing as a vehicle to do so.

Exercise 2: Ask Yourself “Why Write?”

Time: 15 minutes (Ten minutes of writing, five minutes of reflection)

- 1.** Turn to a blank page in your journal and write “I am journaling because I want to...” at the top of the page.
- 2.** Set your timer for ten minutes and start it running.
- 3.** In the form of a list, complete the sentence in as many ways as you can. Your reasons can be big or small, but they will be outcomes that will make you healthier and happier. Journaling will help you with these goals. Remember -- and this is crucial -- there is no “should.”
- 4.** Take five minutes to reflect on what you wrote. Read over your list and pick out the three reasons that are most important to you. Circle them and number them in order of priority.
- 5.** Look at what you’ve just done. You’ve written down the goals that are most important to you and determined the top three. When was the last time you had that kind of clarity about what you’re after in life?

“If you hear a voice within you say ‘you cannot paint,’ then by all means paint, and that voice will be silenced.”

—Vincent Van Gogh

STEP 3: IMAGINE THE WORST, THEN IMAGINE THE BEST

We tend to experience writer's block as a nebulous feeling of anxiety rather than as a concrete obstacle. We don't know what exactly it is that we're so afraid of.

In the same way, we usually haven't considered what outcomes we hope for. Oftentimes, we don't even entertain the idea of being in good health, because we might be disappointed or feel like failures if it doesn't come true.

How can you come up with a solution to your writer's block if you don't know what fears are triggering it? How can you expect yourself to pursue goals if you can't imagine what your life will look like when you've achieved them? Believe it or not, you can start to define your fears and hopes around journaling, in the next fifteen minutes.

Exercise 3: What Could Happen If I Write in My Journal?

Time: 15 minutes (Ten minutes of writing, five minutes of reflection)

Get to the root of your writer's block by imagining two scenarios: the worst possible things that could happen if you do write, and the best ones.

1. Turn to a blank page in your journal. Write "What Could Happen If I Write in My Journal?" at the top of the page.
2. Set your timer for five minutes and start it running. In a list, write down as many "worst case scenario" outcomes about what could happen if you wrote exactly what you want to say in your journal. ("I'd be overwhelmed by my problems.") Be serious. Be silly. Don't censor yourself.
3. When the timer sounds, stop writing. Set it for another five minutes and start it running. Repeat the previous step except for one key difference: write down as many "best case scenario" outcomes. ("I'd sleep through the night without worry.")
4. When the timer sounds, take five minutes to reflect. Read the two lists you wrote. Circle the top three worst outcomes you fear, and then circle the top three best outcomes you hope for. If you had a chance at one of the best outcomes, is it worth taking the risk of one of the worst outcomes? Write down your answer in capital letters.

Journals in Literature

Though journals are written in private, they've long been published as literature, too.

Here's a list of journals that make for compelling stories:

1. *The Diary of a Young Girl*, Anne Frank
2. *The Journals of Lewis & Clark*
3. *Letters from the Dust Bowl*, Caroline Henderson
4. *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*
5. *The Motorcycle Diaries: Notes on a Latin American Journey*, Ernesto "Che" Guevara

Clearing out mental and emotional clutter takes a good amount of energy. You might be getting tired at this point, but keep going. Focus on the feeling of lightness in your body, having identified some of the root issues that are blocking you from writing. Once you name something, you have power over it. You are in the driver's seat, so take advantage and keep going!

STEP 4: COLLECT INSPIRATION

You may not realize this, but a major source of writer's block is trying to write without proper inspiration. Now that you've cleared out all that crazycrap, you've made room to bring fresh material into your life that will galvanize your writing. Out with the old, and in with the new!

Unblocked writers maintain a habit that becomes second nature: They notice what's around them. It's that simple. You can develop this habit, too.

Exercise 4: Find Inspiration All Around You

Time: 15 minutes (Ten minutes of writing, five minutes of reflection)

1. Turn your journal to a fresh page. Set your timer for ten minutes and start it running.
2. Look around the area you're sitting in, whether indoors or outdoors. What catches your attention, on your walls, out the window, or on your street, that relates to your goal of living healthily? You might see a photo of your nephew and write, "Time with family," or look at your beloved books and write, "Cozying up with a good book." Make a list of as many topics as you can. They can be as general or specific as you like. Just write down anything that gives you a positive feeling.
3. When the timer sounds, set it for another five minutes and look at your list. Circle the three ideas that appeal to you most.
4. Celebrate! You've not only captured in print the things that you love about life, but you know what to write about next time you feel blocked. Your list is a wellspring of inspiration that you can turn to when you are at a loss for ideas. Later, you may decide to write a journal entry about one of these topics, or even craft a poem or story around it. Dog-ear this page of your journal, or put a sticky note there so you can find it easily.
5. Before you move on to the next exercise, add a few more ideas to the list. From now on, whenever you have a new idea, add that, too. Once you get in the habit of simply noticing your surroundings, you will find writing inspiration everywhere.

Moving Forward (And Backwards, And Sideways!)

Just because you've finished a page in your journal doesn't mean that it becomes "dead!" Feel free to go back, add things, circle, cross out, or underline other things. Add to your list of ideas. Once you've been writing for weeks and the words are flowing, take a look back at your earlier self still tentatively trying to be expressed. It's satisfying to relive those emotions with the perspective you've gained.

You have now completed four out of five steps, and you've done the hardest part! Now it's time to reap the fruits of your labor, so move on to Step 5.

STEP 5: REAP WHAT YOU'VE SOWN

You've invested the last hour planting your seeds and tending your crops, even though it may have been challenging. Smile—now it's time to enjoy your harvest!

After clearing out the junk that was preventing you from writing in the first place and replacing it with what inspires you personally, you've set yourself up to let the writing flow.

So let's do it, shall we?

Exercise 5: Let Your Pen Take Over

Time: 15 minutes (Ten minutes of writing, five minutes of reflection)

1. Look at the list that you generated in Step 4, and your three circled ideas. Pick the one that speaks to you most at this moment.
2. Open your journal to a blank page and set your timer for ten minutes.
3. Write as much as you can on the topic. Write without stopping, without lifting your pen from the page, and without crossing out. Keep your pen moving forward. No one will see this but you.
4. When the timer sounds, set it for five more minutes and read over what you wrote. Circle the parts where you said exactly what you wanted to say, where you wrote down what was on your mind. It's no longer bottled up inside of you. It's right there on the page.
5. Marvel at what you just accomplished. You were blocked when you started, and you probably felt uncomfortable and even scared along the way. And you survived! YOU did this. At the bottom of your page, write these words in bold capital letters, embellished in any way you like: **"I AM A WRITER."**

There is no denying it now! You're holding the evidence right in front of you.

“I dwell in possibility.”

—Emily Dickinson

CONCLUSION

Congratulations! You started this book with writer's block, staring at a blank page in your journal. Now you've created five different pieces of writing that progressively chipped away at your resistance. Here's what you accomplished in each step:

Step 1: You drained the swamp, clearing your internal clutter to show you what was really important to you, and central to your true self.

Step 2: You put aside any "shoulds," and realized your unique motivation for wanting to journal for the health of it.

Step 3: You got to the root of your fears around writing by imagining the worst things that could result from your journal writing, and then the best. You asked yourself whether the possibility of those good outcomes was worth the risk of the bad ones. And if you've gotten this far, your answer must have been yes!

Step 4: You jump-started your inspiration by making a list of things you'd enjoy writing about. You began to get in the habit of noticing what's around you and jotting them down as future writer's block cures.

Step 5: You set your pen free on the page, writing fluidly and without letting your inner critic inhibit you.

Stop for a moment to recognize what you just did. You shook yourself out of your routine, faced some of your deep-seated issues around writing, and generated a pool of ideas to pull from in the future. No matter what you decide to do from here, your investment in these exercises has already paid off.

The ability to be honest with yourself, and to write freely without censoring or judging yourself, is a major step to becoming a healthier person. You have begun to unearth and let go of the emotional baggage that manifests itself in physical symptoms. After releasing your fears, dreams, and inspirations onto the page, do you feel a burden, even a small one, lifted from you?

If there's one thing that writers agree upon, it's this: Writers write. Today you wrote, didn't you? Then you are a writer. **WE ARE ALL WRITERS.**

Believe me now?