

Journaling: A Routine for Self Reflection



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For those in recovery, journaling may be a common practice. It is the process of recording your thoughts on a regular basis. The value in doing this exercise is it often provides clarity in thoughts that may be in our minds or it allows one to visually experience and see the words that clutter the recesses of our brains. No matter the reason for practicing journaling daily, there are many ways to do it. Some people put pen to paper. Others use electronic media to type or draw. Some people paint or make things (think of art as therapy).

Images have often been used to record important historical events. Petroglyphs depicting a successful hunt were created with charcoal from a fire. Later sharp stones were employed to make images on rocks (petroglyphs).

One of this country's founding fathers, Ben Franklin, used a daily journal that he called a "scheme." As part of this scheme, every morning he asked himself, "what good shall I do today," followed by "what good have I done today," every evening.

Business owners, may use this technique to document events that take place within the business. This was a natural routine of Virgin Group owner Sir Richard Branson who used a book style journal to capture written events, drawings, and doodles.

From a mental health perspective, it can be very helpful to engage in a routine of self-reflection. Your emotions, thoughts and behaviors change and journaling is a good way to see how those changes have taken place over a lifetime or a period of time. Much like how

a photo album reveals how your physical appearance has changed over time, a hard copy journal shows how your interior world has also changed.

In my personal family tree, there are at least four family members who were diagnosed with schizophrenia. For one of these individuals, I had the opportunity to see drawings they completed over the course of several decades. When reviewing these it really struck me that what they drew and how they drew seemed to parallel how they lived life over time. This really helped me understand their interior world much better.

I recommend journaling to many of the clients I see in my therapy practice. Many of these clients report that they benefit from a routine of self-reflection while journaling and when shared in a counseling session there is an additional benefit to the work we do together. Journaling also helps cement the connection and recall to the written issues.

To get the most out of your journaling practice, consider incorporating three things: **images, felt-sense, and words.**

Images. Researchers have shown and psychological theory supports the belief that images allow for better recall of events compared to using only words (citations below). Artistry and artistic talent is not necessary so add the drawing or doodle. Any doodle will do. Thin and thick. Bold and subtle. Single color or lots of colors. Abstract and detailed. It really doesn't matter.

Felt-sense. As you draw, doodle, or write, pay attention to your body. Are there sensations in your body, breathing changes, certain thoughts or feelings? Maybe a song pops into your head or you experience different temperature changes. What occurs is less important to that you're noticing it.

Words. You may find if you combine images and your felt-sense, then words will flow easier, and this will lead to deeper self-understanding or connections and aha moments. This is because you are engaging both sides of the brain. The body and mind are connected when a writing or drawing tool is handled creating an atmosphere for drawing and feeling. And that leads to more meaningful writing.

I recommend journaling using hardcopy, that is pen or pencil to paper. However, for those people who are more comfortable with electronic media, there are several apps that allow various ways to record your thoughts, emotions, and felt sense. These apps can be just as helpful for some people, but they are not for everybody.

Whether you use a hardcopy journal or an electronic version, consider journaling on a daily basis to enhance your life journey.



[Bill Stoner](#) is a mental health counselor and author of, "[Journaling the InnerLenz Way](#)," a workbook that teaches innovative ways to incorporate images, felt-sense, and words into a regular journaling practice. Further information is available at [InnerLenz.com](#).

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- See more at: <http://www.sash.net/journaling-routine-self-reflection/#sthash.IWmaLhIW.dpuf>