Journal Prompts

Self-Care: Everyday Prompts to Get You Writing

Journal prompts are short questions that give you something to write about when the page feels blank. Psychologist James Pennebaker began studying the effects of writing about thoughts and feelings in the 1980s, and his work is the starting point for these prompts. They cover six everyday themes, so you can pick whatever fits your day.

1 How to use these prompts

- Choose one prompt that catches your eye. You do not need to go in order.
- Write for 10 to 15 minutes without stopping to fix spelling or grammar.
- Write only for yourself. You can keep the page, tear it up, or come back to it later.
- If a prompt brings up more than you want to handle today, pick a lighter one.

Why does this work? *Writing can help you turn a jumble of thoughts into words you can look at. Since Pennebaker's first study in 1986, many studies have tested this kind of writing. A 2006 review of 146 of them found small benefits on average, and not everyone benefited. Writing about good things can help too: in a 2001 study by psychologist Laura King, students who wrote about their best possible future felt better in the weeks after and made fewer illness visits to the health center over five months than students who wrote about neutral topics.*

2 Prompts to choose from

Today

- What is one moment from today I want to remember, and why?
- What took most of my energy today?
- What am I feeling right now, and what might be behind it?

About me

- What words would a close friend use to describe me? Do I agree?
- What is something I believe now that I did not believe five years ago?
- What do I need more of in my life right now?

The people in my life

- Who has shaped who I am, and how?
- Who do I want to spend more time with, and what gets in the way?
- What do I wish someone understood about me?

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*

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3 More prompts

Looking back

- What is a hard time I got through, and what helped me?
- What is a choice I made that I am proud of?
- What is a mistake I learned something from?
- Which person or moment from my childhood still makes me smile?
- What did I want most a year ago, and do I still want it?
- When did I last feel truly at ease, and what was I doing?
- What is a kind thing someone did for me that I still think about?
- What has changed most about me in the last year?
- Which place from my past would I like to visit again, and why?
- What advice would I give my younger self?

Looking ahead

- Imagine the next few years go as well as they possibly could. What does my life look like?
- What is one small step toward that life I could take this week?
- What am I looking forward to this month?
- What habit would I like to start, and what would help me keep it?
- What would I try if I knew nobody would judge me?
- What do I want people to say about me in ten years?
- What is one thing I want to learn, and where could I start?
- What would a really good ordinary day look like for me?
- What do I want to stop doing, and what could I do instead?
- What kind of friend, partner or family member do I want to be?

Good things

- What are three small things that went well this week?
- Who am I grateful for right now, and have I told them?
- What made me laugh recently?
- What is a place that makes me feel calm, and what do I like about it?
- What is something I own that makes my days easier?
- What is a strength that helped me this week?

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4 My entry

The prompt I chose:

Example: What took most of my energy today?

What came up when I wrote:

5 After writing

How do I feel now compared with before I started?

It is normal to feel stirred up right after writing about something that matters to you, and that feeling usually passes within a couple of hours. If writing about one subject keeps leaving you very upset, a therapist can help you work through it.

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