

Beyond the “Dear Diary” stuff, today’s journals allow you to

document your life while working wonders on your psyche.

It’s time to give journaling another try—or discover the joy of

putting pen to paper

“**M**onday, December 5, 1977.
Dear Diary: Today was a pretty good day except for my French teacher, but she is usually strange. We got our class pictures back today. ... J. didn’t call tonight.”

It seems like yesterday, but this is an excerpt from the first diary entry I ever wrote. And so began my foray into a lifetime of writing. I was 12 years old at the time and received the diary the year my father fell gravely ill. I wrote in this journal faithfully till there were no more blank pages to scribble on. From there, I graduated to blank books and then to simple notebooks; I have a cartonful hidden away, with entries spanning from that dreary winter day to my recent past.

Whoever gave me that journal knew that writing things down would make me feel better. That it would help me cope with and often escape a dreadful time in my life. And that journaling would start me on a journey of self-exploration that will certainly last a lifetime.

Whatever your reasons for starting a journal—sorting your thoughts, jotting down ideas, recording the good and bad times—it’s sure to enrich your life in ways you’d never imagine.



Comfort makes a difference. Choose a tranquil spot and a good pen to get started journaling.

WRITTEN BY ALYSSA ETTINGER
PHOTOGRAPHER HOPKINS ASSOCIATES

Helping Hand

The act of writing in a journal or diary, dubbed "journaling," has become a hot trend. Which seems odd, because journal writing has been practiced for centuries. Chaucer kept a journal, as did writers Charlotte Brontë and Anaïs Nin.

"It's a human need to make sense of the events in our lives," says Carol Perlee, principal of the progressive Pasadena, California, Walden elementary school and a summer fellow in the Bay Area Writing Project. "Journaling sorts out our feelings, helps us focus on a game plan, starts us on the road to success. Journaling is a way to chronicle progress."

It works, according to Anna Miller, a New York City antiques dealer. "One way my journal has helped has been in looking back on the breakup of my marriage," she says. "Being self-critical, I have a tendency to blame myself for what went wrong as my memory clouds. But reading past entries in my journal reminds me that he was a player in it, too, and keeps me from too much self-flagellation."

As you begin to write, it may seem like you are just telling the stories of your day, but there is more to it than that. "When you write about the self, we must rewrite and renew our personal contract to live every day," writes Dennis J. Cleary, author of *Joys of Journaling*. "[It] can provide the breakthrough that allows self-disclosure to become the joy and beauty of self."

Getting Started

Whether with any sport or hobby, having the right tools for journaling will inspire you to practice the activity more often—and prevent you from feeling intimidated. First, think about how you can best collect your journal pages: Do you want to handwrite them or type them onto the computer? Will you work sitting at a desk or wherever the mood strikes? Where you intend to write might affect your choice; some media are more portable. If you choose to handwrite, do you want a bound journal, a loose-leaf binder, a certain type of paper? "You need to feel completely comfortable with the materials you're using; enjoying the process is vital," Perlee says.

Personally, I favor plain-Jane college-rule notebooks with thick-stock paper, and I won't write with anything but a ballpoint pen. Very utilitarian ... and compulsive, I know. But it makes my writing "happen." And I don't write in my journal at a desk or table: I have to be sitting on my bed, propped up on lots of pillows.

While you're writing, let go of worries about grammar, sentence structure, and spelling. Your pages are for you, so correctness doesn't count. To successfully journal, try to put all of these things aside—trust me, I know this is hard— and just write. If you get caught up in the rules of writing, you'll lose the reflective energy that journaling unleashes.



Jazzy Journaling Products

If a plain notebook doesn't do it for you, here are some wonderful products to enhance your journaling experience.

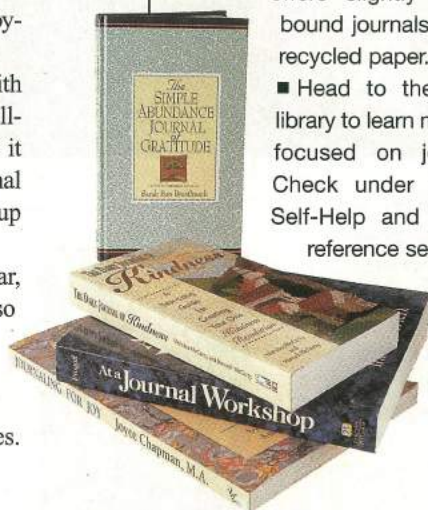
- Rubber Stampede's Create a Journal Kit, *above*, comes complete with rubber stamp alphabets and a blank book—perfect for kids of all ages. Call 800/632-8386.

- Retro-style and scratch-n-sniff journals from Pulp Paper Products (800/516-7857), *right*, have an uplifting look.

- Gratitude Journals from Running Rhino (800/574-4665; www.runningrhino.com) are filled with inspirational quotes. This company also

offers slightly oversized wire-bound journals filled with thick recycled paper.

- Head to the bookstore or library to learn more from books focused on journaling, *left*. Check under the categories Self-Help and Writing in the reference section.



fact, if you're journaling at a computer, you might even turn off the monitor so you're not tempted to make corrections as you type.

Perlee also suggests setting a reasonable amount of time for your journaling—say 15 minutes over every Sunday to get started—I'm being relentless. Like any other good habit, it's easy to let it slide. Journaling takes a deliberate decision, and if you're writing about particularly thorny issues, it's easy to avoid the activity. As your journaling progresses, you can increase the time—in fact, you'll probably want to indulge more often.

Morning Papers

Another form of daily writing was developed by Julia Cameron, author of *The Artist's Way*, and her co-author, Mark Bryan. Their program, a 12-week process for unleashing your creativity, includes an exercise called Morning Papers, which calls for three pages of stream-of-consciousness writing every morning. You simply write whatever comes to mind. You may start by writing that you don't know what to write. Whatever you're thinking. It doesn't matter.

This daily ritual has a huge following. Devotees insist *The Artist's Way* has helped them get more in touch with their inner selves, that it has increased their creativity and has helped them make peace with their lives. "I learned about the Morning Papers when I took an Artist's Way course," says Janet Izur, an Ocean Grove, New Jersey, writer. "The process was very comforting, as I'm the type of person who must get things out, discuss them, dissect them. And it's fascinating to look

back at my pages and discover that something that bothered me terribly is no longer an issue. Or, if it still is a problem, the pages gently nudge me into taking action."



"All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them."

—Isak Dinesen, whose life as a writer was brought to the big screen in *Out of Africa*.

The Gratitude Journal

Another huge journaling trend is the Gratitude Journal, a concept created by Sarah Breathnach in her book *Simple Abundance: A Daybook of Comfort and Joy*. The concept of a Gratitude Journal is easy: Every day, write down five things that you are grateful for.

Gratitude Journal fans claim that the more they look for "gratitudes," the more they find, and that in doing their daily gratitude writings, they begin a process of spiritual self-discovery that enhances their mental—and physical—well-being. "As the months pass and you fill your journal with blessings, an inner shift in your reality will occur," Breathnach writes. "Soon you will be delighted to discover how content and hopeful you are feeling. As you focus on the abundance rather than on the lack in your life, you will be designing a wonderful new blueprint for the future."

On Your Own

If you've been bitten by the journaling bug but don't know where to begin, check the library or bookstore. There's also lots of immediate help on the Internet: the site <http://journals.miningco.com> has hundreds of links to other journal sites online and is a hub for journal writers on the Net. You can also try www.ArtistsWayWork.com. *

SEE "WHERE TO FIND IT," PAGE 112.

