

Journal Writing

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As you begin to pay attention to your own stories and what they say about you, you will enter into becoming, as you should be, the author of your own life, the creator of your own possibilities.

--Mandy Aftel

Rules for Writing Practice

1. Keep your hand moving. Don't cross out.
2. Lose control.
3. Be specific. (Not car, Cadillac; not fruit, apple)
4. Don't think. Don't get logical.
5. Don't worry about punctuation, spelling, or grammar.
6. Go for the jugular.
7. Be kind to yourself.
8. You are free to write the worst junk in the world.

--from *Wild Mind* by Natalie Goldberg

Books about Journal Writing that I like:

- *Writing Down the Bones* and *Wild Mind* by Natalie Goldberg
- *The Artist's Way*; *Vein of Gold*; and *The Right to Write* by Julia Cameron
- *One to One* by Christina Baldwin
- *Life's Companion: Journal Writing as a Spiritual Quest* by Christina Baldwin
- *The New Diary* by Tristine Rainer
- *Writing for Your Life* by Deena Metzger
- *A Voice of Her Own: Women and the Journal-writing Journey* by Marlene Schiwy
- *Writing and Being* by G. Lynn Nelson
- *A Year in the Life: Journaling for Self-Discovery* by Sheila Bender
- *One Continuous Mistake* by Gail Sher

Books about Creative Writing that I like:

- *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott
- *Write from Life* by Meg Files
- *What If? Writing Exercises for Fiction Writers* by Bernays and Painter

- *Your Life as Story* by Tristine Rainer
- *Tell It Slant: Writing and Shaping Creative Nonfiction* by Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paula

Exercises to help you begin writing:

When we write from experience, we harvest our lives.

--Bonni Goldberg

- ❖ Pick a specific time in your life (ten years old on summer vacation, first months of college or marriage, first days in a new place) and describe ONE day as you would have experienced it then. Include as many sounds, sights, smells, and thumbnail sketches of other people as you can.
- ❖ Write about leaving, in any context that you like. This can mean leaving a place, a job, a way of life, or a part of yourself behind as you took on new experiences.
- ❖ Make a list of memories important to your sense of identity. Include all of them. Then go back and reread them until one of them leaps out at you, and write about it in detail. Then, take your list and title them as you would chapters in a book. What patterns do you observe? What is the secret logic of your life?

Art is not just ornamental, an enhancement of life, but a path in itself, a way out of the predictable and conventional, a map to self-discovery.

--Gabrielle Roth

- ❖ Finish the following statements. Write for at least 10 minutes on each one:
 - I used to be a person who . . .
 - I am now a person who . . .
 - I want to be a person who . . .
- ❖ Open your journal and write down:
 - I think . . .
 - I feel . . .
 - I want . . .
 Without stopping to think about what you will say, write a paragraph or two starting with each one. When you have finished, go back and read what you just wrote. Are there any surprises?
- ❖ Use the following sentence stems as starters for freewriting:

I was . . . / I am . . . / I will be . . . / I am looking forward to . . . / I am tired of . . . / More than anything, I want . . .

- ❖ What color is your life right now? What color do you want it to be?
- ❖ Write a letter to your demons, whatever and whoever they are. This could be an addiction or a guilt complex, whatever you feel is robbing you of your life energy.
- ❖ What is changing in your life right now? What are you bidding farewell to? What are you welcoming into your life? What remains constant?

The road to authentic art is through the self. More specifically, it lies through the heart, not the head. Your loves, your hates, your scars, glories, fears, losses, triumphs—your heart is the heart of the matter. Heart is where the art is.

--Julia Cameron in *Vein of Gold*

- ❖ What's a metaphor you'd use for your body? (e.g., machine, tree, river, computer?) Start by brainstorming a list, then choose one and help an imaginary reader understand the analogy.
- ❖ Consult your body. What are some of its most memorable experiences? Make a short list. These could include experiences of pleasure or pain, wild excitement, or great fear. Then focus on one experience and describe it more fully.
- ❖ If your tears could speak to you, what would they say?
- ❖ What is the journey you are on? What other paths can you imagine yourself having taken?
- ❖ When and where have you felt homesick? Where are you at home?

Keeping a journal does not mean simply recording the external facts of your life from one day to the next. I'm talking about something that goes much deeper than that. Journal writing is a process of vital reflection that plunges you below the surface of your life to its psychic roots. When you are writing at that deeper level, your life itself changes. . . . The journal writing journey accompanies our life's journey, deepening it, enhancing it,

both illuminating it and being illuminated by it. . . . In the journal, we try things on for size; we write our emotions large; we take risks we wouldn't take anywhere else. Journal writing increases self-understanding and esteem, and furthers our growth and creativity. Hesitant voices grow eloquent as we write about the intricacies and subtle shadings of our lives, the secret hopes and dreams that drive us on. . . . The journal is where I breathe most freely.

--from *A Voice of Her Own* by Marlene Schiwy

- ❖ Start with writing wherever you are right now, either externally or internally. Look out the window or around the room and start writing what you see. Check in with yourself and start writing how you feel. Just keep writing. Keep your pen to the page. Let the process carry you. Enjoy!