

Journaling for Professional Development

Developing Yourself Through Reflection

http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/journaling.htm?utm_source=nl&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=25Feb14#np



There are many benefits of regular journaling.

Would you like to become a better communicator, develop self-awareness, build self-confidence, and learn quickly from mistakes, all with one simple, daily habit?

All of this – and more – is possible when you keep a journal.

In this article, we'll explore what journaling can do for you, and we'll look at how you can fit this valuable habit into your schedule.

Why Journal?

You journal when you make a record of your thoughts, feelings, and experiences on a regular basis. Most people who journal write their experiences down, either on paper, or electronically; however some use other formats – for example, by keeping video or audio journals.

If you don't do it already, journaling might sound like a waste of effort; after all, it's just another thing that you need to fit into an already-busy schedule. However, you needn't spend long keeping your journal, and it helps you grow, professionally and personally.

One of the biggest benefits of journaling is that it gives you the opportunity to reflect on your experiences and **learning**. Journaling helps you:

- Identify mistakes you've made, and reflect on how to avoid them in the future.
- Review learning, keeping information fresh in your mind.
- Develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Become more **self-aware** and emotionally mature.

Another advantage is that journaling helps you **develop communication skills**, because you learn how to express your thoughts and feelings clearly, and you get to practice your writing skills more often.

Journaling also helps you deal with negative events more effectively. One key [study](#) showed that people who used a journal to describe and analyze their emotions after a stressful event felt more positive about it in the long term.

Last, journaling helps you keep track of the progress you make towards your [goals](#) . It's motivating and fulfilling to reflect on what you've achieved.

Examples

You can journal in many ways. Consider these examples:

- Lochland writes in his journal after attending training classes, to reflect on what he has learned in each session. He cements new concepts in his mind by writing about how he will use them with his team.
- Marissa writes in her journal each evening after work. She takes time to reflect on what she did well, and she thinks carefully about what she could have done better, especially when it comes to interactions with her team. The self-awareness she has developed through journaling has helped her to become more empathic with her team members. She has also become a much better listener.
- Edward has felt unfulfilled in his work for several years. A few months ago, he began writing a journal every morning to see if he could find new [purpose](#) in his work. Edward can now reflect on the previous day and recognize how he made a difference for his customers and colleagues. Daily journaling has rekindled his motivation and enthusiasm.

How to Keep a Journal

Use the techniques below to start journaling.

Decide on a Format

You have several options when it comes to the format of your journal.

First, you can keep a paper journal. Many people find that the physical act of "putting pen to paper" encourages reflection. It's slow and measured, and it can be a valuable way to start or end your day.

Another option is to keep an electronic journal. This could be as simple as using a document on your computer, or making entries in an app such as [Evernote](#). Or, you could use journaling apps like [OhLife](#), [iDoneThis](#), [Penzu](#), or [Day One](#).

You could also consider [writing a blog](#) to record your experiences. However, keep in mind that, once published, anyone has access to your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Avoid saying anything negative or damaging about your colleagues, clients, or organization. Or, set up your blog so that only you can access it.

Tip:

If you want to journal on paper, buy a notebook or journal that appeals to you – you're more likely to use an attractive, well-made journal than a notebook that you picked up as an afterthought.

Make it a Habit

Writing in your journal is a [good habit](#) . But, like any habit, it takes time and [self-discipline](#) to make it stick.

To get the most out of your journaling experience, aim to write at the same time every workday, ideally when you won't be interrupted. Some people enjoy journaling first thing in the morning or right before bed. You could also write in your journal during lunch, or in an afternoon break.

Tip:

Our articles [Finding Time for Professional Development](#) and [Creating Time in Your Day](#) have more information on how you can find time for journaling in a busy schedule.

Pace Yourself

Remember, your daily journal entry doesn't have to be a novel!

Go slowly at first – write for five or 10 minutes, and then stop when you've had enough. Over time, you might find that you want to write for longer.

Also, don't amend what you write down – just let the words flow.

Reflect on Your Experiences

Effective journaling combines a clear narrative about recent events with **critical thinking** about what you have learned, and what behaviors, if any, you can change or improve.

To help you write your journal, think about the following questions:

- What has happened since you last journaled?
- What have you learned since your last entry? What mistakes have you made?
- What difficult or painful events have occurred?
- If you could repeat a recent event, what would you do differently, and why?

When you write, think carefully about the most important thing that's happened to you since you last wrote in your journal. Keep in mind that this event can be subtle.

For example, you might have pulled off a great presentation, but this isn't necessarily your most important event. It may be more important to note that you were upset with your assistant before the presentation, and that you said something that damaged his trust in you. This is the event you need to write about in detail, exploring why you were upset and why you were cross. Only then can you learn from the experience.

As well as this, it's important to write down any small or **quick wins** that you've achieved. When you don't make a point of thinking about these, they might slip out of your memory. But it's important to reflect on them, so that you can boost your motivation and self-confidence.

Tip 1:

If this seems like a lot to remember, don't worry – the more you write in your journal, the easier it will be to know what to write about.

Tip 2:

Cognitive restructuring is a great technique to use to think about difficult or painful events more objectively. Use it as part of the way that you keep your journal.

Be Honest

Try not to "sugarcoat" your day as you write – be honest about what you thought, how you acted, or how a person or event made you feel.

You'll only learn from your experiences if you're honest about them.

Focus on Positives and Negatives

No matter how lousy your day was, try to reflect on at least one positive thing that happened. (It's great if you can think of three or five – this will help you become more optimistic.) What led to this positive event, and what did you learn?

If you can't identify a positive thing that happened, simply "count your blessings" by thinking about things that you're grateful for, such as your health, your skills, or your family. It's easy to take these things for granted, if you're having a bad time.

Keep Your Goals in Focus

Think about your long-term **goals** as you complete your journal entry.

What progress have you made since you last wrote in your journal, and what can you do next to make progress on your important goals?

Tip:

Download and print our **journaling aide-mémoire**. Cut this out and paste it into your journal as a quick reminder of what you could write about.

Key Points

You keep a journal when you record your thoughts, feelings, and experiences on a regular basis. It offers many benefits for your personal and professional growth.

To begin journaling, decide on a format, and find time in your day to write, so that you can make it a habit.

When you write in your journal, think critically about events that you've experienced, and write down what you've learned.

Also, be honest about your thoughts and feelings, try to identify at least one positive thing that happened in your day, and reflect on your goals.