

WRITING FOR DE-STRESSING

Writing can be a powerful tool for managing stress and organizing your thoughts. By using reflective and expressive writing, you can process emotions, clarify ideas, and create a sense of control when things feel overwhelming. This handout shares practical approaches to help you use writing for focus, calm, and clarity. Adapt them to your needs.

GROUP I: REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

Gibbs' reflective cycle

[Gibbs' Reflective Cycle](#) helps individuals consider what they did well in a particular situation, even during difficult experiences, and help them consider what they would wish to do differently in the future. The goal is to help the writer learn from situations that they experience regularly, particularly those that do not go as anticipated. It covers six stages that the writer writes to:

1. Describe the experience
2. Think about the feelings and thoughts prompted by the experience
3. Evaluate the experience, both good and bad
4. Analyze to make sense of the situation
5. Conclude what you learned and what you could have done differently
6. Consider an action plan for how you would deal with similar situations in the future, or general changes you might find appropriate

Mindful Decision-Making

In trying times, making any kind of decision—let alone an informed one—can be difficult. This activity helps you focus and slow the thoughts in your head to visualize the outcomes of making a choice.

1. Set a timer for 2 minutes, sit down, inhale and exhale deeply. Imagine yourself in the future having made the decision you are considering: What does your productivity look like? Your confidence? Your workdays and time off? Your relationships, health, and emotional state?
2. Open your eyes and write down as much of those thoughts as you can. As you write, pay attention to how each of those potential realities makes you feel.
3. Reset the timer for another 2 minutes, sit down, inhale and exhale deeply. Imagine yourself in the future having decided against what you are considering: What does your productivity look like? Your confidence? Your workdays and time off? Your relationships, health, and emotional state?
4. Open your eyes and write down as much of those thoughts as you can. As you write, pay attention to how each of those potential realities makes you feel.

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GROUP II: EXPRESSIVE AND EMOTIONAL WRITING

Compassionate Narrating

This tool helps you find a way to relate differently to your inner critical voice and to be more compassionate with yourself.

1. Fold a piece of paper into four squares, or divide a document into four quadrants.
2. In one square, embody the perspective of the inner critic. Write out the issue you have been dwelling on. (e.g., “I hate that I am so easily distracted and cannot get anything done.”) Take notes on the tone you use when telling this to yourself. Notice the emotions and physical demeanors that are evoked in the telling/writing of this critique.
3. In the second square, move to the sensation of being judged. Take notes on how it feels to encounter this criticism. Notice the emotions and physical demeanors in that response.
4. Then, engage in a dialogue between these two perspectives. How does the critical perspective feel? How does the judged perspective feel?
5. Finally, in the last square, find the voice of a friend or mentor. How would they respond to the critical perspective? How would they respond to the judged perspective? What advice would they give? Notice the tone, emotions (or lack of), and physical demeanors.

Give yourself time to express everything you need to, and at the end reflect on the experience. Do you understand a bit better how you think? Could you benefit from one of the alternative perspectives explored? Can you find ways of being more compassionate and supportive of yourself, especially the next time you find yourself being critical?

Freewriting and Expressive writing

Expressive writing is a therapeutic tool that has you focus deeply on what is bothering you and explore that through writing. Freewriting is an activity where a writer writes without censoring/editing themselves. These help writers get thoughts and emotions out that they might not share with themselves or others.

Find a private place to write so that you feel as comfortable as possible writing about your thoughts and feelings. Plan to write for at least 5 minutes on one prompt and consider writing on the same topic multiple times on separate days.

- What has been stressing or bothering you lately? How is it affecting you and the people around you?
- What fear might be preventing you from achieving a goal? Where is that fear coming from? What action can you take to overcome and prevent this?
- Who in your immediate circle is in need of joy, and what might you do to add to their joyfulness?
- Who is someone who believes in you? Describe what their support means to you.
- What are you currently proud of yourself for? What are you most grateful for this year?
- What does your perfect day look like? What can you not live without?
- Did you overreact to anything this week?
- Right now, I feel...