

LEARNING MADE EASY



Journaling

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Start or resume a
vibrant journaling practice

Heal the past, boost your
creativity, and reach your goals

Transform your life with
focused journaling

Amber Lea Starfire, MFA

Journaling guide, teacher, and
creative writing coach



Journaling

by Amber Lea Starfire, MFA

**for
dummies[®]**
A Wiley Brand

Journaling For Dummies®

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Introduction

You've heard it said that life is a journey — amazingly beautiful at times, and yet also complicated and messy. Along this journey, you experience myriad emotions, ranging from despair to joy, and have to deal with countless decision points, from trivial to life-changing. No one is exempt from life's challenges, and everyone needs help navigating the confusing events, responses, relationships, and choices that are simply part of being human.

Fortunately, journaling is a simple and effective tool that helps you address all of life's issues. Moreover, it's inexpensive and freely available to everyone — and that includes you.

This book can show you what you need to begin and maintain a journal, as well as how to use your journal to improve your life. The techniques and guidance provided in these pages can help you process and make meaning of significant life events, enhance self-awareness, identify ineffective or harmful habits and behaviors, build gratitude, establish a positive outlook on life, become better organized, solve difficult problems, and achieve your most important goals. That list of results may seem like a lot to promise, yet journaling has helped tens of thousands of people achieve these positive outcomes.

In these pages, you can discover how to practice journaling in ways that work best for you, so that you can continue to be engaged and maintain your journaling routines for years to come. While you grow in your knowledge and expand your journaling methods, you can expect to reap many of its benefits, ultimately attaining a greater sense of well-being and purpose.

About This Book

I wrote *Journaling For Dummies* with both beginners and experienced journal writers in mind.

If you're a beginner, this book provides you with all the information that you need to figure out if and how journaling can work for you, how to get started, and the tools you need.

If you've journaled before and want to reignite or deepen your practice, *Journaling For Dummies* provides a rich resource that offers a variety of journaling techniques, prompts, and inspirational ideas.

To make the information accessible, I've divided the book into four parts:

- » **Part 1: Getting Started with Journaling:** Foundational information that you need to understand what journaling can do for you, how to get started, and how to fit it into your life.
- » **Part 2: Exploring Popular Journaling Techniques:** Takes a deep dive into five different methods — reflective, mindful, Bullet, creative, and gratitude journaling.
- » **Part 3: Journaling Your Way to Health and Happiness:** Shows you how to apply the different methods for specific purposes, including healing emotional trauma, improving relationships, becoming more creative, achieving your goals, exploring your spirituality, and journeying through grief.
- » **Part 4: The Part of Tens:** Offers tips to maintain a robust journaling practice and ways to generate your own journaling prompts.

Whatever your knowledge and experience level, you can find what you need in *Journaling For Dummies* to begin and develop your journaling practice. Feel free to work your way through the content in any order you choose — skip around according to your interest, or start at the beginning and work your way through all the techniques and topics.

Foolish Assumptions

In writing this book, I made a few assumptions about who you are and why you opened these pages:

- » You've either heard about journaling or tried it before, and you think it could help you. Or you already journal on a regular basis and are looking for ways to deepen your practice.
- » You're interested in discovering more about yourself, your inner workings, and why you respond the way you do in relationships and life events.
- » You might feel a little shy or intimidated about expressing your inner feelings and thoughts — or maybe you've unsuccessfully tried journaling in the past — and you're looking for guidance on ways to get started and maintain a fulfilling practice.
- » You want to have more clarity and improve the quality of your decisions.
- » You want to improve your mental, emotional, and physical health and your relationships.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, icons in the margins highlight certain types of valuable information that call for your attention. Here are the icons you encounter and a brief description of each.



TIP

The Tip icon marks information that can help you make decisions about how you want to approach certain topics or prompts more easily; they might also provide inspirational variations of prompts.



REMEMBER

Remember icons mark information that's especially important to know. To identify the most important information in each chapter, just skim through these icons.



The Warning icon tells you to be careful. It marks important information that can help you navigate difficult journaling topics and issues in safe ways.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the abundance of information and guidance related to journaling that I provide in this book, you get access to even more help and information online at Dummies.com. Check out this book's online Cheat Sheet. Just go to www.dummies.com and search for *Journaling For Dummies Cheat Sheet*.

Where to Go from Here

Although you don't need to go through *Journaling For Dummies* in any particular order, for best results, ask yourself, "What am I looking to gain by journaling?" The answer to this question can guide you to the chapters and topics that best meet your needs.

That said, I do have a few recommendations about how to approach the content in this book:

» For beginners:

- If you've never journaled before, I highly recommend going through Part 1 first. Then, select a method in Part 2 that appeals to you and give it a try.
- If you want to know more about journaling's benefits, be sure to go through Chapter 2.
- If you have concerns or fears about journaling, see Chapter 4 for how to overcome your fear.

» If you've attempted journaling before and had difficulty making it a regular part of your life, I suggest looking at Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 before diving into specific journaling methods or topics.

»» For experienced journal writers:

- If you're looking to expand or deepen your journaling, I recommend trying a new method. Check out the different ways to journal in Part 2. Then, challenge yourself to begin something completely different.

For example, if you've only used the written word to journal, try creative journaling, which incorporates drawing and other visual journaling methods (see Chapter 8).

- You may also find a topic in Part 3 that can inspire you to new insights.

1

Getting Started with Journaling

IN THIS PART . . .

Discover what journaling can do for you, what you need to get started, and how to integrate a journaling practice into your life.

Examine the many benefits of journaling and how to overcome any obstacles that might prevent you from journaling successfully.

Create a foundation for an enduring practice by identifying your motivations, deciding how you want to journal, gathering your tools, and setting up your writing space.

Take the steps you need to establish your journaling practice.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Figuring out what journaling actually is
- » Setting yourself up for journaling success
- » Considering all the different ways to journal
- » Giving journaling a go

Chapter 1

Exploring Life with Journaling

Discovering the world of journal writing — also known as journaling — is to find, all at once, unlimited and creative personal expression; a way of exploring, investigating, and making meaning of life; and a self-help tool for increased self-knowledge and confidence.

With a regular journal-writing practice, you can create a safe space in which to express your deepest fears and hopes, disappointments and satisfactions, heartaches and joys. By writing down your feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs, you can discover behavioral patterns, become more self-aware, and improve your ability to learn from and build on significant life events.

Exploring the variety of journal-writing approaches in this book can help you find the methods that work best for you and provide you with the most meaningful benefits. And you can develop and deepen your journaling experience by practicing it on a regular basis, on a schedule and duration that fits your unique lifestyle.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of what journaling is and isn't as well as some of the different ways to approach journaling to help determine which journaling practice is a good fit for you and your lifestyle.

Defining Journaling

Journaling is the deeply personal practice of writing for personal development. It uses a variety of methods for recording life events, processing thoughts and emotions, increasing self-awareness and understanding, and achieving success through improved organization systems.

Journaling is similar to the once-commonplace practice of keeping a *diary* — a simple record of daily events. But with journaling, you take a deeper look at your life experience.

Whether you're brand new to journaling or have journaled in the past, you may have a few preconceptions about journal writing that could limit your approach to it. When you think about beginning or resuming a journaling practice, understanding what journaling is and isn't can help you approach journaling with a willingness to experiment and find a method that works best for you.

Appreciating what journaling is

At its essence, journaling is a self-help tool that is

- » Open-ended and flexible
- » Personal and private (not designed for publication)
- » A place to freely express feelings and thoughts, and to explore any topic of interest
- » Designed to fit your lifestyle and schedule
- » Relaxing and enjoyable
- » Beneficial for mental, emotional, and physical health
- » Used alone or in combination with professional psychological/mental health counseling and other services

Recognizing what journaling isn't

Because journaling can be adapted in unique ways for each person, it's not a one-size-fits-all form of exploring life's meaning and experiences. Here are a few other things that journaling is *not* meant to be or do.

- » Not a substitute for professional psychological or mental health services if you want or need help that a professional can provide.
- » Not rule-based or rigid.
- » Not focused on writing craft such as grammar, spelling, punctuation — or even full sentences. As long as you understand what you write, that's all that matters.
- » Not limited to writing — it may also include drawing, doodling, and other visual art forms.

Taking First Steps Toward Journaling Success

You may be wondering if journaling can work for you, and you probably have a few of the following questions: Will I enjoy writing? Will I be able to fit it into my schedule? Will it help me deal with some of the situations I'm experiencing?

Let me assure you that journaling is so flexible and effective that it works for just about everyone. The key to success is finding a method (or methods) and schedule that fit your lifestyle and feels comfortable.



TIP

To decide whether journaling is a good fit for you, it helps to understand your preferred communication style and your underlying reasons for considering journaling.

Determining your preferred communication style

Are you the sort of person who likes to talk out your problems with a close friend or confidante? Do you prefer reading and writing to watching videos? Do you enjoy working with your hands, perhaps with arts and crafts, or creating collages or scrapbooks? Do you practice or have you explored other self-help practices, such as mindfulness? Do you seek to better understand yourself?

If you answered yes to at least one of these questions, you likely can find journaling a natural extension of the ways in which you like to communicate and express yourself.

If you answered no to all of the questions, then journaling might not come naturally to you. That doesn't mean it's not for you, but you might have to work a little harder to find a method that feels natural and comfortable. If journaling doesn't come naturally, I recommend reviewing the different methods presented in this book and trying those that appeal to you.

Understanding your motivations

Why do you want to journal?

Although journaling has many benefits, what do you personally hope to gain from it? Answering this question and understanding what's drawing you to the idea of journaling can help you feel confident about your reasons for beginning or resuming a journaling practice.

For example, if you're interested in journaling because you want a safe place to express your most personal and private thoughts and feelings, that's a clear indication that journaling can benefit you.

On the other hand, if you're interested in journaling solely because someone told you that you *should* journal, then your motivation is externally based and may not be strong enough to carry you through the learning curve. In this case, answer the question: Why do you want to journal?

YOU'RE IN GOOD COMPANY: FAMOUS JOURNAL WRITERS

The practice of keeping a diary or journal is as ancient as writing itself. Some of the oldest discovered travel journals and writing that contain personal experience and inner reflections were created as early as 900 CE.

Here's a list of a few history-making journal keepers you might recognize:

- Meriwether Lewis, explorer (of Lewis and Clark)
- John Adams, second president of the United States
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, composer
- Charles Darwin, naturalist
- Charlotte Brontë, novelist
- Henry David Thoreau, writer
- Vincent Van Gogh, artist
- Beatrix Potter, writer and illustrator
- Marie Curie, physicist and chemist
- Virginia Woolf, writer
- Carl Jung, psychiatrist and psychotherapist
- Anne Frank, diarist
- Frida Kahlo, artist

Still not sure? Browse the chapter titles and subjects in this book's Table of Contents, noting which ones appeal most to you or draw you in. That point of reference should help define what you're looking for in a journaling practice.

Introducing the Many Ways You Can Journal

Because journaling is unique to each person, there's no one right way to keep a journal. That said, there are some commonly used techniques and some techniques that have specific purposes or benefits. The chapters in Part 2 focus on particular methods, and the chapters in Part 3 focus on the reasons and benefits of journaling.

Writing without structure

The most common way to journal is to simply open your notebook (or digital app) and write or draw whatever is in your mind, whenever and for as long as you need. There's no specific format for filling a page. This way of journaling is often referred to as *free-writing*.

Free-writing (unstructured journaling) allows you to be in the moment with your thoughts and feelings, and to take a stream-of-consciousness approach to your journal.

Unstructured journal entries — and, in fact, entire journals — tend to meander across numerous time periods, topics, and situations. They can include prose, poems, sketches, doodles, and lists.

One drawback to unstructured journaling is that it can get boring after a while, especially if you tend to circle around the same topics over and over without gaining self-knowledge or increased understanding in the process. In this case, try another journaling method for a while (you can choose from the options in Part 2), just to mix things up.

Using writing prompts

The second most common way to journal, after free-writing (see the preceding section), is to use writing prompts. Prompts are helpful when you're not sure what you want to write about. And

when you're feeling uninspired, a prompt can help engage the mind and start the creative juices flowing.

I'm a big proponent of journaling prompts, and I provide a lot of them throughout this book. I recommend journaling prompts to help you jumpstart your writing, approach a sensitive topic in new ways, get out of a journaling rut, and break through fear or writing blocks. Prompts can also help you deepen your journaling practice and gain meaningful insights.



REMEMBER

For best results, use prompts that interest you or generate an emotional response. You're not likely to write authentically or deeply in response to a journaling prompt that you're not engaged with.

Making lists and other structured forms

Lists and other highly structured forms of journaling, such as the Bullet Journal method (see Chapter 7), appeal to busy people who don't want to spend a lot of time writing but still want a way to document important events, keep track of tasks, and use shorthand to record emotional responses and thoughts.

Using a list structure is easy and fast, and it doesn't typically take a lot of mental or emotional energy. And it can still provide many of the benefits of journaling, such as enhancing self-awareness and identifying harmful or ineffective habits and behavior patterns.

You can use lists for many purposes: generating ideas, tracking tasks, identifying traits or attributes of people and objects, word associations, and so on.

Other structured journaling forms may include tables for habit tracking and graphs to track progress toward goals.

Drawing on your creative side

It's important to remember that journaling isn't limited to writing. In fact, some of the most famous journal keepers (think Leonardo Da Vinci or Frida Kahlo) used their journals to sketch

out ideas for inventions, sculpture, paintings, or scientific concepts.

While you begin or expand your journaling practice, try adding different forms of expression to your pages. You might be surprised by the richness and depth of your multimedia journal entries.



REMEMBER

Visual poems, paintings, collages, and ink drawings — with or without writing accompanying them — are all perfectly at home in a journal.

Journaling for specific purposes

Journals are often kept for dedicated purposes. For example, you can have a journal for cooking and recipes, another for inspirational ideas, and another for work projects. Whether you choose to keep one journal that contains all topics or keep a separate journal for each topic is completely up to you. Over time, depending on your lifestyle and needs, you can develop a journal-keeping system that works for you.

One common dedicated type of journal is a gratitude journal. This type of journal is used solely as a place to record things that you're grateful for. You can find out more about gratitude journaling in Chapter 9.

Trying Your Hand at Journaling

If you're new to journaling or just coming back to the practice after a hiatus, you might be wondering which journaling methods can work for you. Before jumping into any of the more detailed chapters on these approaches to journaling, why not give one a try?

Do This

Select one of the following prompts that most appeals to you and respond to it in the space provided. I've included prompts for structured and unstructured free-writing, list making, drawing, and gratitude.

- » Write the first thought that comes to your mind. Keep writing whatever occurs to you.

This prompt encourages unstructured, associative free-writing. If you enjoy writing to this type of prompt, you might want to check out Mindfulness Journaling, covered in Chapter 6.

- » Make a list of the things you want to remember about today. You can make this a simple list, or you can add additional details or notes for each item, such as why it's important or what you want to remember about it.

This way of journaling is similar to what you might write in your daily log in a Bullet Journal. To find out more about this method, turn to Chapter 7.

- » Write about an event (large or small) that occurred recently. Describe what happened, who else was involved, and what your emotional response to it was. What about this event sticks with you the most?

This Reflective Journaling prompt helps you begin to think about a life experience and consider its implications or meaning for you. You can take a deep dive into Reflective Journaling in Chapter 2.

- » Select an object in your home or office that's meaningful to you. Write about the object and why it's important. Include a sketch of the object.

Including drawing and other visual art is an example of Creative Journaling. If this prompt speaks to you, check out Chapter 8.

- » Write down ten things and/or people you're grateful to have in your life today.

This prompt is an example of a simple Gratitude Journaling technique. If this kind of journaling appeals to you, flip to Chapter 9 for more information about keeping a gratitude journal.

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