

Guidelines for Therapeutic Writing

1. Be mindful that there is a risk with writing down your thoughts that despite a privacy statement, someone you don't want to could find them. It is your choice as to whether you would like to keep your writing or dispose of it after writing it.
2. Know that this is not a writing, spelling, or grammar test. Let go of anything negative you've been told about your writing in the past. This writing is about the process, not the product. If a part of you is self-critical about how nice your writing looks, write purposefully messy. If a part of you edits your thoughts before you write them down, write at the top of the page "This is place for my thoughts to run." Recognize the blocks that you have to this process and use tools such as those to help yourself move past them.
3. **ALWAYS** do a post-writing reflection after your write. This is the most important part. (see other handout)
4. You have the option of only writing on one side of the page. Use the backside to jot down upsets that come to you that are too overwhelming to deal with in the moment or any themes that you want to explore in the future.
5. Be aware of helpful "pause buttons" for yourself. You may choose to make a list of them on the inside cover of your journal, so they are always readily available. (e.g. read a light-hearted book for 7 minutes or more, complete a mindfulness meditation, engage in grounding techniques, etc.)
6. Be aware that anything you send electronically to your counsellor becomes a part of your file as well as anything you physically give to him/her to keep.
7. Sit to write in a quiet space free of distractions. Make it a special time that you can look forward to with something comforting or soothing in that space with you - e.g. have a special journal and pen, drink tea, have a comforting stuffed animal or object in the space with you, etc.

Why Write?

What the Research Says

Expressive writing is defined as writing about significant emotions and experiences. It is important to dig deep and write in a detailed manner about your experiences, your related emotions, and what you think you've learned, how you've grown or changed, etc. when writing.

Benefits of writing:

- Decreased symptoms in major depressive disorder
- Decreased brooding and improved emotional processing
- Increased immune system and relationships, and decreased tension and fatigue following a breakup.
- Lowered dependency on medical system for stress-related issues
- Improved immune system
- Lower blood pressure
- Improved lung and liver function
- Less time spent in the hospital
- Improved mood and affect
- Overall feeling of greater psychological well-being
- Reduced depressive symptoms
- Less post-traumatic symptoms
- Less absenteeism from work
- Quicker re-employment following a job loss
- Improved working memory
- Improved sports performance
- Higher GPA
- Improved social and communication skills

Most benefits can be seen writing as little as 15 – 20 minutes/day writing 2 – 5 times/week

Writing about intensely positive experiences also improves mood, increases attentional focus, and decreases the likelihood of illness.