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Twelve Tips for Maintaining a Satisfying Journal Writing Practice

There are no hard-set rules for keeping a journal. How often you write, how much time you spend, and how rigorously you maintain a regular journaling schedule are matters of personal choice and circumstance. What seems a comfortable writing schedule for one may seem unbearably formal to another. And while an individual living alone may have hours of solitude and enormous flexibility in terms of time, a parent with small children may have very little of either. So it is of primary importance to find what works for you. The following general guidelines, however, may help you to establish journal writing as a regular and enduring habit.

Allow regular writing times. Find a time of day that works well for you and use this time every day. As much as possible, control interruptions during this time.

Create a proper writing environment. If you need quiet space, try to find a time that you can write without the noise and interruption from friends and family. If the hum of the world around you is soothing rather than distracting, plan to write during a time when other people will be engaged in their own work and not looking over your shoulder.

Develop a centering ritual. Associating journaling with another pleasurable habit can help to strengthen the routine and create an atmosphere of self-nurturing. When you are ready to write in your journal, consider pouring yourself a cup of tea or coffee. Play relaxing music. Take a moment for meditation, deep breathing, or prayer.

Date every entry. If you only establish one habit in your journal, let it be this one. Dating every entry allows you to chronologically reconstruct your journal by date. It also gives you the opportunity to observe cycles, trends and patterns. Over time, you'll begin to notice and plan your down times, your creative times, and your introspective times.

Prompt yourself with a routine self-reflection question: If you tend to have trouble starting, prompt yourself with a routine question, such as "What are you feeling right now?" or "What's on your mind?" ~ Anais Nin, an author who was well-known for her journal writing, suggested the question, "What feels vivid, warm, or near to you at the moment?"

Write quickly. You can outsmart dreaded "journal block" by writing so fast that the Internal Critic and the Internal Censor can't catch up. Writing quickly also provides much more ready access to subconscious information, because you're not as liable to be thinking about what you're writing.

Tell yourself the truth. Your own truth is not your enemy. Don't try to talk yourself out of knowing what you know or feeling what you feel. You'll get the best results in your journal if you give yourself permission to write your own truth.

Write because you want to write, not because you have to. Don't allow journaling to become an obligation or chore. Remember not to demand more of yourself than you can give. If you have missed a day - or several days - accept that journaling, like life, is imperfect. Just write the next time you have a chance.

Create a positive feedback loop. As you continue to use the journal as an opportunity to be with and learn about yourself, you will find that the practice gains a momentum of its own. Discovering your own hidden depths piques your curiosity and stimulates you to continue, setting up a positive feedback loop between your conscious and unconscious mind.

Emphasize process rather than product. An important purpose of journal writing is simply expressing and recording your thoughts and feelings. Concentrate on the process of writing - keeping the flow of words going, rather than worrying about the end result. ~ If your goal is to have a specific audience read your piece, go back to it later and edit it. You can always use your journal as the raw material for more polished writing.

Learn from your own experiences. After just a few weeks or months of keeping a journal, go back to earlier journal entries. See how you've changed. Look for patterns and correlations between your stress levels and your health. How does stress affect your energy levels? See what helped your general mood improve by opening up journal entries that precede an increase in your mood ratings. Learn from your own experiences. Use the objectivity of time to review your life from a different perspective that you had when you wrote the journal entries.

Have fun!! Journal writing is its own reward. Once you get started, your journal will become another one of your good friends - one who is always available and who has the time to listen attentively.