

Four-Day Expressive Writing Exercise

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Exercise quoted directly from book, [*Expressive Writing: Words that Heal*](#) (33-41):

Day One Writing Instructions

Remember that this is the first of four days of writing. In today's writing, your goal is to write about your deepest thoughts and feelings about the trauma or emotional upheaval that has been influencing you life the most. In your writing, really let go and explore this event and how it has affected you. Today, it may be beneficial to simply write about the event itself, how you felt when it was occurring, and how you feel now.

As you write about this upheaval, you might begin to tie it to other parts of your life. For example, how is it related to your childhood and your relationships with your parents and close family? How is the event connected to those people you have most loved, feared, or been angry with? How is this upheaval related to your current life –your friends and family, your work, and your place in life? And above all, how is this event related to who you have been in the past, who you would like to be in the future, and who you are now?

Really let go and examine your deepest emotions and thoughts surrounding this upheaval in your life. Remember to write continuously the entire twenty minutes. And never forget that this writing is for you and you alone.

At the conclusion of your twenty minutes of writing, complete the post-writing questionnaire.

For this and for all future writing exercises, respond to each of the following five questions either at the end of your writing or in a separate place. Put a number between 1 and 10 by each question.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all			Somewhat				A great deal			

____ A. To what degree did you express your deepest thoughts and feelings?

____ B. To what degree did you currently feel sad or upset?

____ C. To what degree do you current feel happy?

____ D. To what degree was today's writing valuable and meaningful to you?

Briefly describe how your writing went today so you may refer to this later.

Day Two Writing Instructions

Today is the second day of the four-day process. In today's writing, your task is to really examine your very deepest emotions and thoughts. You can write about the same trauma or upheaval as you did yesterday or a completely different one.

The writing instructions today are similar to those of your last writing session. Today, try to link the trauma to other parts of your life. Remember that a trauma or emotional upheaval can often influence every aspect of your life – your relationships with friends and family, how you and others view you, your work, and even how you think about your past. In today's writing, begin thinking about how this upheaval is affecting your life in general. You might also write about how you may be responsible for some of the effects of the trauma.

As before, write continuously for the entire twenty minutes and open up your deepest thoughts and feelings. At the conclusion of your writing, complete the post-writing questionnaire.

Put a number between 1 and 10 by each question.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all			Somewhat				A great deal			

___ **A. To what degree did you express your deepest thoughts and feelings?**

___ **B. To what degree did you currently feel sad or upset?**

___ **C. To what degree do you current feel happy?**

___ **D. To what degree was today's writing valuable and meaningful to you?**

Briefly describe how your writing went today so you may refer to this later.

Day Three Writing Instructions

You have made it through two days of writing. After today, you will have only one more day of writing. Tomorrow, then you need to wrap up your story. Today, however, continue to explore your deepest thoughts and emotions about the topics you have been tackling so far.

On the surface, today's writing assignment is very similar to the earlier assignments. In your writing, you can focus on the same topics you have been examining or you can shift your focus to either another trauma or to some other feature of the same trauma. Your primary goal, however, is to focus on your emotions and thoughts about those events that are affecting your life the most right now.

It is important that you don't repeat what you have already written in your past exercises. Writing about the same general topic is fine, but you also need to explore it from different perspectives and in different ways. As you write about this emotional upheaval, what are you feeling and thinking? How has this event shaped your life and who you are?

In today's writing, allow yourself to explore those deep issues about which you may be particularly vulnerable. As always, write continuously the entire twenty minutes.

Put a number between 1 and 10 by each question.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all				Somewhat				A great deal		

___ **A. To what degree did you express your deepest thoughts and feelings?**

___ **B. To what degree did you currently feel sad or upset?**

___ **C. To what degree do you current feel happy?**

___ **D. To what degree was today's writing valuable and meaningful to you?**

Briefly describe how your writing went today so you may refer to this later.

Day Four Writing Instructions

This is the final day of the four-day writing exercise. As with the previous days' writings, explore your deepest emotions and thoughts about those upheavals and issues in your life that are most important and troublesome for you. Stand back and think about the events, issues, thoughts, and feelings that you have disclosed. In your writing, try to tie up anything that you haven't yet confronted. What are your emotions and thoughts at this point? What things have you learned, lost, and gained as a result of this upheaval in your life? How will these past events guide your thoughts and actions in the future.

Really let go in your writing and be honest with yourself about this upheaval. Do your best to wrap up the entire experience into a meaningful story that you can take with you into the future.

Put a number between 1 and 10 by each question.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all			Somewhat				A great deal			

___ A. To what degree did you express your deepest thoughts and feelings?

___ B. To what degree did you currently feel sad or upset?

___ C. To what degree do you current feel happy?

___ D. To what degree was today's writing valuable and meaningful to you?

Briefly describe how your writing went today so you may refer to this later.

Today includes the basic four-day writing exercise. Most people find the last day of writing the least enjoyable. This is often a sign that you are tired of dealing with this trauma and want to get on with other life tasks.

In some ways, it is tempting to go back over the various writing samples, questionnaires responses, and personal observations immediately after the fourth writing day. Indeed, it is important to review your writing. However, it is strongly recommended that you take at least two or three days off from the writing exercise before you do this. When you are ready to begin assessing your writing, look back at your writing.

References

Pennebaker, J. W., & Evans, J. F. (2014). *Expressive writing: words that heal: using expressive writing to overcome traumas and emotional upheavals, resolve issues, improve health, and build resilience* (pp. 33–41). Idyll Arbor, Inc. https://www.amazon.com/Expressive-Writing-Words-that-Heal/dp/1611580463/ref=sr_1_1?crid=3B4FE878YFURQ&keywords=expressive+writing&qid=1671995813&prefix=%2Caps%2C241&sr=8-1