



WRITER'S ALLEY

## How to Write a Journal

A journal is a record of events and feelings in life. Unlike a diary, a journal is often a public text, which means it is intended for others to read. You may be writing a journal just for yourself, but you may also be writing it for a teacher in a writing class, a therapist, or even for your grandchildren to read some day to learn about you. You may be writing a journal so that you can read it in the future and come to some understanding of your life.

In any case, a journal must balance the public with the private. It must appeal to you as a writer and to your potential reader. For that reason, a journal is more than just a log of events or a laundry list of ideas. It contains elements of narrative, along with introspection. But a journal doesn't have to be formal or perfect writing (though you should strive for correct grammar by making corrections after you finish writing)—the main goal is to express ideas and feelings and to record events.

When you write your journal, try to write about ideas and events that are meaningful to you. Try to capture that meaning and convey it to your reader—even if your only reader is going to be a future version of yourself. Use lively language and detail to show what happened by using descriptions from all five senses. Then follow a description of events with your own thoughts.

You might want to set a goal for length and frequency for your journal—or it may be set for you. Try for a page each day to start with, and you can vary that once you decide what works for you.

Here are some possible topics for your journal. You may choose a different one each day or you may want to do the same question and write about a different person, event or idea. You can use the topic as a starting point and alter it to meet your own needs. In the end, you should write about ideas that are important to you.

1. Describe an important event that happened today (or this week). How do you feel about what happened? Why is the event important?
2. Look out your bedroom window for a while. What do you see? What do you think about it?
3. Choose a person you know. Describe that person—both in terms of physical appearance and personality. Why is this person important to you?
4. What is your favorite song? What is the song about? Why is it meaningful to you?
5. Choose an event you have heard or read about in the news. What happened? What is your interpretation of the event? How does it affect your life?
6. Describe your family's holiday celebrations for a holiday that is significant to you.

7. How would you define happiness? What makes you happy?
8. Choose something in your life that you see as a problem. Describe the problem and try to list possible ways to deal with it.
9. How would you describe the ideal relationship? How does one of your current relationships fit with your ideal?
10. What is your favorite activity? Describe what the activity involves. Why do you enjoy it?
11. How would you describe yourself—both in terms of physical appearance and personality? What are some things you like about yourself?
12. Describe your family of origin. What is your home life like? What are the roles and relationships of the members of your family?
13. What would you consider the most significant event of your life so far? How did the event affect the way you see yourself and your life?
14. What do you consider one of your best accomplishments? Why is it important to you?
15. Do you have a favorite place? Describe the place using all five senses. Why is it special to you?
16. What do you consider to be one of your best attributes? Why?
17. Describe an event that you think shaped who you are. What exactly happened? Why was the event significant?
18. Describe a person who influenced who you have become. What is that person like? What is a typical action or behavior of this person? Why did he or she have influence over you?
19. Do you consider yourself religious? How would you describe your core religious beliefs? Where did they come from?
20. What religious or spiritual practice do you engage in regularly? What does it involve? Why is it significant to you?
21. If you had to pass on a life lesson to a younger person, what would it be? How did you learn this lesson? Why do you think it is important?
22. What is your favorite food? Why? Describe how you prepare it and what it tastes like.
23. Does your family have a tradition? What is it? What does it involve? Where did the tradition come from and why is it meaningful?
24. What do you know about your family's history? Does your ethnicity play an important role in your family or individual life? In what ways?
25. If you had a beautiful day with nothing required of you, what would you do? Why did you choose this option over others?
26. What is/was your favorite subject in school? Why?
27. What subject in school did you like least? Why?
28. Do you have musical talent? What is the role of music in your life?
29. Do you have a pet? Describe the pet. How has your pet contributed to your life?
30. What is your feeling about the emphasis on going green in recent years? What actions have you taken, if any? If not, why not?
31. Describe your house—or the dream house you hope to get some day.
32. Who was your best friend when you were a child? Describe the friend. What activities did you do together? Are you still friends? Why or why not?

33. Who is your best friend now? What is your friend like? What is important about your relationship?
34. Describe something you and your best friend typically do together.
35. How do you manage your money? What are your feelings about money?
36. What is one of the most embarrassing things you have done? What exactly happened? How did you recover?
37. Do you consider yourself artistic? How do you define art? How do you feel about art?
38. Do you think creativity and art are important? Why or why not?
39. What do you consider your biggest challenge? How did you meet the challenge?
40. What item do you consider your prized possession? Describe it and tell why it is meaningful to you.
41. What is your fondest childhood memory? Use your five senses to describe what happened.
42. What value or belief do you feel is most important to you? Why? Where do you think the value came from?
43. Should people be responsible for other people, even if they are not related? What is the nature of that responsibility? Tell a story that shows what you mean.
44. Can individuals know about the world? If so, how does the individual learn about the world, himself or herself and the nature of existence?
45. What is the nature of human existence? What purpose does that existence serve?
46. What is death? What is the purpose or meaning of death?
47. Is there a higher power? What is the nature of that power? What is its role in the universe? What is the nature of the relationship between a higher power (if you believe in one) and the individual?
48. What is the individual's role in the universe? In society? Toward nature?
49. What is the nature of human relationships with each other? With the world?
50. What rights do individuals have in their daily lives? What responsibilities do they have?
51. What is love? What is happiness? How do you achieve each?
52. What obligations do individuals have to others and to their communities and the world?
53. If you could travel anywhere in the world where would you go and why?
54. What trips have you taken? Use your five senses to describe important things that you saw or experienced on your trip?
55. Is traveling to other places important? What can be gained?
56. How would you describe your childhood? What are some important events that you feel shaped your childhood?
57. Describe an event that you feel changed a core belief. What happened? Why did it change your belief?
58. How do you spend your time? What would you say takes up most of your time?
59. Do you feel that the way you spend your time reflects your values? Why or why not?
60. What is your view of technology? How do you use technology in your everyday life?

61. Describe your mother—both in terms of physical appearance and personality. What role has she played in your life?
62. Tell a story about a specific event in your life that involves your mother.
63. Describe your father—both in terms of physical appearance and personality. What role has she played in your life?
64. Tell a story about a specific event in your life that involves your father.
65. What qualities do you think make a good friend?
66. If your friends described you, what would they say?
67. Which of your qualities or characteristics do you think is most salient? Why?
68. What makes you most angry? Why? How do you deal with the anger?
69. What makes you most sad? Why? How do you deal with the sadness?
70. Do you prefer urban, suburban or rural living? Why?
71. Have you ever experienced the death of a loved one? What happened? How did you deal with your grief?
72. Do you consider yourself healthy? What do you do to maintain your health?
73. Do you participate in a sport? Why? Describe an important event related to your sport?
74. What hobbies do you have? What does each entail? Why do you enjoy each particular hobby? Tell a story about something you did related to your hobby.
75. How important are appearances to you? Tell a story about a time when appearances were very important or not important at all.
76. Have you ever been victim of a crime? What happened? How did you feel? How did you recover?
77. What is your opinion about the legal system in the USA? On what is your opinion based?
78. How important are politics in your life? Why? What are your political beliefs?
79. How do you feel about nature? Is there a spot in nature that is particularly important to you? Describe it in detail. How do you feel when there?
80. What is your favorite book? Why? What significant lessons do you feel this book imparts?
81. How did you learn to read? Does reading play an important role in your life? How?
82. When you were a child, what did you want to be as an adult? Why? How have your goals changed or stayed the same?
83. If you could do anything, what would it be? Why?
84. Describe a typical day for you with as much detail as possible. When you read over what you have written, how do you feel about it?
85. What was your first romantic encounter? Use your five senses to describe it in detail. How did you feel?
86. What is love? Tell a story that illustrates what you mean.
87. If you had to plan the perfect date, what would it involve?
88. What famous person do you admire? Why?
89. If you were famous, what would it be for? What would you do with your fame?
90. What television show best matches your life? Why?
91. If you had to make a show or book about your life, what would it be called? What would the premise be? Who would be the main characters?

92. How much responsibility should parents take for their children's lives? Tell a story which illustrates what you mean.
93. Do you consider yourself to be guided more by emotion or logic? Tell a story that shows what you mean.
94. Do you think most people are guided more by emotion or logic? What evidence do you have for your opinion?
95. Describe your favorite item of clothing. Is it a favorite because of how it feels, how it looks or because of an event you wore it to? What do you think the item of clothing shows about you?
96. Do you believe that everything happens for a reason or that things just happen and people create the reason after the fact? On what do you base your opinion?
97. Is it possible to balance work and family life? How? If not, which would take priority? Why?
98. How do you feel about money? How important is money to you?
99. When you meet new people, how do you react? Tell a story to illustrate this.
100. When you are around a group of people, how do you behave? What makes you most comfortable? What makes you most uncomfortable?