

YOUR FRIENDLY GUIDE TO A  
MONTH OF JOURNALING

30 Days  
to a  
Journaling Life



Nova @ Journaling Saves

# 30 Days to a Journaling Life

Your friendly guide to a month of journal adventures

Nova @ Journaling Saves

# Ready for 30 exciting days?

You, my friend, have made a very wise decision.

Journaling is fabulous for a million reasons, and getting into a daily habit of writing will change your life. Lofty claim, I know. But daily journaling makes sliced bread look like yesterday's news.

I will be your friendly, supportive, and slightly crazy guide on a 30-day mission to create a journaling life. The process can be challenging, scary, and a boatload of fun. Don't worry - I'll hold your hand each step of the way.

## Here's the Plan.

Each day for 30 days, you will follow the corresponding lesson.

The first week will have longer lessons but no writing. These days will prepare you by covering the basics like choosing a journal and figuring out the best time to write.

We've all got bonkers To Do lists and the last thing you need is more pressure and guilt. So reading the lesson and doing the exercise won't take more than 30 minutes.

I'm so excited you decided to join me on this adventure. It's going to be a blast.

Yours in Journaling,

Nova

# Day 1: Paper or Plastic?

Welcome to day one. Ready for liftoff?

Let's get started.

**One of the questions I'm asked most often about journaling is if it can be done on the computer. For the next 30 days, that answer is "NO."**

Hear me out on this one.

I'm going to ask you a favor. Even if you are madly in love with your iPad, desktop, or shiny laptop, please try writing journal entries by hand on paper for one month. If at the end of the month you decide journaling by hand is not for you, then go digital. No hard feelings.

*(That said, if you have physical limitations or if journaling on the computer is simply the only way you can participate right now, please do.)*

Try writing journal entries by hand on paper for one month.

Why is writing by hand the best idea ever?

## 1. It helps you focus on Process, not product.

Yes, I know you can type faster than you can write. But believe it or not, journaling is not about speed. It's easy to lose sight of Process in our results-driven environment. Writing by hand gets us back in touch with doing something for its own sake, instead of simply producing a deliverable to be checked off your action item list.

## 2. It exercises your brain.

The white coats tell me that the physical act of writing by hand exercises the creative, big-picture part of your cerebrum. This means you'll come away from your journaling session with a new outlook, feeling refreshed and more creative. It may even make you smarter!

## 3. You deserve a break!

Most of us spend a lot of time on the computer already. Consider this a much-earned vacation from the digital world. A mini spa, if you will, on the page. You'll thank me later.

### Get yourself a journal and some pens

You may already have a journal you'd like to use. Great. If not, time to go shopping.

For our purposes, anything with paper will do just fine. Spiral bound notebook, looseleaf 3-hole punched, artsy-fartsy Moleskine. Whatever floats your boat.

Note that if your journal is absolutely stunning, you may feel obligated to write only Deep and Poignant entries. You don't need that kind of pressure, so set that one aside for a little bit and try your hand at a \$1 composition book from the drug store.

Your journal should be large enough to stretch out in, but small enough to carry with you comfortably. You should look forward to writing in it, and not have any fear that you're sullyng it up.

One splurge I suggest making is buying yourself a fat stack of awesome pens that you can't wait to write with. This makes a huge difference in the ease of journaling, particularly if you're not used to writing by hand.

You've got a couple of days to select your journal, so get on it.

Tomorrow I'll give you another reason to get mad at me when I tell you that you have to write every single day.

# Day 2: Just Like Vitamins

I have another request, and this will likely be the last favor I ask. (But don't quote me on that.)

**For the next 30 days, we're going to write every single day.**

Yes, every day.

Why, you ask? Well, it just so happens I've got eight reasons right here.

## 1. Establish a routine

You don't waste energy debating whether or not to write - you just do it. There's no guilty rescheduling, no rationalizations. You know to set aside the time every single day. It's just easier.

## 2. Create Momentum

The pages pile up quickly, which provides measurable progress that's immensely satisfying.

## 3. Build Discipline

Honoring your commitment to yourself, even when you'd rather go to the movies or catch an extra hour of sleep, strengthens your discipline. Showing up regardless, because you said you would, bolsters your self image and establishes you as a person of your word.

## 4. Establish Credibility

Your friends, family and housemates will see you're serious about journaling, which may give you more power to set boundaries and make demands so you can keep at it.

## 5. Invite big wins

There's a sweet spot in daily journaling, around page 1.5, where breakthroughs often occur. Even if you sit down unfocused, convinced you have nothing to say, you can bet something big is brewing. And halfway through the second page of the morning, it appears.

If you neglect to write because you don't "need to" or don't feel you have anything important to say, these epiphanies will never occur.

## 6. Gain perspective

Writing daily keeps the drama right-sized and on the page. When you are going through a rough patch, it's hard to remember you didn't always feel this way. It's equally hard to imagine that you won't feel this way forever.

A daily writing practice gives you visual proof that everything is temporary.

## 7. Identify patterns

If you write daily, over the course of a few weeks, you may begin to see useful patterns. Small things that may have escaped you now provide clarity, highlighting possible ways to improve your life or grow emotionally.

If you keep making the same decision that's not getting results, it will become clear in your journal so you can make the change.

## 8. Retire from crisis management

Journaling daily keeps you on top of issues, concerns, problems. You resolve conflicts more quickly and with less damage. Your journal becomes an “early warning” mechanism.

Think of it like the little red light on your dashboard, signaling that you’ve got another 50 miles before you run out of gas. Wouldn’t it be a pain if the car just quit?

I understand life happens. If you can't write, you can't write. But show up and do your best to get in a writing session each day, no matter how brief or directionless. If you miss a session, just be sure to write the next day. And don't beat yourself up. This is a process, and it can be rocky. We'll get through it. Progress, not perfection.

Oh, and I'm pretty much done asking for favors and making ridiculous demands. Glad we got that out of the way early.

Tomorrow we'll talk about finding the best time to journal. (Hint: it's whenever you'll actually do it!)

# Day 3: Hours of Operation\*

When is the best time of day for journaling?

**Whenever you'll actually do it.**

## Day or Night?

Writing in the morning has many benefits. Starting your day with *You* front and center emphasizes the importance of self-care. It allows you to prepare for the day ahead, and start your activities with a clean slate.

Plus, if your morning session is interrupted, you still have the chance to snag another block of time later in the day.

Some people can't think straight first thing in the morning, so writing before sun-up is like pulling teeth. If that's the case, give nighttime journaling a shot. Writing before bed allows you to vent the day's pressures so you can sleep better.

**Pick the time of day you have the most control over.** For me, that's mornings. Nobody in their right mind would bother me at 6:00 in the morning. (At least not more than once.)

Look for a natural lull in your day that occurs with regularlity. Maybe it's just after getting the kids off to school. Perhaps your lunch break at work offers some time for journaling instead of surfing the web.

Experiment and find what works best for you. Over time you can try different slots and compare results. Whether you choose day or night, the most important part is that you get it done! Tomorrow we'll discuss *where* to journal.

We're halfway through the first week already! It's almost time to put pen to paper. Stay tuned.

# Day 4: Location, Location, Location

In order to stay motivated, you need to find a comfortable place to journal. A spot that meets all your needs will help you look forward to daily writing.

So let's talk about where to park your fine self.

Some characteristics of location to consider:

## Privacy and Distractions

Your journaling spot must provide adequate privacy or you'll be unable to truly let go and dig deep. Choose a locale where nobody can read over your shoulder.

If you fear being interrupted, it'll be hard to let the flow of writing take you away. Same with distractions. Your chosen writing environment should minimize bright shiny things so you can concentrate.

Other sounds in your environment should be at a comfortable level for you. Some people can't concentrate in a library but find their focus amid chaos. You can also don a pair of headphones and crank up your music if that works for you.

## Comfort

Chair, table, temperature all need to be comfy enough to let you focus on your writing and not the fact that your behind is falling asleep. (Curse those fancy wrought iron cafe seats!)

## Availability

Your chosen place should be open during the hours you'll likely be writing. It should also be close enough that you don't have to plan a special trip to get there. If you

have to drive across town every time you want to journal, you're less likely to do it.

Find a place that's easy to get to and requires little planning. If you drive, predictable parking is key.

Today, put some thought into where you might do your best journaling. As we progress through the course, try some different locations and see what works for you.

Tomorrow we'll talk about privacy. I'll show you how to be a Journaling Secret Agent and keep your writing under wraps.

# Day 5: Be a Journaling Secret Agent

## **Privacy is a huge concern for a lot of people.**

Never fear - we're about to cover the ins and outs of keeping that journal of yours private. Before I go into the actual mechanics of keeping your journal private, let me say this.

I want you to have the best in life, and that includes being surrounded by people who respect your boundaries.

I refuse to share my home or my life with people I cannot trust implicitly. I can leave my journal open on the kitchen table for a week and know it won't be read. But getting to that point has been a long process.

If you're not quite there yet, that's okay. Your primary concern is to be safe. If something you've written will shake up part of your life that you're not ready to deal with yet, focus on privacy for your own safety.

Do whatever you need to do to feel protected so you can write without hesitation or self-censorship. As you continue on the path to personal growth, you can use your journal as a trust barometer for your relationships.

Okay, let's get started. Here are 7 methods you might find useful for keeping your writing private.

## 1. Out of sight, out of mind

Most of the time, keeping your journal out of visual reach prevents roaming eyes. I consider this my "keep the honest people out" method, like locking car doors.

I believe in setting people up for success. No matter how much they love you, your friends and family may be tempted to snoop if you make it easy for them. It's human nature.

Help them honor your trust by putting your journal away.

## 2. Code words and analogies

Develop your own shorthand, and substitute names and places if necessary.

In the past, I used code words and analogies that would be meaningless to anyone else:

"I simply don't know which sheets to choose. Do I go with the comfortable, traditional flannel? Or do I gamble on the racy satin sheets, exciting but impractical long-term?"

You might want to revisit the entries once you're a safe distance from the situation and make a "key" for yourself to clear up any confusion. "Why the heck was I all worked up about sheets?!"

## 3. Locks

Obviously, you can go the Fort Knox route with a locking file cabinet or bookcase.

But if you're in a volatile situation, it's probably unwise to flaunt this fact. Stick with generalizations. "Oh, yes – I just lock up all my important documents – safety first!"

If you want to go the teen angst route, there's always the locking journal with tiny heart- shaped padlock. Those can be picked with a hairpin, though, so don't rely on Mead to guarantee your privacy. (I speak from experience.)

## 4. Warning Labels

A big, fat warning label may provide an additional line of defense.

Again, keeping the honest people out. "You are about to violate the sacred trust of someone you love. Is whatever petty stuff you might find in here worth that?" Just

to remind intruders what's at stake.

## 5. Fake Covers

Try hiding your journaling beneath the guise of a less intriguing topic.

If you want to get creative about protecting your privacy, go "undercover." You can buy journals made from old books – Nancy Drew novels, botany handbooks, philosophy anthologies. "Oh this old thing? Just my stuffy volume of 17th century poetry."

## 6. Conversations

Do yourself a favor and have the conversation about privacy before you need to.

Pour a glass of wine and start a friendly chat when the stakes are low and nobody is at fault. It's much easier on your relationships. Simply assure your partner, family member or housemate that you're happy to discuss any issues between you as they come up.

"If you have any questions about me or our relationship, come to me and we'll talk about it. I promise to do the same. This journal is for my private thoughts, and I trust you to honor my privacy by not reading it."

Personally, I also add, "I'm not responsible for what happens if you decide to read my journal so don't come crying to me when you find something that wasn't meant for your eyes."

But my relationship can withstand this level of candor. Your mileage may vary.

## 7. Boredom

As a last line of defense, most of our journaling would bore a snooper to tears in minutes.

The juicy stuff is usually few and far between – that's the nature of daily journaling. Anyone who decides to violate your trust will likely be disappointed when they discover it wasn't worth the bother.

Okay, Journaling Secret Agent, tomorrow we'll talk about how to keep it simple when you're so dang smart.

# Day 6: Keep it Simple, Smartly

Now that we've covered all the essentials, I'm here to tell you:

## **None of it matters.**

An ideal time to write, comfortable digs, a great pen, and endless sheets of fabulous paper can make journaling more enjoyable. But writing in the ugliest notebook, in the wrong place, at the worst time, always beats not writing at all.

One of the most attractive elements of journaling is its simplicity. Journal writing has virtually no barriers to entry; if you can hold a pen, you can keep a journal.

## **So why do we make it so difficult?**

We create barriers for ourselves because it's hard to start something you've never done before. It's difficult to stay dedicated to a practice that loses its charm once the infatuation fades. It's painful to dig deep into topics you've buried for years, and it's deflating to examine your mistakes with a magnifying glass.

A cheery cover on your journal will not make these tasks any easier. Neither will the perfect desk, the juiciest pen, or the most sacred afternoon.

We convince ourselves we've got complicated problems to solve because it delays the discomfort of doing the work.

The only way to make these tasks less threatening is to do them.

## Form Follows Function

Don't get me wrong – there's nothing wrong with aesthetics. I fully embrace the surge of creative energy and renewed productivity that can sprout from a fresh outlook, an extreme makeover, some spring cleaning.

But, like that essential design principle declares, "form follows function." If you're spending hours searching for the "perfect journal," you're making this harder on yourself.

The truth is, when you're ready to write, you'll make do with whatever's within reach. You don't need a perfect notebook, ideal location, free afternoon, or anyone's permission - but your own.

I know you're raring to go. We've got one more topic to cover before we hit the books.

Tomorrow ends the "tough love" portion of our program. I'll show you how to be a spectacular screw-up, so you can get over yourself and start putting words on the page.

# Day 7: You are Already Fabulous!

It's time to wrap up this week of preparation and get you ready to start writing. Before we hit the page, I'd like to let you in on a little secret:

**You're already fabulous.**

You're not going to do it wrong. In fact, there's no right or wrong way to do it. Anyone who says otherwise is trying to pull a fast one on you.

## Why Perfectionism Will Ruin you

If I could eliminate just one affliction with a wave of my magic wand, I'd banish perfectionism.

Perfectionism is an insidious monster with many faces, stalking in dark corners of our minds. In the world of journaling, creativity, and personal development, perfectionism is public enemy #1. Why?

**Because perfectionism is paralyzing.**

Perfectionism blocks forward movement and prevents the experimentation necessary for growth. It stifles creativity, erodes self-confidence, and blocks the birth of fresh ideas. You cannot learn, improve, or grow while hobbled by perfectionism.

Perfectionism can be distilled into one sentence:

**"I might not do it perfectly, so I'm not doing it at all."**

It's time to get out of your own way. Here are 7 steps to do just that.

### 1. Focus on the process, not the product

Set a goal for yourself based on effort, not results.

Commit to writing in your journal for three pages or twenty minutes. Then, even if you're convinced you're doing it wrong, you're still successful because you met your goal.

This works because Process is the soul of journaling. The individual words on the page are unimportant; showing up and writing is what makes journaling magical.

## 2. Be a beginner

Beginners are like puppies; they're inherently cute and the urge to coddle them is universal.

Only insecure people mistreat newbies – the same people who kick puppies. You can identify them because they're defensive and eager to prove they know more than you.

Don't be afraid to admit you're a beginner. Secure people build you up because your success isn't a threat to their status. They might even give you biscuits.

## 3. Embrace your suckiness

Unless you're a freak of nature, mastering a new skill requires hard work. The suck phase is necessary and healthy.

If you quit because something is hard, uncomfortable, or you just don't like being a beginner, you'll never get better.

In contrast, if you're willing to be imperfect, it's almost a given that you'll improve. In journaling, this often means hesitant, self-conscious journal entries lacking direction and voice. It means writing, "I don't know what to write..." repeatedly - until you do.

**If you're willing to be imperfect, it's almost a given that you'll improve.**

It means one day, during a grammatically-incorrect deluge of monotony, you'll write

a phrase that takes your breath away. You'll stop to re-read it.

And you'll realize you're getting better – just by showing up and being willing to suck.

## 4. Stop comparing yourself to others

Comparing ourselves to others is dangerous because you can always find someone who is better - or worse - than you. So the comparisons don't mean anything.

**Most success has nothing to do with talent and everything to do with perseverance.**

If you and I both get up this morning and write for half an hour, we're on equal footing. It doesn't matter that this is your first day doing it and my ten thousandth. As of today, we are both dedicated journal writers. That's all you need to know.

The wisdom of our grade school teachers proves invaluable: keep your eyes on your own paper!

## 5. Ignore the naysayers

To be a successful journaler you must ignore the weird little voice in the back of your head.

The one chanting, "You suck! Why even bother? You must be kidding that you've got something worthwhile to say! Who do you think you are, anyway?"

Maybe that weird little voice lives not in your head, but your house. If the naysayer script belongs to your spouse, your mother, or your best frenemy, ignore them.

They're just jealous because your journaling doesn't involve them.

## 6. Accept the worst

Most fears are irrational. If we actually thought it through, we'd find being imperfect isn't all that scary.

Really, what's the worst that can happen? Honestly identifying the result of our imperfect actions enables us to move forward more confidently.

I can assure you – you've already survived much worse in your life than the damage inflicted by imperfect journaling.

## 7. Learn to laugh at yourself

I put this one last because I want it to stick.

We're awfully serious most of the time. I don't know about you, but I look for opportunities to be a drama queen whenever possible – back of hand to the forehead, knees swaying, *woe is me*.

### **Humor is a pure antidote for perfectionism.**

My creative subconscious loves a juicy storyline with high stakes. I frequently catch myself at the curtain call and I can't help but laugh at my theatrics.

Maintaining a sense of humor about your journal writing makes the act less threatening. Especially when you're able to look back at old entries and give a hearty chuckle. Laughing at your imperfect self with wild abandon is liberating. Try it sometime.

Alright, this ends our little pep talk.

Time to give your perfect self a big pat on the back for completing our first week together! Now dust off your pen and paper (yes, paper!) cause we're about to get this party started.

# Day 8: This is Your Parade!

Welcome to Week Two, where the rubber hits the road.

Since we're doing this whole journaling thing for YOU, let's get clear on your hopes and expectations.

Today, I'd like you to write about what you hope to get out of journaling.

When we get clear about our goals, it's easy to assess whether or not we're reaching them. We can adjust our course as needed.

This writing prompt should start you off gently. A little ice breaker, if you will. You probably know the answer to this question already. You can do this entry in list form, traditional prose, comic strip format, limerick, mind-map or flowchart. Whatever format feels most inviting to you today.

There is no right answer. Open your journal. Take a deep breath and clear your mind.

## **Answer these questions:**

- Why have you decided to keep a journal?
- Why start now?
- What are you hoping to get out of journaling?
- What would successful journaling look like to you?
- Write for 20 minutes. Proclaim your intent.

## Additional questions

**Here are a few extra credit questions, if you're so inclined:**

- Have you journaled in the past? How did it go?
- What did you get out of it then?
- Would you like this time to be different? If so, how?
- If you stopped journaling in the past, why?
- How can you overcome these obstacles this time around?

Congratulations on finishing the first assignment. Not so bad, right? Now you have a better idea of where you're headed. Goals are your friend!

You did fantastic. Gold star for you.

Tomorrow we'll open our eyes wide and take a look around us. You won't believe the view.

# Day 9: Paint Me a Picture

One of the easiest ways to get into the flow of journaling is to write about your surroundings.

If you're not sure how you're feeling - or you're not ready to write about that yet - environmental exposition is a great way to get the pen moving.

With any luck, as you continue to document what's going on around you, your brain will start doing what it does best: having thoughts.

**You:** I'm sitting beside this huge, old window with leaded glass flowers around the top, overlooking the city street.

**Brain:** Hey! You with the pen! I have very important opinions about that window! I have observations! I have *feelings*!

**You:** Okay, fine. Let's hear them.

**Brain:** Well, that window reminds me of the one upstairs in the house where I grew up and what it was like to look out each morning during winter and check for snow to see if school would be cancelled...

If you're writing about the window and your brain hasn't got with the program yet, that's fine. You'll end up with a highly detailed description of time and place. A snapshot to look back on later if you like.

**At the very least, you're writing. And that's the only requirement. Pen to paper.**

## Get Closer

I had this great photography professor in college who said:

**"Anything is interesting if you get close enough."**

He was talking about photographs but the same is true of journaling - and life. Zoom in on something and describe it in intricate detail. See if paying it that much attention changes your experience of the object, or your relationship with it.

I tried this with my kitchen floor one time, lying on my stomach and writing about the pale mosaic tiles. I never looked at that linoleum the same way again.

That's all for today. Great job!

Tomorrow we'll apply the same powers of observation to our days.

Speaking of days, have a sparkling one!

# Day 10: Putting the Day to Bed

Dear Diary,

Today we're going to try the traditional route in our journals. You know, the utilitarian "this is what happened next" style of journaling. So simply turn to a blank page and tell me everything you can about what happened yesterday. Don't skip a thing -- and use all the bad words!

## Why it's useful

Sometimes it's helpful to just write what you know. If you're not feeling terribly introspective, "Just the facts, m'am" can get the job done with little fuss. Plus it's good to have a smattering of "day in the life" type posts in your journal for posterity.

We often take our daily activities for granted. Writing about them can give you a new respect for the amount you accomplish in 24 hours.

## Days worthy of your grandeur

You may protest and say, "But my life is so BORING!" or "NOTHING happened!" If that's the case, this exercise will show you that you best get your butt in gear and start doing something interesting.

**Life is too short for boring days, my friend.**

That's all for now. If you thought today was utilitarian, wait until you see what I've got lined up for tomorrow. It just happens to be my favorite method of journaling.

# Day 11: The No-frills Braindump

Today we're going to try one of my favorite ways of journaling. It's called the No-frills Braindump and it's my default method for writing. It goes like this:

Open to a blank page. Write for 20 minutes or three pages. Don't stop.

If you can't think of anything to write, try, "I can't think of anything to write" over and over. Your brain will quickly get bored with that and come up with something juicier.

The magic of this process usually kicks in halfway through the second page. One minute you're writing about soggy breakfast cereal and the next you're documenting how trapped you feel in your dead-end job.

## Why it Works

The braindump method lulls your subconscious into a false sense of security. Real gems of insight sneak in under the radar.

Some days you won't have any mid-session epiphanies and the writing will just serve to reinforce the habit of daily journaling, proving that you can do it. And it emphasizes the importance of self care.

As long as you complete 20 minutes or 3 pages, you've had a successful session. Epiphanies are a bonus, not a requirement.

Go give it a shot. I have faith in you. Tomorrow, I'll let Anais Nin take the lead.

# Day 12: What Feels Vivid?

Today's prompt comes straight to us from Anais Nin. Nin was a French author famous for her published journals. She was a voracious writer and a true voluptuary.

She was known for turning to a blank page and answering the question:

**What feels vivid, warm or near to you at the moment?**

I love this prompt. It's a colorful antidote to the straight "today I washed the minivan" journal entry. It's not asking you about your surroundings or your activities. It's digging deep and tickling your core.

Try it out. You may be surprised what you find.

# Day 13: Living in Wishville

Wishing isn't just for kids, you know.

In fact, keeping a wish list is clinically proven to get you lots of gifts from the Universe.

So let's try it ourselves.

**Open to a blank page. List all your wishes. Write for 20 minutes or until you're done.**

Getting in touch with your simple wants, big and small, gives you the opportunity to make them happen. It also lets the Universe know what you'd like so it can lend a hand whenever possible.

**This exercise appears simple but you might be surprised how powerful it really is.**

Tomorrow is going to be a little more challenging, so enjoy a little dreaming during today's session.

# Day 14: Negative Inspiration

So far I've gone pretty easy on you. We've been just scratching the surface with our journaling. Mostly safe, non-threatening prompts. A little juice, but largely run-of-the-mill. It's good to get your feet wet and establish a ritual around journaling. Hopefully by now you're starting to get the habit down.

This is your first scary prompt.

Don't worry - I'll hold your hand for this one.

**Turn to a blank page in your journal and complete this sentence:**

- I really don't want to write about \_\_\_\_\_.

**Now continue writing about that topic for 20 minutes, or three pages.**

We keep the juicy stuff hidden away. It's human nature to take the path of least resistance. This prompt upends that safety net, allowing you to get a glimpse inside at the topics that have the potential to make a big difference in your life.

And making a big difference is why we're doing this, after all.

Congratulations on completing Week Two! Another gold star for you. Next week is going to be full of fabulous, challenging prompts - so fuel up.

# Day 15: Working/Not Working

When we are overwhelmed, we tend to regress into a petulant three-year-old: ***I like. I hate. I want!***

It's time to embrace your inner brat and purge these impulsive judgments onto the page.

## How it works

Turn to a fresh page and draw a vertical line down the middle. Label one side **Working** and the other side **Not Working**.

**Now brainstorm items for your lists, using these prompts:**

- What is working in my life right now?
- What is not working in my life right now?

Write down the first thing that comes to mind. It doesn't matter how silly, petty, insurmountable, mean, or lofty it sounds. Just pound it out.

Try to see if you can come up with 10 items under each list without stopping. Don't even pause to reread what you've written.

## No Editing!

The key to making effective use of this tool is to NOT think about solutions.

**Totally clear your mind of how you're going to address any of these issues.  
Ignore all assumptions about what is or is not possible.**

Go back to that three-year-old self. The self who wants a pony. Who doesn't WANT to go to bed early. Who hates brussel sprouts. Who wants it to stop raining so she

can play outside – NOW.

Go back to that three-year-old self.

The self who wants a pony. Who doesn't WANT to go to bed early.

Judging your items will summon your censor. As soon as you start making excuses like, "I don't have the money to do that right now," or "She doesn't mean to be so demanding," the ideas stop flowing. You lose touch with your true desires.

**Allow yourself to write some things even if they make you feel bad or guilty.  
It's okay – you're just venting, and nobody is going to see this.**

For twenty minutes, your bratty three-year-old can be mad at her best friend and not want to share her toys.

## What you get

Sometimes just admitting something is driving you nuts makes it easier to deal with. Sometimes we just need to vent.

Once you're done with this exercise, then you can re-read your list and see which items you can accomodate.

**See if there's any actionable items on your list and take one step toward making them happen.**

I hope this is working for you. See you tomorrow, where I'll help you combat the paralysis that ensues when we don't know where to start.

# Day 16: Overcoming Paralysis

In our modern age we play many roles. We have endless and ever-expanding responsibilities. It's easy to become overwhelmed.

Faced with a full plate or a staggering To Do list, we become paralyzed. Unsure where to begin, we fail to do anything.

**It's ironic, when you think about it. We have so much to do that we end up doing *nothing*.**

But that's what happens, isn't it? We turn the page on our To Do list, switch off the ringer, and disappear into Netflix and a pint of Ben and Jerry's.

The key to overcoming paralysis is to take one tiny action, right now.

## How it works

**Open your journal and answer the question:**

- What can I do NEXT?

Keep it small. Something you can finish in the next hour. You can't move across the country, but you can pack the plates in the cabinet above the sink.

Taking action will melt away that feeling of overwhelm and get you back in the saddle. It's often easier to continue once your wheels are set in motion.

Try it on that massive project looming before you right now. You don't have to stay stuck anymore.

# Day 17: More or Less

This is a great tool to leverage when you feel like your energy is not focused in the right place. When we feel like we've been wasting time on unimportant tasks while essential tasks – especially the ones that energize us – are being set by the wayside.

It's very simple. This exercise is similar to the Working/Not Working exercise, but the results are more visceral and complete. The information you glean is not a means to an end, but an end in itself.

## How it works

**Start by drawing a line down the middle of your journal page and label one column MORE and the other column LESS. Now start brainstorming.**

Write whatever comes to mind – no matter how silly, selfish, implausible, or embarrassing it seems. "More music. Less news. More sunshine. Less sugar. More vacation days. Less laundry."

Write for twenty minutes and don't stop until time is up. Dig deep.

The items at the top of the list may be the most urgent. But occasionally, if you let yourself become absorbed in the flow of brainstorming, you might pull a real zinger out at the 11th hour. You may surprise yourself – "I didn't see that coming!"

Bringing your desires into sharp focus means you're in a state of receptivity when the solution comes along.

Give it a shot and see if it works for you.

# Day 18: The Conversation You Need to Have

Perhaps you've been putting off a big talk. Maybe you've got something on your mind that's bugging you. Whether the subject matter is work, family, social life, health, or hobby, think about small conversation that could bring about big positive change.

## Get Clear About the Conversation Topic

You may know immediately what conversation is most important to have soon. It could be the one that's been gnawing at you for weeks. It's time to stop biting your tongue! If you've already identified your conversation, write a one-sentence description down in your journal.

If you're not sure yet, let's do some brainstorming.

**List 10 important players in your life. Family, friends, work relations, neighbors, payees, etc. Now complete the sentence:**

- What I'd really like to tell \_\_\_\_\_ is...

Do this for each person on the list. See if any of them hit a nerve. You may find the conversation you need to have most when you've filled three pages of ALL CAPS about your sister or your landlord.

## How it Works

Pick the one conversation from this list that you think will give you the most bang for the buck.

**Set aside 20 minutes and complete this statement:**

- What I really want to tell \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_.

Write for the full 20 minutes. Dig deep.

## Without Consequences

If you're paralyzed by thinking about what could happen if you let the cat out of the bag, try this prompt:

- If I could tell you anything without consequence, I'd say \_\_\_\_\_.

This allows you to dig deep while keeping the fear of consequences at bay. There are no consequences right now – we're just writing. You can decide later if what you need to say is worth the risky outcome.

Try this one today. Tomorrow we'll start looking at some of those bad habits holding us back.

# Day 19: One Habit You Need to Quit

We invest a lot of our precious energy in maintaining bad habits and addictions that we'd do better without.

**We want to focus on one single behavioral change that will have the most impact on your quality of life.** Attacking a problem at its root is the only way to make significant progress in any area of your life. Treating symptom after symptom is a waste of energy.

What one behavior is keeping you from reaching your full potential? Is there a single habit that's responsible for the majority of your problems? What one change could you make that would offer big wins?

## How it works

**Try completing these questions in your journal:**

- I wish I could give up \_\_\_\_\_.
- If I was honest with myself, I'd admit that I need to stop \_\_\_\_\_.
- I'm most ashamed that I keep \_\_\_\_\_.
- I would be free if it wasn't for \_\_\_\_\_.
- It's hard to admit that I can't stop \_\_\_\_\_.
- I wish I had the discipline to \_\_\_\_\_.
- I really need to start \_\_\_\_\_.

Tomorrow, we'll enjoy a little De Ja Vu.

# Day 20: What Does This Remind You Of?

Today I'm going to show you how a healthy dose of De ja vu can save your relationships. Crazy, I know.

Traumatic and painful events are imprinted on our memory clearly so we remember next time to avoid a similar situation.

Back when we were living in caves, this kept us alive. A saber-toothed tiger scares the beejesus out of you while picking berries. Next time you're picking berries, the anxiety reminds you to keep an eye out for tigers.

We learn from our mistakes. Some situations are best avoided a second time. But you need to distinguish between actual threats and harmless situations your caveman brain has hard-wired as DANGER.

Luckily, in addition to a sharp fight or flight reaction, we also have the ability to reason. Sometimes we forget to tap into that skill, relying only on our biology and emotions for cues about our environment.

**Today's prompt will help you get in touch with your logic.**

## How it works

Think about a situation in your life that's under your skin. Perhaps something that showed up on your "Not Working" list from earlier in the week. A friendship with rumpled feathers, a tense environment at work.

Now turn to a blank page of your journal and answer the following question:

- What does this remind me of?

Knowing what triggers your hardwired DANGER response is helpful for several reasons. It enables you to examine this situation objectively, comparing it to the

previous situation it reminds you of.

This insight allows you to discern whether you're really angry about your friend, or if she just triggered some buried anger response your family member installed a decade ago.

This knowledge is also useful for learning which scenarios trigger us. When going into a situation that you know has a DANGER response installed, you can prepare yourself.

**It's easier to surf the flight or fight response when you're expecting it.**

If the relationship is intimate enough, you might even warn the other person and ask for their support.

## Go gently

Today's prompt can unearth a whole lotta garbage, so tread lightly. It's good to dig deep and see what's in there, but be aware that you might drag some stuff out into the light that will require a bit of processing.

Make time for it and have a good friend on speed dial.

Tomorrow will talk about your worst nightmare. I bet you can't wait.

# Day 21: Your Worst Nightmare

We've all got scenarios in our lives that scare the beejesus out of us.

We often live in fear of those events actually happening. We don't look directly at that monster for fear it will consume us. But not looking at it keeps you from moving forward, from following your dreams, from living your life.

**You'll likely find that once you shine a light on the monster in the closet, it's not so scary after all.**

Here, let me hold the flashlight for you.

Getting okay with your worst-case-scenario opens you up to freedom and a power you cannot even imagine. Imagine walking through the world, chasing your dreams and giving your all because you have nothing to lose. Because no consequence scares you enough to hold you back.

What would be possible in *your* life?

## How it works

Choose a situation in your life or an upcoming event about which you're really scared. The more frightened, the better. Go for that "shaking in your boots" level of fear.

Open your journal and write that situation at the top of the page.

**Now answer the question:**

- What's the worst thing that can happen?

After each "worst" you write, answer the question:

- And?

Keep asking, over and over, digging deeper.

Here's an example

## Say you need to ask for a raise.

**What's the worst that can happen?** Your boss could fire you. **And?** You couldn't pay rent. **And?** You'd have to ask for help. **And?** Your family would help until you got another job. **And?** You'd feel like a loser. **And?** You'd get over it.

You won't starve to death. You'll be safe. Is it ideal? No, obviously. But in the grand scheme of things, losing a job is unfortunate but it's not going to kill you. And accepting that allows you to move forward and ask for that raise.

Drilling down into what could really happen makes the scary stuff less paralyzing.

Monsters begone!

# Day 22: CEO of Your Life, Inc.

## You are the new manager of Your Life.

Pulling back and looking at your life objectively from a "project" view can provide insight you wouldn't normally get while mired in the day to day business of living.

How are you doing as President and CEO? How about as Chief Financial Officer? Head of Human Resources? Activities Director? Relationship Manager? Happiness Consultant?

Would somebody else hire you to run *their* life?

## Time for a performance review

**Try the following prompts in your journal to assess how business is going:**

- What departments in your life need improvement?
- What resources are available to help you improve?
- What will success look like?
- How will you measure progress?
- Are there projects that you'd be wise to delegate?
- Is it time for a merger?

Try to keep a sense of humor as you hack through this exercise. It's funny to talk about your life in terms of a corporation. We need all the laughter we can get when we're dealing with tough personal development challenges.

Tomorrow I'm going to save you a little bit of money and you won't have to change a thing. It's like magic!

# Day 23: Unsent Letters

Today we're going to save a few stamps.

**Unsent letters are a powerful journaling exercise for gaining clarity, closure, and release.**

The act of committing words to the page in an organized way can illuminate your path and free-up head space, especially when the letter is intended for your eyes only.

## How it works

Choose one of these letters, turn to a blank page, and start writing your unsent letter.

### 1. Letter to the Editor

Writing a persuasive argument to the press may be a dying art, but you can revive this tool by penning an unsent Letter to the Editor in your own defense. Formulate a solid argument in support of yourself, your actions, your decisions, or your beliefs.

You may find it easier to write the letter from someone else's point of view; it's often difficult to sing our own praises, even when we're already fabulous.

### 2. Letter to the Dearly Departed

Letters to the dead are probably the most instinctual and frequently used form of unsent letter.

The desire to continue sharing your life with someone after they're gone is universal. Unsent letters are especially useful if the person died unexpectedly or if

you were unable to communicate with them at the time.

Writing it all out can provide the closure you desperately seek.

**The phrase, "I wish I could tell you..." is a great prompt to start off the letter.**

Rewrite that phrase each time you find yourself pausing, and press onward until you've said everything you need to say.

### 3. Letter to Your Future Self

We do have built-in forgetters, so if you hold a gem of knowledge that could benefit yourself in the future, by all means put it in writing. Even if you don't use it in the years to come, just enjoy speculating on what your life will look like a decade from now.

### Some Additional Ideas

Here are some other ideas for unsent letters. Feel free to try any of your own. You are limited only by your imagination.

- Love letter
- Letter of apology
- Letter to be opened on a future date
- Expression of gratitude
- Letter to an infant (to be read as an adult)

Woah. We've had a couple of heavy days! To counteract all this Serious Work we're doing, tomorrow's lesson will be superfun and may even involve wearing a cape.

See you there, superhero.

# Day 24: Creature Feature

Today's journaling prompt is one of the most fun. It's one of my favorites, and I've found it extremely useful when I need to infuse a situation with some humor.

**If I'm down in the dumps about the state of my union, I'll write a press release, tabloid feature, or even a comic book style story.**

When my houseboat was infested with poisonous mold that was making me very sick, I wrote a story called "The Adventures of Tea Tree Girl and Borax Boy," centered around my battle with cleaning and removing the mold, superhero style.

The story made me feel much better about the toxin infiltrating my stateroom ceiling. It also made me feel like I was wearing a purple cape while riding my Vespa around the city.

- Is there a situation in your life you can rewrite for a new take?

Press releases and buttoned-up news spots are a blast to write in irony. Just read *The Onion* for inspiration.

Once you've turned your boss into a villain wearing yellow tights, it's harder to take his grumpy mood seriously.

# Day 25: Alternate Lives

Do you ever find yourself daydreaming about living a totally different life?

## **Our imaginary lives show us tiny slices of our dreams.**

These alternate lives aren't going to become reality this week. But we can honor those dreams by finding small ways to incorporate them into our existing lives. And make today a little more magical.

Today I'm going to show you a journaling prompt that puts you in touch with those dreams.

## How it works

The idea for this prompt comes from *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron. I highly recommend picking up a copy of this book if you don't already have it.

## **Get out your journal and list five alternate lives you would live if time, money, age, time period, and geography were irrelevant.**

Maybe you want to be a gondolier in Venice, circa 1826. Or maybe selling stocks on the floor of the Securities Exchange is more your cup of tea. Go crazy with this one.

Take each "life" from your list and flesh it out. Describe your perfect day living that life. Just daydream. Write about where you would live, how you would spend your days.

- What do you do?
- Who do you meet?
- What type of transportation do you use?
- What does your home look like?

- What do you eat?
- Where do you focus your energy?
- How do you feel?

Once you've got details, step back and take a look. What is it about these lives that appeals to you? The freedom? The colors? The location? The people you interact with? Your contribution? The way you feel living this life?

## Let's get imaginary

Now let's brainstorm ways to incorporate small slices of these alternate lives – the parts that really excite you – into your real life today.

**You don't have to ditch your existing life. Let's just work with what you've got. Keep it small. Keep it Saturday-doable.**

You can't move to an adobe villa in New Mexico next weekend, but can you paint one room of your house terra cotta? You probably can't become a Master Polo Champion next week. But maybe you can sign up for a riding lesson at a nearby stable.

Dreams are a lot like stray cats. When we pay attention to our dreams, they come around more often. Set food out for them, and they show up regularly. Soon they start bringing friends.

As you incorporate these pieces of your imaginary lives into your real one, record the results.

Do you feel more creative? More compassionate? Are new opportunities opening up for you? Perhaps your volunteer gig morphs into something more promising. Just write about it in your journal. You may be surprised at what transpires.

You can come back to this exercise regularly and see what develops.

Isn't it great to have permission to daydream? I always got yelled at for having my head in the clouds. Now I say to people, "Stop being so *realistic*!"

Tomorrow we will continue our exploration of dreamstates. This time, it's nocturnal.

I'll save you a seat.

# Day 26: While You Were Sleeping...

Only in your dreams can a horse take you sailing with your best friend, who looks an awful lot like your fifth grade teacher.

Our night visions keep our little brains hard at work while we sleep. When we're able to tune into what's broadcasting, we can pick up on some interesting tidbits.

Today we're going to talk about keeping a dream journal.

## Dream journals have several benefits:

- Writing down your dreams makes you remember them
- You can use these images for creative undertakings
- Recurring themes might alert you to a situation in your life that needs attention
- They can be a fun break from the norm of black and white journaling
- Re-reading your dream journals is highly entertaining

I've never been a big believer in universal dream symbolism. I think you know better than some book what your dream is trying to tell you. Use your intuition while doing the following exercise.

## How it works

This one requires even you morning-haters to do your journaling first thing upon waking. I guarantee if you wait more than a few minutes, the images from your dreams will no longer make sense. If you can remember them at all.

Immediately upon waking, get out your journal. Record any details of the dream you can recall.

Dreamworlds are often weird, so many of the descriptions won't appear to make sense. Do your best to capture some of the imagery.

**Now, write about how the dream affected you.**

- Regardless of the action of the dream, how did you feel? Stuck? Liberated? Frightened? Inspired?
- What is the dream trying to tell you?

Some of the benefits of dream journaling only come about through regular use. If you enjoy this exercise, feel free to give it a shot for a few weeks and see how it goes.

If nothing else, you'll stretch your creative muscles and provide some entertaining reading for later.

Tomorrow we're going to play "choose your own adventure." It's kind of like dreaming - except you're awake.

Sweet dreams.

# Day 27: Choose Your Own Adventure

Writing about where you want to be on this day one year from now is a powerful journaling exercise.

**When you sit down to journal on this day next year, what do you want the circumstances of your life to be? Detail your ideal scenario.**

- What do I want next year to look like?
- What will my work day look like?
- My weekends?
- My relationship?
- My home?
- My health?
- My body?
- How do I want to spend next birthday?
- How do I want to feel?

**When you're done day dreaming, answer the question:**

- What do I need to do this year to make that scenario a reality?

Then write it all down in specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound goals.

Get on it. The clock is ticking and your life won't wait!

# Day 28: Image-ing

Time to give your writing muscles a break.

Today we're going to talk about incorporating images into your journaling.

We look at the world all day; this prompt helps you really see it.

Photos are a powerful way to document your days. The idea is to encapsulate your activities and feelings using images instead of words.

You don't need any fancy equipment to do this exercise. You can use anything from your cell phone camera to your shiny Canon D-SLR, whatever inspires you. I also enjoy playing with the Polaroid instant camera I got from Goodwill.

No artistic talent is required! Don't worry about the quality of the photo or the composition. Just capture your world, as you see it.

Let's give it a "shot," shall we? (Sorry - couldn't resist.)

## How it works

### **Find five images throughout the day that capture the essence of your day.**

Print them out and paste them into your journal. You can write captions for them if you like, or just let them speak for themselves. (Though location might be helpful to note for future reference.)

Experiment with trying to capture feelings through the lens. If you're feeling joyous and free, how about a shot of pure sunbeams in an open sky? Having a quiet, introspective day? Maybe a photo of your shadow is appropriate.

Let yourself play with this one. Kick your critic to the curb - this isn't a graded photography assignment. (I've seen enough of those in my time!)

If you really enjoy this exercise, keep it up. Try some creative photo techniques like Polaroid transfers and digital image manipulation.

Make it a supplement to your regular journal writing, or create a photo journal that can stand on its own.

Tomorrow we'll talk about all the fun stuff that comes in pretty little boxes. It can really spice up your journaling.

# Day 29: Using Cards and Tools

Tired of writing yet?

I think you could use a little creative diversion. Today let's jazz up the black and white, pen and paper act with some journaling tools.

There are several journaling kits out there that I use and recommend. They're good to have on the shelf for days when you don't feel like writing about the same old same old. I'll discuss two of my favorites here.

**Using tools and cards can give you a fresh perspective and stimulate the thinking juices.** Plus these picks are easy on the eyes. Relish the details. They're really works of art.

You can pick up these tools and many more at the nearest bookstore or on Amazon.

## *Wide Open*

Perhaps you'd like to branch out and try some creative new photography techniques in your journal? Enter *Wide Open: Inspiration and Techniques for Art Journaling on the Edge* by Randi Feuerhelm-Watts.

This deck of art cards is loaded with inspirational images and innovative journaling techniques. Each card offers a prompt you can answer with words, photography, mixed media, paint, or all of the above.

My favorite asks, "How long will you continue to put tinsel on that dead Christmas tree?" I could write for hours on that one.

## *Inner Outings*

This kit includes a book and a deck of large, heavyweight art cards, tucked into a smooth hard wrap-around box. Each 4" x 6" card in this deck is a gorgeous mixed-media work of art, frame-worthy right out of the box. The cards are emblazoned with a word or phrase that you can use as a journaling prompt.

It really can get you thinking in ways you never expected.

## Journaling with cards

There are many ways to use cards like these for journaling prompts. My favorite way is to flip through the cards and see which one speaks to me. Then I work with that card in my journal for awhile.

You can also embrace your intuition and select one of the cards face down to use as a guide. If you feel special resistance to a certain card, it probably means you need to do that exercise.

**Journaling tools are great for giving you a new perspective and spicing things up on the page. Try them and see if they work for you.**

# Day 30: Another Little Piece of Your Heart

This is our last day together, at least in this eBook. I'm going to miss you!

Before I get all misty eyed, let's jump into today's lesson.

For most of our time together, we've been very focused on the head part of journaling. Digging deep, analyzing, turning over rocks, examining what's unearthed. All noble and healthy.

**But it's time to give our journals some heart. A little more picture book; a little less encyclopedia.**

So how do we do this?

## How it works

Infusing your journal with heart means paying attention to what moves you and recording it fully on the page. All the details. Truly painting a picture of an event, an interaction, or just another Tuesday night at home.

**Here are some tips for making that happen. There's no right or wrong way to do this. Thankfully, our hearts are short on rules and long on love.**

Capture the positive It's easy to let the happy days slide. Afternoons of calm and content lack the urgency brought to the table when life is going down the toilet. This tiny slice of simple joy colors the rest of your world.

**Take a "snapshot" on the page.** When you detail an event in your journal, your experience of it deepens. The snapshot stays more vibrant in your memory.

Pretend you're recreating the scene for someone who wasn't there. Try capturing all the visual details in your journal. Even the tiniest observations, like the color of the table cloth or the slightly faded poster on the telephone pole.

**Create a photo album of words you can revisit whenever you want to experience it again.**

Use all five senses Try to stay present in the moment, using all five senses to soak up the details.

The way the air smells the first day the cherry blossoms burst into bloom. The tickle of the salty breeze in your winterized nose during a walk on the beach.

The angle of the sun as golden rays warm the bamboo floors. The throaty song of that one eager bird at daybreak in the magnolia tree out back.

When you capture your sensory world in your journal, the colors remain a shade deeper, the light more vivid.

That's all for now. I've enjoyed our time together and I hope you did, too!

# Thank you!

I hope you found this course helpful. As always, I'd love to hear feedback on your experience. You can email me directly: [nova@journalingsaves.com](mailto:nova@journalingsaves.com) or use the "contact" form on the website at: [www.journalingsaves.com/contact](http://www.journalingsaves.com/contact)

Thanks for spending this time with me.

I hope to see you at Journaling Saves soon!

Yours in journaling,

Nova