

PROCESS WRITING

Anger/Frustration/Resentment Processing

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PURPOSE: The purpose of this “process writing” exercise is to give voice to your raw, sometimes painful, negative emotions (e.g. anger, frustration, resentment, etc.) and even just your basic mental clutter. This process allows our thoughts and feelings to be “heard”—even if just by you and God.

We all have legitimate accumulated thoughts and feelings that are based on everything we have previously experienced in our lives. These experiences—and the resulting thoughts and feelings—create the lens or perspective through which we view each other and the world. Our mental debris is what is at the root of all inner turmoil and reactivity within us and our relationships. We certainly want to get rid of as much of it as we can—as quickly as we can—and this process writing can help.

As you write, you are able to clear your mind... (It's a great addition to your bedtime routine) and make better sense of what you are even thinking or feeling. (If you don't write things down you'll often just get stuck in mental loops.) It's like “vomiting out” the mental sludge occupying your mind. If this process writing feels like too much negativity, some clients find it helpful to also write out some things they are grateful for to balance out the negative, “I am angry...” statements.

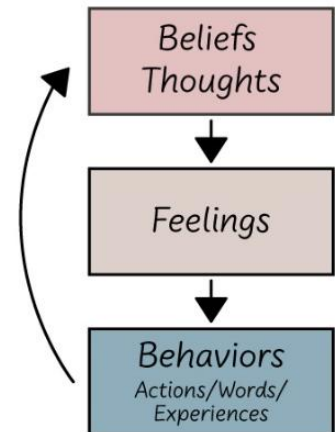
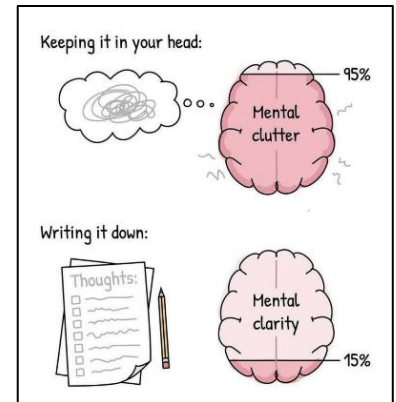
You may notice that your writings are often regarding things that are rarely or never expressed. These thoughts and feelings get stuck in our system. By giving these things “a safe space” to be seen and heard you can begin to let it all go...as if giving it all to God.

It's important to understand that there is a hierarchy—thoughts and beliefs are predominant and precursor to feelings and behaviors. (This concept is at the root of Cognitive Behavior Therapy - CBT). Your thoughts and beliefs create your feelings, which lead to your behaviors. Getting our thoughts straightened out by processing them out on paper is vital to changing our thoughts, feelings, words, and actions. This process writing is not for sharing with others but is just to allow you the opportunity to remove a layer of mental sludge from your psyche and be free of the emotional weight it induces.

Process writing is like having free “talk” therapy available 24/7 - 365 days a year. Talk therapy helps in similar ways to process writing but therapy is just not available enough to get through all of one's mental debris in a timely/affordable manner. Doing process writing can help you proactively get at the “old” stuff and can be used any time you are feeling something negative and have no one to talk to or nowhere else to go with your emotions. Most people will definitely need to do some of this process writing—at least “Level 1” writing (see below)—for as long as it takes to calm the mind down on any given/heated topic **before** they can have an effective conversation with their spouse. You'll know you've cleaned out your mental sludge on any particular subject when you no longer have negative emotions around it.

One of my therapeutic guidelines for couples is, “Don't talk if you're NOT at neutral!” Doing some process writing before having a potentially heated conversation allows a couple to take the raw edge off of their emotions, so that they don't take it out on their spouse. And if you ARE speaking while NOT at neutral emotionally, you ARE doing some damage to the relationship! Like one client said, “I've come to learn that if I don't write it down on paper, I'll say it to my spouse and end up causing damage to our relationship.”

As you process and let go of your negative emotions and choose to *accept what is*, over time you will feel lighter, clearer, less reactive, more positive, and have a greater sense of self, personal wholeness, and freedom. This alone will begin to change the dynamics in your relationships because when you change one part of a living system you can't help but change the dynamics of the whole system.



TYPES: Three of the ways to use process writing include:

1. **Anger/Stress/Frustration Lists** (like the sample given here)
2. **Free Writing** (to just let out any thoughts as they come to mind with no filtering, judgement, or punctuation)
3. **Written Conversations with God** (to process in conversational form what you are feeling and what you think “He” may say to you in return)

LEVELS: There are three levels of process writing. Focus on level 1 to begin. You will need to do multiple rounds of level 1 process writing until you can genuinely move on to level 2 or 3.

- **Level 1 – “I hate...”** (processing raw negative emotions)
- **Level 2 – “I accept and make peace with...”** (accepting the reality of the experience and the resulting emotions and making peace with it even though you can’t change anything that’s already happened)
- **Level 3 – “I forgive...”** (letting go of negative attachment to the experiences and emotions so that YOU can be free)

DIRECTIONS: To begin the therapeutic process of releasing stuffed/stuck, negative emotions create a list of at least 50 “I...” statements using the following sentence stems. Spell out whatever thoughts and emotions are at the top of your mind. Be sure to write out the full “I...” statement as that is where the power is for the mind. You can also do this in smaller batches like 5 or 10 items per day.

1. *I am angry that...*
2. *I hate that...*
3. *I am frustrated that...*
4. *I resent...*

You can either do just the first column of negative processing or if you are able to do the next step of accepting your current reality then complete the second column as well. Move on to the 3rd column when you can. It may take quite some time to work through this process on all of your accumulated mental debris.

You can use this as a worksheet and write directly on the table below, but it may be even better to just use this as a template and write everything in a notebook instead. It's especially therapeutic to tear out the page of your writing and put it through a shredder (if you have one) or destroy it to symbolically let all those thoughts and feelings go. The point of your process writing is to "identify," "process," and "let go" of your stuff—not beat someone over the head with it. It's never helpful to share every single negative thing you think and feel, as they'll likely just get defensive, take it personally, or get triggered by their own stuff.

[illegible]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (to better understand how and why process writing works and makes such a difference)

- [*Expressive Writing: Words that Heal*](#) by James Pennebaker and John Evans
 - [*Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*](#) by Louise Desalvo
 - [*The Power of Your Other Hand: Unlock Creativity and Inner Wisdom Through the Right Side of Your Brain*](#) by Lucia Capacchione
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BENEFITS OF PROCESS WRITING

(Taken from “Live From Love” Podcast -- [Episode #111 - Mindful Sex](#))

For a long time, I thought I could just do a “thought download” in my head. That I didn’t need to actually write anything down. But I was listening to something with Tony Robbins, and he said that when we don’t write it down, we really can’t get a handle on it. We go into thought loops, which really isn’t helpful. Here are 8 powerful benefits of writing things down:

1. **Writing things down helps you record everything that has your attention.** We can’t remember everything we have to do these days. We have information overload. By writing down all the things we need to remember, we are actually able to think much more clearly. Our brains were designed for having ideas, not storing all of them. So, write down things that go on your calendar, on your to-do list, your grocery list, your work and kids’ assignments. That will definitely help calm the chatter in your brain.
2. **Writing things down helps clear your mind.** Once you write things down, you’ll notice a sense of relief. Even if you haven’t done a single thing on your list, your brain will go from chaos and calm because it has less to think about.
3. **Writing things down helps clarify your goals, priorities, and intentions.** When you keep everything up in your head, your brain gets confused on what you need to do first. So, of course you feel overwhelmed with everything. But when you write things down you can literally see and evaluate each thing and make sense of them. You can more easily decide what needs to happen first, what needs more exploration, and what doesn’t need to happen at all.
4. **Writing things down helps keep you motivated.** Do you ever notice how sometimes you feel really motivated and sometimes you wonder where that motivation went? Motivation is a feeling, that comes from our thoughts. When you want to stay motivated, you need to think thoughts that help you feel that way. Writing down what you want to accomplish, and why, can help you remember why you are doing what you are doing and help keep you motivated.
5. **Writing things down encourages daily progress.** When I am actively working on changing thoughts and believing new things, I love to save my “thought downloads” so that I can look back and see how far I’ve come. Sometimes we forget what things were like “back then” and we don’t see the progress we’ve actually made. By writing down our thoughts and feelings along the way, we can see the progress we’ve made.
6. **Writing things down helps you recognize and process your thoughts and emotions.** Ok, this is a big one and really what it’s all about. Oftentimes we don’t even see the sneaky little thoughts that our brain is offering to us that really don’t serve us and get in our way of making the progress we want in our lives. When you sit down and write, you are able to see those thoughts for what they are...a thought that is optional, and gain power over it. You can’t change what you aren’t aware of.
7. **Writing things down enables a higher level of thinking, and therefore, more focused action.** When your brain isn’t busy remembering everything, your brain can then process anything! It’s when your brain isn’t overwhelmed that you become free to analyze and ask it important questions. You’ll be able to process your thoughts and feelings on a much deeper level than simply thinking about it when you have things down on paper.
8. **Writing things down develops your sense of gratitude.** A gratitude practice is one of my favorite ways to help clients see the goodness in their life when things seem otherwise bleak. I love having them write down things they are grateful for in themselves, their spouse, and their life. It helps them turn their thoughts from the negative to the positive. It helps them connect with the things that are truly important in their life.