

# Writing Emotions

The benefits of writing for mental health are well researched but don't get talked about often enough. It's one of the most accessible ways to boost our mood available, all you need is a pen and paper (or note-taking app on your phone). Not only does it help us feel better, it helps us get better at making sense of the things we feel.

## Understanding Emotions

Naming our emotions and recognizing the impact they have on us both mentally and physically is helpful in so many different ways. For one, it takes the fear out of negative emotions when we realize that we are feeling them for a reason. It also helps us to make good choices based on what we know instinctively, our gut feelings. When we are aware of how our emotions make us act, we have the ability to make changes to the way we react in situations. Finally, it allows us to end stress cycles by helping us to become detached from stronger emotions, which lets them move through and out of us faster.

## Pen and Paper versus Phone and Computer

Many of the benefits of writing are consistent across all forms of writing, from digital to physical. The goal is to choose the method of writing that is most comfortable for you, which makes it easier for you to make it a habit. A couple things to consider are privacy and memory. If privacy is a big concern, a free journal app like Penzu allows you to encrypt your entries with a password. If you prefer pen and paper, you do have the option to rip up the paper after you're done or to purchase a journal with a lock. If you're concerned about memory (if you're writing about your emotions to make sense of them and make changes) studies show that pen and paper writing may serve you better. Writing with a pen also minimizes the distraction of notifications popping up in front of what you're trying to write on a screen.

## Ways to Write

Writing doesn't have to be a big undertaking! Just five minutes a day with your journal (physical or virtual) is all you need to start feeling the benefits. Here are some different writing ideas to get you started:

- Freewriting: Sit down and write whatever comes to your mind. True freewriting doesn't use punctuation or sentences, it's truly just writing constantly for five minutes. Whether you're writing down your feelings or a thought you had earlier in the day, anything counts. The point isn't for it to make sense, the point is just to write.
- Diary: Sometimes it can feel silly to write about our feelings, but it shouldn't. Diaries are a tried and true way to record your thoughts and emotions from the day. You can buy physical journals with locks or use password protected journaling apps. Or you can fill the diary and then throw it out once it's full if you're worried about reading it in the future. This isn't for anyone to read, it's just for you, so let go of judgement and write honestly.
- Letter: If you're having a problem with someone in your life, write them a letter. This isn't a letter to send, it's just a way to affirm what you're feeling about them and have your say in a safe and non-confrontational manner. After you've written it, tear it up and throw it out. It can help to visualize letting go of the problem as you physically get rid of the letter. Writing letters to ourselves can also be a very powerful mental health tool. Write a letter to yourself as if you were advising a friend about the problem you're grappling with. Write a letter to your younger self, saying the things you needed to hear at that time. You can keep these letters as reminders or get rid of them, it's up to you.