

Write More Light Live! Day 7 (May 5, 2020)**Notes****Anchor & Sail – What Writing Can Do for Us**

Writing is a great thing for people to be doing right now for several reasons—it's something most of us already know how to do, and it's accessible and affordable (just need something to write with and something to write on). From there...

1. Expressive or creative writing, journaling, etc. can help reduce stress, depression, anxiety, insomnia —as well as help relieve symptoms of some physical ailments, and...

"Writing about an emotionally charged subject or an unresolved trauma helps you put the event into perspective and give some structure and organization to those anxious feelings, which ultimately helps you get through it," notes **James Pennebaker, a professor of psychology at The University of Texas–Austin and co-author of the new book "Opening Up by Writing it Down: How Expressive Writing Improves Health and Eases Emotional Pain."**

-Quote from: <https://health.usnews.com/wellness/articles/2016-08-31/the-health-benefits-of-expressive-writing>

2. A simple writing practice (journaling—even freewriting for a few minutes every day) can help with focus & organization, which many people are struggling with during the pandemic, by giving both a ritual (same pen, same journal, write at the same time) and an activity.

It also forces us to slow down, both our bodies & minds, to capture more of our thoughts, and in so doing writing often has a calming effect, and improves attentiveness.

See this prompt for a simple example:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/everettharper/2020/04/14/how-to-use-rituals-to-focus-attention-during-covid-19/#2928dd8439c8>

(The prompt below is from this article, c/o Everett Harper, *Forbes* 4/14/20:

1. *Write the 1st sentence and the last sentence of the story that will be written about you during COVID. Act to fill it in in the next 60 days.*
2. *Create a Gratitude Practice: Write 3 things you are grateful or thankful for. Repeat daily. In 30 days, review your writings and notice what story it tells.*

3. Writing is a way of coping with grief, and anticipatory grief (anxiety), of giving it context & structure, which helps us to see it more fully balance it with other thoughts that might not be as readily accessible or pre-occupying--and thus better manage it. Writing also keeps us in the present moment, even if we're writing about the past, so it helps to center us in the now, as opposed to getting lost in the past.

See quote from David Kessler from article in *Harvard Business Review*:

https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief?utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=hbr&utm_medium=social&fbclid=IwAR0xkLbPZVDg73OVYVdIGBnrgNRwmb5hWKHnKHLpfommG_UlyNq8DCShss

“Yes, we’re also feeling anticipatory grief. Anticipatory grief is that feeling we get about what the future holds when we’re uncertain. Usually it centers on death. We feel it when someone gets a dire diagnosis or when we have the normal thought that we’ll lose a parent someday. Anticipatory grief is also more broadly imagined futures. There is a storm coming. There’s something bad out there. With a virus, this kind of grief is so confusing for people. Our primitive mind knows something bad is happening, but you can’t see it. This breaks our sense of safety. We’re feeling that loss of safety. I don’t think we’ve collectively lost our sense of general safety like this. Individually or as smaller groups, people have felt this. But all together, this is new. We are grieving on a micro and a macro level.”

4. It’s an opportunity to document history (see prompt from #2) – too often, people do not think of/see themselves as living in/through history, which of course we always are. With a situation like this, which impacts every aspect of daily life for people all over the world (see quote in #3), living in history is much more apparent, if a bit scary perhaps.

Not that one needs to write about the pandemic to get some positive benefits from a writing practice, **but it does afford us a chance to document our experiences of this time (micro) as well as the larger context of what’s happening in our states, our countries, to various groups of people, etc. (macro) as it is happening.**

These kinds of documents/diaries/memoirs are something people come to MWC frequently to talk about—often not for publication, but to produce a text to share with friends, family members, etc.—to have a record of what happened and how we lived through it.

5. It creates a space for us to create: a journal, a legal pad, a sketchbook, a blank Word document—all of these are spaces for you to fill with whatever you like. No one needs to see what you’re writing, unless you want them to see. So it’s a private space where we do not have to answer to the demands that fill the rest of our lives. Even if we are in a small physical space, the world opens up with our language & our imagination.

It's also important to exercise our creativity, to allow our imagination to stretch & see outside of our own spaces—physical & mental. Thinking about, through, and around the present moment, thinking about what other people's lives are like relative to our own & what we can learn from others, even at a distance, can offer perspective & insight, help keep our thinking nimble & sharp, and help us to express ourselves more fully.

Related Readings:

Ada Limón, "Instructions on Not Giving Up" (with audio):

<https://poets.org/poem/instructions-not-giving>

Anne Boyer (winner of the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction), "What Cancer Takes Away" (with audio):

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/04/15/what-cancer-takes-away>