

Putting Feelings Into Words

REFLECTIVE WRITING SERIES · 1 OF 5 · EXPRESSIVE WRITING

A guided space to write about something that has been difficult

Writing about emotional experiences has been studied for decades. Research suggests it may help some people, though effects vary by person, topic and approach. These prompts move gently from describing towards understanding.

BEFORE

Set up gently

Set aside 15 to 20 private minutes. Choose something you feel reasonably able to write about today. You do not need to choose your most difficult experience.

WHILE WRITING

Write in your own way

Write about what happened and what you noticed emotionally, physically or in your thoughts. Spelling and grammar don't matter.

AFTER

Close the page

Notice how you feel. A brief dip is common and usually passes. Then do something grounding before moving on.

Before I begin, my distress feels

0 = calm · 10 = the most distressed I can imagine

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1

What happened, and what has it been like for me?

Describe the experience in your own words. Write only as much as feels manageable. You can pause, skip a question, or come back to the page later.

2

What feelings sit underneath it, and where do I notice them in my body?

Name as many as fit. Mixed or contradictory feelings are welcome here.

3

Looking at it now, what am I beginning to understand, about the situation or about myself?

You don't need a neat answer. Even "I'm not sure yet, but..." is a start.

After writing, my distress feels

rate again; compare gently, without judging

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

One kind or grounding thing I'll do next

What the research suggests

Expressive writing has research support, but average effects are small and vary by person, topic and approach. It isn't helpful for everyone, and open-ended writing may not suit people who tend to ruminate, so these prompts are guided and time-limited.

Go at your own pace

Writing about difficult experiences can bring up emotions. Pause whenever you need to, or come back to the exercise when it feels manageable.

When you finish

Take a moment to notice how you feel. A little grounding, movement, or time away from the page can help you transition back into your day.

SOURCES

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