

Write Your Way to Happiness and Healing

In the spring of 2020, I spent a lot of time walking, writing, and crying. In the early part of the year both my parents had died within a few weeks of each other. I experienced a tsunami of grief, and as a survivor of childhood abuse my grieving process was complicated and messy. Later in this chapter I will describe how walking and writing meditation helped me to deal with and emerge from the trauma. I want to share the methods I used to help in my recovery from trauma, because I know from my own experience that when we repress traumatic memories it creates a block to our creative expression, conversely when we work through the trauma our creativity is freed to grow and blossom.

However, you do not need to have suffered from trauma to benefit from the type of writing meditation that I will share with you in this chapter. Journaling, a form of writing therapy, has enjoyed a huge resurgence of popularity recently. This is not surprising because therapeutic writing is a great way to boost your creativity and enhance your wellbeing, regardless of whether you are a painter, a musician, a sculptor, or a scientist. And if you are suffering from some sort of creative block expressive forms of writing can shift the block and help you to generate new ideas.

Studies show that therapeutic writing reduces stress, boosts your mood, reduces symptoms of depression, and helps to manage anxiety. Studies suggest that writing therapy can strengthen the immune system, lower blood pressure, improve sleep, and generally promote good health. It also helps your creativity to expand and flourish, and the reason for this is “Journaling requires the application of the analytical, rational left side of the brain; while your left hemisphere is occupied, your right hemisphere (the creative, touchy-feely side) is given the freedom to wander and play.”¹

¹ Ackerman, Courtney, *83 Benefits of Journaling for Depression, Anxiety, and Stress*, 2021, <https://positivepsychology.com/benefits-of-journaling/>

When I'm working on a book, if I get stuck with a chapter, I find the best way to shift the block and to generate new ideas is to use a combination of walking meditation and writing meditation. Likewise, if I am facing a challenge in life and I am unsure which direction to take, I find that walking and writing meditations help me to generate creative solutions, boost my problem-solving skills, and help me to move forward with my life.

You can use all the writing meditations in this chapter on their own, however, I find they are most effective if you precede them with a walking meditation (go back to the previous Walking Meditation chapter for all the amazing benefits of walking on creativity). My own recipe for getting creative juices flowing is ten minutes of walking meditation followed by fifteen minutes of writing meditation.

Next, I will describe two forms of writing meditation, in the first, *Free Flow Writing Meditation*, you do not have a specific focus, in the second, *Writing Meditation with Focus*, you do. Both of these meditations can be done as standalone practices, or they can follow a sitting or walking meditation, or be done before or after your yoga practice. Both writing meditations are effective ways to get your ideas flowing and allow you to gain access to the wisdom of your subconscious mind. If your creativity is blocked, the meditations will fire up your imagination. If you have come to an impasse in your life, they will help you to reorient and get you moving forward again. You will also find chakra-inspired writing meditation suggestions in each of the chakra chapters of the book.

Your meditative writing will be more fruitful if you can cultivate the following qualities and skills, and bring these attitudes to the meditation process:

- Curiosity
- Patience
- Self-acceptance
- Self-compassion

- A sense of humour
- Listening skills
- An open mind

Personally, I like the physicality of writing with pen and paper. However, it's fine to work digitally too. Either way, have your writing materials to hand.

Exercise: Free Flow Writing Meditation

This form of writing meditation is sometimes known as automatic writing or flow of consciousness writing. It has a cathartic effect, clears the mind, and opens the way for new ideas to surface.

The object of this meditation is not to pen a polished piece of writing, but rather simply to observe and record thoughts and feelings as they arise. The writing does not have to be smart, clever, witty, or even interesting. All you are required to do is to listen, observe, and be present to whatever arises in your mind during the allocated meditation period, and your job is to simply get this down on paper.

Be reassured that whatever you write during the meditation is for your eyes only. No need to pay attention to handwriting, neatness, spelling, grammar, presentation, and so on. As long as your writing is legible and comprehensible to you, anything goes.

Find yourself a comfortable position. Before you start writing, bring your awareness to your body, and notice any bodily sensations that are arising. Be aware of where your body is in contact with the floor or the chair. Now, bring your awareness to the natural flow of your breath. During the meditation maintain a background awareness of your body and your breath.

Then set your timer for 10 to 20 minutes... and... start writing. Keep your pen in contact with the paper at all times and keep writing until your timer goes.

Write down whatever comes into your head. Your aim is to capture the stream of thoughts and feelings as they flow through your mind. Let go of your inner editor! It doesn't matter how off the wall your thoughts are—just get them down! Later, after the meditation has finished, you can read the writing and see if there are any nuggets of gold amongst the stones and grit. But for now, just keep that pen moving!

Be aware of the physical act of writing and how it feels to be someone sitting here writing. Relax any parts of your body that do not need to be engaged with the act of writing. If you find that you are tensing up, slow your writing down, consciously relax, and reconnect with the flow of your breath. At the same time, keep writing! A relaxed attitude will help you to access your subconscious mind, and it is here that we uncover our gold.

However, it's no problem if you find it impossible to relax—just keep on writing anyway. Part of your meditation can be to write, and at the same time maintain a gentle awareness of how it feels to be tense, noticing sensations as they arise in your body. If you can't let it go, then just let it be.

Once your timer goes, put your pen down, notice how your body feels, how you are feeling in yourself, and the natural flow of your breath. Be aware of where your body is in contact with the floor or your chair. And when you are ready, carry on with your day.

Exercise: Writing Meditation with Focus

Generally, I do ten minutes of Walking Meditation with Focus before I do the Writing Meditation with Focus. I find the walking really frees up my mind and gets my creative juices flowing. However, it's fine to do this writing meditation as a standalone practice too.

Whereas in the previous meditation you allowed the mind to roam freely, in this meditation you choose a subject to focus on and keep bringing the mind back to that focus when it inevitably wanders off. So, for example, if I was designing a yoga practice for the

root chakra, I might choose to do a writing meditation focussing on the theme of earth, which is the root chakra's element. In the meditation I would let my mind wander wherever it wanted as long as it was roughly related to the theme of earth. If my mind wandered off onto planning what I would have for lunch, or noticing that the floor needed sweeping, then I would gently bring it back to the topic of earth. This is a meditative technique called 'notice and return', you notice your mind has wandered and you gently return it to the chosen point of focus.

The Writing Meditation with Focus is exceptionally good training for developing the concentration and focus that you need to complete any creative project. Also, I'm sure you'll be bedazzled at the amazing power of the subconscious mind to come up with unexpected and original associations, related to the theme you are focussing on. I find when doing this meditation that I frequently have 'Aha!' lightbulb moments, when a surprising, brilliant, idea pops into my mind, as if plucked from thin air!

As with the previous meditation, be reassured that whatever you write down during this meditation is for your eyes only. No need to pay attention to handwriting, neatness, spelling, grammar, presentation, and so on. As long as your writing is legible and comprehensible to you, anything goes.

Find yourself a comfortable position. Before you start writing, bring your awareness to your body, and notice any bodily sensations that are arising. Be aware of where your body is in contact with the floor or the chair. Now, bring your awareness to the natural flow of your breath. The trick with this meditation, is to not to try too hard. It works best to divide your attention, focussing on the chosen focus (but not too intensely!), and keeping a background awareness of your body and breath as you write. When your mind wanders off, practise compassion, let go of self-criticism, and gently return your attention to the chosen focus. Notice and return.

Set your timer for 10 to 20 minutes... and... start writing. Keep your pen in contact with the paper and keep writing until your timer goes.

Write down whatever comes into your head. Your aim is to capture the stream of thoughts and feelings as they flow through your mind. Let go of your inner editor! Later, after the meditation has finished, you can read the writing and salvage those bits that are worth keeping, your gold, and discard the dross. However, for now just keep that pen moving and keep getting those thoughts down on paper. If your mind wanders too far off from your chosen focus, notice that, and gently bring it back to the topic in hand.

As in the previous meditation, be aware of the physical act of writing and how it feels to be someone sitting here writing. Relax any parts of your body that do not need to be engaged with the act of writing. If you find that you are tensing up, slow your writing down, consciously relax, and reconnect with the flow of your breath. At the same time, keep writing! A relaxed attitude will help you to access your subconscious mind, and it is here that we uncover our gold.

However, it's no problem if you find it impossible to relax—just keep on writing anyway. Part of your meditation can be to write, and at the same time maintain a gentle awareness of how it feels to be tense, noticing sensations as they arise in your body. If you can't let it go, then just let it be.

Once your timer goes, put your pen down, notice how your body feels, how you are feeling in yourself, and the natural flow of your breath. Be aware of where your body is in contact with the floor or your chair. And when you are ready, carry on with your day. If you wish to you can read the writing through immediately after the meditation. You might want to underline any sentences that strike you as interesting and worth pursuing. Or you might prefer to read the writing through later and sift through it to see if you can uncover any hidden gems.

Protecting Your Privacy

A young friend confided in me that because she lives in shared accommodation, she doesn't feel secure to put her thoughts down on paper in case one of her flatmates might read what she's written. Instead, she prefers to write digitally and keep her writing in a file with a secure password. It is understandable to feel concerned about privacy. You'll feel more liberated to express your true thoughts and feelings if you are certain that you've established a safe, private place to keep them.

When we practise writing meditation, we are writing for ourselves. Writing meditation is not about being nice, it is about being authentic. We give ourselves space to explore through our writing whatever crazy ideas our minds come up with, as some of these bizarre ideas can turn out to be pure genius. This can feel dangerous if you are uncertain whether you can protect your privacy. In order to feel safe to open your heart onto paper, you will need to consider how you are going to protect your writing from unwelcome attention. I am certain that as a creative person, you'll find ways to put boundaries up to protect your writing, until you are ready to share it with others.

This morning, in preparation for writing this chapter, I did a period of writing meditation. I wrote twelve pages, and afterwards I tore up and composted eleven of those pages. I only felt the need to save one of the pages as that contained lots of useful ideas for this chapter. All the pages were of value, as they helped me to clear my head of all the detritus that gets in the way of clear writing. However, I am not precious about my writing meditation writing, I am genuinely more interested in the process than I am in the outcome, so I don't mind letting go of most of the writing. I find that following a period of meditative writing, afterwards when I sit at the computer to write, my writing is fresher, flows more easily, and is more inspired.

However, it can be interesting to keep a copy of your writing, especially when you are first starting out. It's informative every so often to look back over what you've written, noticing what's changed and how you have grown and developed. For privacy you could keep your writing under lock and key or store it digitally as my friend does. Sometimes if some of the writing I've done during writing meditation really shines, then I scan a copy of it and store it in a computer file. I write on loose file paper, rather than in a notebook, so it makes it easy to tear a page out to scan or to compost. The other advantage of storing it in this way is that it can be easily found without searching through mountains of notebooks.

The above excerpt is from *Chakras for Creativity* by Jilly Shipway