**10 Surprising Benefits You’ll Get From Keeping a Journal**

By: Thai Nguyen

Source: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/thai-nguyen/benefits-of-journaling-_b_6648884.html>  
02/13/2015 08:21 am ET **Updated** Apr 15, 2015

When it comes to keeping a journal, stereotypes of Sweet Valley High and Napoleon Dynamite quickly come to mind; “Dear diary” is reserved for the high-school sweetheart or awkward recluse. Others see writing merely as a tool, a pragmatic means to an end, certainly without value in and of itself.

But science continues to dissolve skepticism. For those sitting on the fence, these 10 benefits of journaling will convince you to start writing.

**1. Stretching Your IQ**  
A hot topic, but strong [cases](http://www.livescience.com/36143-iq-change-time.html" \t "_blank) support the ability to change your IQ. A [report](http://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/WPLC/article/viewFile/5160/2132" \t "_blank) by the University of Victoria noted that “Writing as part of language learning has a positive correlation with intelligence.”

Journaling is an exploration of language, you’ll have the natural urge to search for new words and increase your vocabulary. The report goes on to say, “One of the best single measures of overall intelligence as measured by intelligence tests is vocabulary.”

**2. Evoking Mindfulness**  
It’s the buzz word for good reason. There’s a strong [connection](http://berkeleysciencereview.com/can-mindfulness-make-you-happier/" \t "_blank) between happiness and mindfulness. Journaling [brings](http://www.medicine.virginia.edu/clinical/departments/medicine/divisions/general-med/wellness/the-mindfulness-center/programs/senses" \t "_blank) you into that state of mindfulness; past frustrations and future anxieties lose their edge in the present moment.  It calls a wandering mind to attention, from passivity to actively engaging with your thoughts.

**3. Achieving Goals**  
Journaling often includes your dreams and ambitions, yet the idea that scribbled words can help achieve goals is understandably fanciful. But consider building a house without a blueprint. That makes more sense.

Writing goals signals to your [brain](https://www.hw21summit.com/media/zb/hw21/files/H2948_HW_Summit_White_Paper_eVersion.pdf" \t "_blank) “this is important.” Your reticular activating system ([RAS](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3055423/" \t "_blank)) then flags relevant opportunities and tools to achieve that goal. More [detailed](http://www.dominican.edu/academics/ahss/undergraduate-programs-1/psych/faculty/fulltime/gailmatthews/researchsummary2.pdf" \t "_blank)goals provide a psychological blueprint, and increases the likelihood of achieving them.

**4. Emotional Intelligence**  
Emotional Intelligence is the ability to perceive and manage your emotions, and that of others. Journaling is an outlet for processing emotions and increases self-awareness. This internal familiarity becomes a bridge of empathy, you’ll better intuit and understand what others are experiencing.

Being able to get on the same page with someone is a mark of emotional intelligence, and allows for a much deeper connection.

**5. Boosting Memory and Comprehension**  
There’s a unique relationship between the hand and brain, sparked by the [composition](http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704631504575531932754922518" \t "_blank) of thoughts and ideas. Words are representations of ideas; the formation of letters and causes the mind to compose or re-compose ideas while journaling. This strengthens previously covered information and forces you to engage in cognitive recall.

**6. Strengthen Your Self-Discipline**  
Setting time aside to write, whether morning or evening, is an act of discipline. And discipline begets discipline. Like a [muscle](https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/willpower-self-control.pdf" \t "_blank), the more you exercise it, the stronger it becomes. And habits formed in one area of life have a tendency to spread; as keeping your office clean leads to keeping the bedroom tidy, your daily practice of writing will domino onto other healthy habits.

**7. Improve Communication Skills**  
“Writing has critical connections to speaking” according to a [Stanford](http://rer.sagepub.com/content/66/1/53.short" \t "_blank) report. Journaling is a form of written communication, albeit to oneself. Nonetheless, the subvocalization of tracing your written thoughts naturally translates in actual vocalization.

Of course, anyone journaling must have a deliberate aim to tidy up their writing in order to see benefits in their verbal communication. But making that decision during writing will benefit your speaking.

**8. Healing**  
Expressive writing is a route to healing — emotionally, physically, and psychologically. [Dr. James](https://www.utexas.edu/features/2005/writing/" \t "_blank) Pennebaker, author of  Writing to Heal has seen improved immune function in participants of writing exercises. Stress often comes from emotional blockages, and overthinking hypotheticals. He explains, “When we translate an experience into language we essentially make the experience graspable.” And in doing so, you free yourself from mentally being tangled in traumas.

[Studies](https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/prefrontal-nudity/201211/the-grateful-brain" \t "_blank) have also shown that the emotional release from journaling lowers anxiety, stress, and induces better sleep.

**9. Spark Your Creativity**  
[Julia Cameron’s](http://juliacameronlive.com/basic-tools/morning-pages/" \t "_blank) “Morning Pages” has become the panacea for unlocking creativity amongst anyone and everyone. Our struggle isn’t whether we’re creative, it’s how to let it flow.

Her powerful tool is simply to write without thinking — “stream of consciousness” writing. Beyond overcoming writer’s block, stream of consciousness writing brings out thoughts and ideas you never knew you had in you, and loosens up your expressive muscles. She recommends three pages, done first thing in the morning. Including even one page as part of your journaling will get your creative juices flowing.

**10. Self-Confidence**  
Journaling about a positive experience allows your [brain](http://www.ted.com/talks/shawn_achor_the_happy_secret_to_better_work/transcript?language=en" \t "_blank) to relive it. And reaffirms your abilities when the ugly head of self-doubt appears. The release of endorphins and dopamine will boost your self-esteem and mood. These reflections can become a catalog of personal achievements that you continue to go back to.

As you work to incorporate journaling into your life, remember the elephant is best eaten one bite at a time. Patience and consistency are crucial in forming new habits. Begin writing perhaps three days a week, first thing in the morning or before sleeping.

Thai writes from the intersection of psychology, philosophy, and spirituality. Reflected in his work is the message that life is not about what you get, but who you become. Follow his work at *[The Utopian Life.](http://theutopianlife.com/" \t "_hplink)*