LA COUNTY LIBRARY

DIY Library Program

ADULT 101: KEEPING A JOURNAL

PRESERVE MEMORIES, IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH

Recommended for Ages 12 - 18

Keeping a journal is the long-standing practice of recording your life experiences. If you want to remember something, it's a good idea to take the time to write it down. Years from now, you might want to remember what your thoughts, feelings, and day-to-day experiences were.

The value of journaling extends beyond preserving memories. Keeping a journal also brings with it physical and mental health benefits. Various studies have shown journaling's ability to decrease stress, improve sleep, strengthen immunity, accelerate physical healing, reduce anxiety, improve memory, stimulate creativity, and clarify thinking. That's a lot of benefits packed into one activity.

So, where do you start? There are no rules. Your journal is whatever you want it to be. A journal is for you and no one else. You don't need to worry about grammar, punctuation, or spelling. Write honestly and authentically, as if no one else will ever read it. A journal can be hand-written, typed, or recorded. It can be kept in a notebook, on your phone, or on your computer.

There are dozens of different kinds of journals, and yours can be one (or even all) of those, or it can be something entirely different and unique. Here are just a few types of journals:

- **Subject journals** are for specific areas, like cooking, reading, gardening, crafting, dreams, habits, health, and more. For example, a reader might want to record all the books s/he wants to read, mark the ones they've read, and write down some notes. A baker might want to remember recipes made and use notes to remember tips and develop new recipes.
- A **scrapbook** is method of preserving family and personal history that incorporates photos and mementos in addition to text.
- In a **gratitude journal**, you would record things you're grateful for every day. The goal is to help you see the good things even when life is tough. This type of journal has been shown to help people improve their moods and outlook on life. A variation on this is psychologist and professor Martin Seligman's "What-Went-Well" exercise. He invites his patients to take ten minutes at the end of each day to write down three things that went well and why they

went well.[1] When he studied people who practiced this exercise, he found they had less depression and more life satisfaction six months after starting.

- An **art journal** is a visual journal that incorporates drawing and illustration into the more traditional aspects of journaling.
- **Bullet journaling** is part organizational system, part day planner, and part progress report. Diagnosed with ADD at a young age, designer Ryder Carroll created the Bullet Journal method to help him organize and focus his racing thoughts. A bullet journal involves making lots of lists of tasks, events, and notes, and organizing them effectively, while emphasizing intentional living. You can learn more about this in Ryder Carroll's book and on his website.[2]
- **Morning Pages** are three longhand stream-of-consciousness pages, written each morning. You can write about anything and everything that comes to mind. Creativity guru Julia Cameron created this exercise as a way to expel the things clogging your mind in order to make space for clarity and creativity. Morning Pages can be used as part of your journaling practice, or they can used purely to clear your mind for the day.[3]

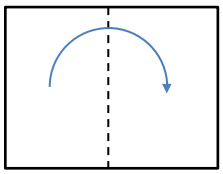
Journals are not limited to the types listed above. If none of these resonate with you, try journaling in your own way.

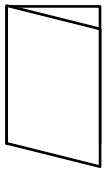
Activity: Make a Small Journal

Materials:

- 8 sheets of blank paper (The paper can be any size. We are using 5.5"x 4.25")
- 1 sheet of cardstock, colored/patterned paper, or other cover paper, same size as above
- 1 length of string, ribbon, yarn, thread, or embroidery floss that is at least three times the width of your paper (We are using a 15" length of ribbon)
- 1 hole punch

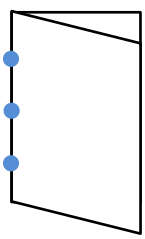
1. Fold the pages.
   Fold each sheet of paper and the cover in half short end to short end, to form a booklet shape.

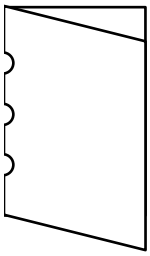




[1] Seligman, Martin E. P. *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being.* Atria Simon and Schuster, 2011.
[2] Carrol, Ryder. *Bullet Journal*. https://bulletjournal.com/ Accessed 17 April 2020.
[3] Cameron, Julia. "Morning Pages," *The Artist's Way*. https://juliacameronlive.com/basic-tools/morning-pages/ Accessed 17 April 2020.

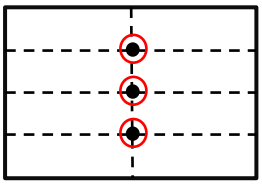
2. Punch holes for binding.
   Using the hole punch, punch three evenly spaced half-moon shaped holes in 1-2 sheets of folded paper along the folded edge. Alternatively, if you do not have a hole punch, you can cut notches in those places with scissors.



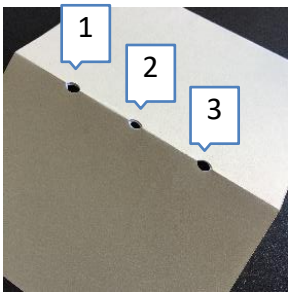


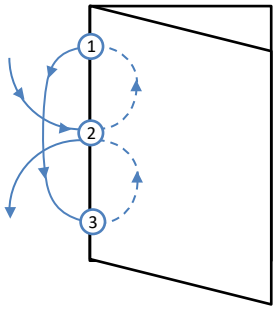
   Repeat on all of the sheets of paper and the cover.

   Tip: To space the holes evenly, create a template by taking one sheet of paper (same size us your unfolded pages), and folding it as follows. Fold in half lengthwise and unfold. Fold in half widthwise and unfold. Fold long edges to center crease and unfold. Where the creases meet is where the holes go. This can be laid over the pages of your journal as a guide (as seen in the photo above).



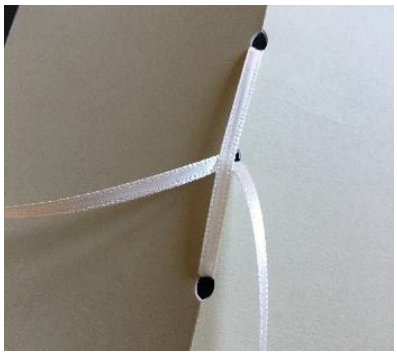
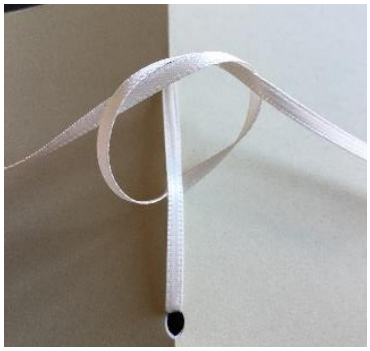
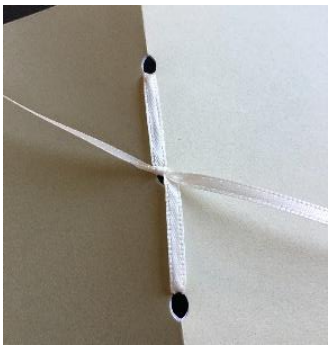
3. Bind your booklet.
   Unfold the sheets of paper and stack them so that holes line up, with the cover on top.





   Starting on the outside (cover side), take the length of ribbon (or other material), and thread it through the center hole (#2), leaving a tail of a few inches. Pull the ribbon on the interior of the booklet through the top hole (#1). Then pull the same ribbon through the bottom hole (#3). Finally, pull the ribbon through the center hole again (#2).

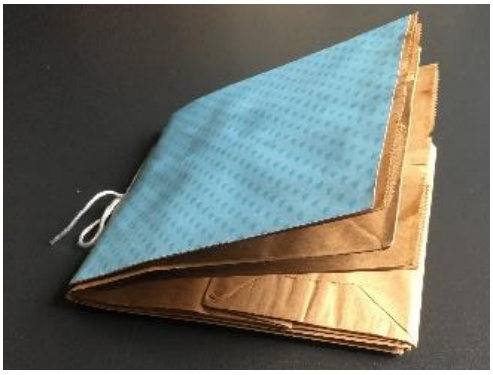
4. Tie the binding.
   You should have the two ribbon ends coming out of the same center hole. Situate the loose ends so that they emerge on both sides of the central length of ribbon stretched between the two outer holes. Tie the ends together around the central length of ribbon.

Tie in a knot or a bow.

5. Start writing!

Variation: Instead of using pieces of paper, use three paper lunch bags. Alternate the bags so the openings are staggered. You can use the pockets created by the bag to store mementos.



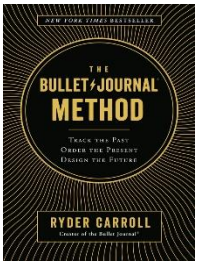
Recap:

1. Keeping a journal can act as a priceless record of your life.
2. Keeping a journal is beneficial to your physical and mental health.
3. There's no right or wrong way to journal. You make the rules.

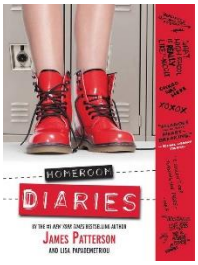
DIGITAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE THROUGH LA COUNTY LIBRARY

eBooks & Audiobooks

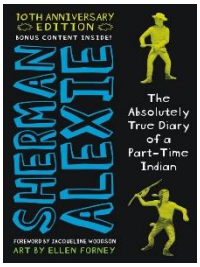
LA County Library offers numerous resources that can help you learn more about creative journaling. Here are just a few, all of which are available as eBooks on either OverDrive and Libby or Hoopla:



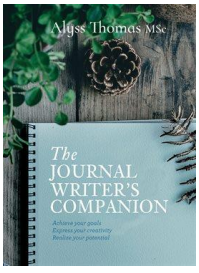
The Bullet Journal Method: Track the Past, Order the Present, Design the Future **by Ryder Carroll**
Ryder Carroll details the Bullet Journal method. He describes how this method promotes intentional living, where distractions are eliminated, and energy is focused on what's meaningful.



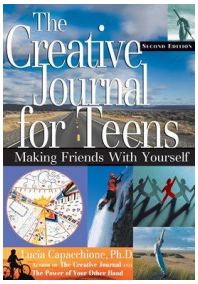
Homeroom Diaries **by James Patterson**
Seventeen-year-old Margaret "Cuckoo" Clark keeps a journal detailing the trials and tribulations of high school life as she and her close-knit group of outcast friends try to break down the barriers between their school's "warring nations."



The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian **by Sherman Alexie**
Determined to take his future into his own hands, Junior leaves his troubled school on the rez to attend an all-white farm town high school where the only other Indian is the school mascot. Drawings by Ellen Forney reflect the character's art.



The Journal Writer's Companion **by Alyss Thomas**
A guide to journaling that offers information on different approaches to journaling as well as information on how use a journal to bring success to your life.



The Creative Journal for Teens **by Lucia Capacchione**
Psychologist Lucia Capacchione approaches creative journal keeping as a tool for understanding yourself better. In this book she offers various exercises designed to help teens express thoughts and feelings, appreciate life experiences, solve problems, and more.

More Library Resources

- Access *The New York Times* for free through the library by visiting https://lacountylibrary.org/new-york-times/. Once you have free access you can read articles such as, "What's All This About Journaling?" by Hayley Phelan who researched and practiced journaling as part of her self-care during a difficult time in her life. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/25/style/journaling-benefits.html.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *The Los Angeles Times.* Read, "Journaling the coronavirus pandemic: 'I'm scared.' 'Can we get a dog?' 'Everything just feels odd'" by Marisa Gerber who shares how people are using journaling to help them through the coronavirus pandemic. https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-03-27/coronavirus-stress-journal-diary-pandemic-social-distance

- *YouTube.* Watch, "Three Good Things" by Martin Seligman on YouTube and discover a simple journaling technique you can use every day to improve well-being. https://youtu.be/ZOGAp9dw8Ac