

# Journaling for Mental Health — Workbook

This workbook gives you the hands-on exercises, structured worksheets, and practical templates to turn the course concepts into a real, personalized journaling practice. Work through each section alongside the corresponding module, or return to individual exercises whenever you need them. The tools here are designed to be used, not just read — leave your mark on every page.

## The Science and Setup of Journaling

Establish your why, choose your format, and design the environmental triggers that will make journaling stick.

### Exercise: Your Journaling Why Statement

Before you choose a format or buy a notebook, get clear on what you actually want journaling to do for you. A specific, personal why is the single strongest predictor of whether a new habit lasts. Write your answers below without editing — first-draft honesty is more useful here than polished prose.

- What is one thing I want to understand about myself that I do not currently understand?  
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- What emotional pattern or recurring problem am I hoping journaling will help with?  
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- How will I know, three months from now, that my journaling practice has been worthwhile? What will be different?  
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- What has stopped my journaling from sticking in the past, and what will I do differently this time?  
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### Worksheet: Format and Setup Decision Sheet

Complete this worksheet once, at the start of your practice. The goal is to make every setup decision in advance so you never have to make them under friction or resistance. Be specific — "notebook on my desk" is actionable; "somewhere convenient" is not.

Primary format (analog / digital / hybrid):  
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If analog — notebook brand and size:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If digital — app or tool name:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Primary writing location:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Anchor habit (the existing behavior I will journal immediately after):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Target time of day:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Minimum viable entry (my floor — the smallest thing that counts as showing up):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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Where I will keep my journal so I see it at trigger time:

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How I will track consistency (app streak / calendar check / habit tracker):

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### Checklist: 30-Day Habit Launch Checklist

- Written my journaling why statement and read it back
- Chosen and purchased or set up my primary journaling format
- Identified my anchor habit and written the habit stack formula ("After X, I will journal")
- Placed my journal or opened my app in the location where I will use it
- Set a recurring calendar event for my journaling sessions for the next 30 days
- Defined and written down my minimum viable entry
- Chosen a consistency-tracking method
- Scheduled a 30-day review in my calendar to assess what is working

## Expressive Writing and Stream-of-Consciousness

Practice the core expressive writing formats — Pennebaker protocol, morning pages, and unsent letters — with guided scaffolding.

### Exercise: Four-Day Expressive Writing Practice

Set aside 15–20 minutes on four consecutive days. Each day, write continuously about a personally meaningful experience or challenge — something that carries real emotional weight. Cover both the facts and your feelings. Do not worry about grammar, spelling, or coherence. You may keep, delete, or destroy each entry after writing.

- Day 1 — The experience itself: What happened? Describe the events as you remember them, including the sensory details of where you were and what was happening around you.

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- Day 2 — The emotions: What did you feel then, and what do you feel now when you think about it? Name as many distinct emotions as you can, not just the dominant one.

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- Day 3 — The meaning: What does this experience mean to you? Has it changed how you see yourself, other people, or the world? What story have you been telling about it?

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- Day 4 — Integration and release: What have you learned from writing about this? What are you ready to let go of? Write a final paragraph about what you are choosing to carry forward.

### Worksheet: Morning Pages Reflection Tracker

After each week of morning pages, complete this tracker. Do not use it to evaluate the quality of your writing — use it to notice patterns in how the practice affects your day. Fill in one row per week.

Week number:

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Days completed out of 7:

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Average time spent per session (minutes):

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What topics or themes came up repeatedly this week:

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How did I feel on days when I completed pages vs. days I skipped:

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One surprising or unexpected thought that emerged this week:

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What I want to do differently next week:

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### Checklist: Unsent Letter Completion Checklist

- Identified a relationship or situation carrying unresolved emotional weight
- Found a private, uninterrupted space with at least 20 minutes
- Written the letter without self-editing or censorship
- Included what I needed from this person or situation that I did not get
- Ended with acknowledgment of what was true about the situation
- Ended with a release statement — what I am choosing to let go of
- Ended with a forward intention — what I am choosing going forward
- Made a conscious decision about what to do with the letter (keep, shred, burn)

## Gratitude Journaling and Positive Reframing

Apply the three good things protocol, savoring journaling, and cognitive thought records to shift attentional patterns and challenge unhelpful narratives.

### Exercise: Three Good Things — 14-Day Practice

Each evening for 14 consecutive days, write three things that went well that day. For each one, add a sentence explaining why it happened. Aim for specificity — "my health" is not specific enough. Use the prompts below to get started if you are stuck.

- One small thing today that I would usually overlook: what was it, and why did it happen?

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- One interaction today that left me feeling better than before it: what made it good?

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- One thing I did today that I am genuinely pleased about — not just completed, but actually proud of or glad I did.

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### Worksheet: Cognitive Thought Record

Use this worksheet whenever a situation has triggered significant emotional distress. Work through each field in order. The goal is not to feel artificially positive — it is to arrive at a more accurate, balanced interpretation of the situation.

Situation (the facts — what happened, when, where, who was involved):

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Automatic thought (the first thought that arose — write it in quotes, as close to the original as possible):

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Emotion (name the emotion and rate its intensity from 0–100):

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Evidence FOR this thought being true:

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Evidence AGAINST this thought, or that doesn't fit it:

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Cognitive distortion present (all-or-nothing / catastrophizing / mind reading / overgeneralization / discounting the positive / other):

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Balanced thought (a more accurate interpretation that acknowledges both sides):

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Emotion re-rating after writing the balanced thought (0–100):

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What I will do differently or think about based on this record:

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### Checklist: Gratitude Practice Quality Checklist

- Each gratitude item is specific to today — not a generic standing item like "my family" or "my health"
- Each item includes a reason why it happened, not just a description of what it was
- I have varied my sources of gratitude across the week (people, experiences, personal strengths, near-misses, small pleasures)
- I am journaling gratitude 2–3 times per week rather than in a rushed daily obligation
- At least one entry this week used present-tense savoring to reconstruct a positive experience in sensory detail
- I used the compassionate observer perspective at least once this week when writing about a self-critical thought

### Exercise: Savoring Entry — Guided Practice

Choose one genuinely positive experience from the past week — something you enjoyed, felt proud of, or that surprised you with its goodness. Write about it in present tense, as though it is happening now. Take at least 10 minutes. Use the prompts below to deepen the entry.

- Describe what you see, hear, feel physically, smell, or taste in this moment of the experience.

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  - Name the specific emotions — not just "happy" or "good" but: relief, warmth, pride, delight, satisfaction, connection, awe, or another precise word.

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  - Who else is part of this experience, and what does their presence add?

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  - Why does this experience matter to you — what does it say about what you value or who you are becoming?
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## Building Your Personal Journaling System

Design your weekly review ritual, build your personal prompt library, and plan how you will sustain and adapt your journaling practice over time.

### Worksheet: Weekly Review Template

Complete this at the same time each week — Sunday evening or Monday morning works well for most people. Budget 20–30 minutes. The goal is perspective, pattern recognition, and one clear intention for the week ahead. Write in point form or prose — whatever you can sustain week over week.

Week of (date range):

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High points — what went well this week, what I am proud of:

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Low points — what drained me, what caused distress, patterns I noticed:

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Relationships — meaningful connections this week; any relationship needing attention:

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Body and energy — sleep, movement, food; what correlated with my mood:

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Learning — what I understood this week that I did not understand last week:

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One thing I want to let go of from this week:

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Single most important focus or intention for next week:

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### Exercise: Build Your Personal Prompt Library

Over the next four weeks, collect at least 10 prompts that unlock something genuine for you. Start with the lists below, add any from this course, and write your own. A prompt belongs in your library if it produced a surprising, honest, or useful entry. Record them in the back of your notebook or in a dedicated digital note.

- Which prompt from this course produced the most honest or unexpected response for you? Write it down and note why it worked.

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- Write one prompt for each of these emotional states that you personally find useful: anxious, frustrated, low, grateful, clear-headed.

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- Write one question you have been avoiding asking yourself. Add it to your library — and then answer it now.

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### Checklist: 90-Day Practice Review Checklist

- Completed a 90-day review: read back three months of entries
- Identified 2–3 recurring themes or patterns across the period
- Written a one-paragraph summary of where I was 90 days ago vs. where I am now
- Noted which journaling formats generated the most useful entries
- Noted which formats felt rote or stopped generating insight
- Updated my minimum viable entry if my capacity has changed
- Confirmed or revised my anchor habit and trigger
- Written a letter to myself from 90 days ago with what I wish I had known
- Set my journaling intention for the next 90-day period
- Scheduled the next 90-day review in my calendar

## Your Action Plan

1. Write your journaling why statement and journaling setup decision sheet today before choosing any tools or notebooks
2. Pick one format — analog, digital, or hybrid — and acquire or set up your materials this week
3. Identify your anchor habit and schedule 30 days of journaling sessions as recurring calendar events
4. Complete Pennebaker's four-day expressive writing protocol on a personally meaningful topic within your first two weeks
5. Start a 14-day three good things practice: write three specific, causal gratitude items each evening
6. Use the cognitive thought record worksheet the next time a situation triggers significant emotional distress
7. Complete your first morning pages session within 48 hours — aim for three pages, accept one page as your minimum
8. Write at least one unsent letter to a person, situation, or past version of yourself this month
9. Conduct your first weekly review at the end of this week using the weekly review template
10. After 30 days, read back your entries and complete the 30-day habit review: what worked, what to adjust, what to carry forward









