

# THE JOURNAL WRITER'S *Companion*

*Have you always wanted to keep a journal but been unable to get started? Alyss Thomas, author of The Journal Writer's Companion, shares why journalling is key to developing creative ideas, finding mental space to relax, and discovering the best version of yourself*

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I believe everyone has original, unique, quirky, special and unusual ideas, and some special thoughts, experiences or understandings that belong only to them.

If you do not express them, then no one else ever will. There are things you have known or loved or understood in your own special way since you were a young child, and these will have been amplified in certain unique ways by your life experience. I also believe we tend towards social conformity, and we have a kind of herd instinct to fit in rather than stand out, like the wildebeest on the plains. If they all run like crazy at the same time in the same direction across the same crossing point on the river, only a few, the unlucky ones, get eaten by crocodiles or big cats. This conformity prevents a lot of us from freely expressing our weirdest and most private thoughts. If you watch a film of the wildebeest doing this, don't you just want to urge them on? And you get anxious about any straggler who's sniffing out what might be a better and safer crossing point, but she's hesitating because all the others are getting in the water and it's safer to go with the herd. Part of our social brain still behaves like this, and this stifles our creativity.

The direct enemies of your weird, original creative ideas are intolerance, criticism, judgment, fear of ridicule and fear of being unusual and standing out. You are just as likely to reap this from your nearest and dearest, who might gently humiliate or laugh at you or make your ideas sound silly or pointless, as from vicious internet trolls or terrible reviews. We dread exposure that brings the risk of criticism or being humiliated. Yet if you don't have the opportunity to develop your own quirky ideas, so much potential is lost. At the very same time, we are constantly being encouraged to market ourselves, put our ideas out there, promote ourselves, network and be connected and share and monetize our ideas in public – quite a contradiction. This is where the need for a journal arises.

Instead of exhorting you to get out there and network, I am suggesting you stay in more and give yourself complete and total permission to discover the 'book' that is yourself, the one that you will write as you give yourself the attention, focus, structure, time and space in the special private room of your own that you can create in your journal. Original creative ideas are not created in public, as this is not a safe space for

them and it never was. Look at anyone who has had brilliant ideas and changed the course of history, and you will see they had private incubation space for their ideas. Often they had to ward off disapproval and criticism. They had a room of their own, and in that room they sat and wrote or drew or doodled about thoughts and ideas that anyone else would have judged as preposterous or even heresy. Look at Einstein, who referred to his private space as his 'inner cloister'. If you ever see a photo of his room or his journals, you can see how messy they are because he liked to include lots of different ideas and materials all at once.

Virginia Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own* was written in 1929 but it is just as relevant today. She insists that in order to develop a mind and thoughts of your own, you need privacy, and you may need to assert your right to this. Samuel Morse, who actually invented the telegraph, developed his ideas in his private art studio, and he was mortified about having to reveal them to anyone. He knew his idea could completely change the world of communications, but the idea he created was such a big paradigm shift that he was afraid it would be mocked or rejected.





A journal is the private space where you believe in your ideas and your unformed, unknown thoughts. Your journal is where you can be the best version of you that is still in the process of being discovered, where you know you're going to be the best at what you do, and where you are prepared to work away until your projects, your ideas, or your newly minted sense of yourself, are robust enough to be seen in public.

## Use journalling to set the tone you want

Whichever method of journaling you gravitate towards, and whatever your topic, productive work emerges when you are in the creative zone. This requires space and focus, but even just 15 minutes each morning can set you up for the day. When you first wake up is good because your mind has not yet started to fill up with thoughts. Mozart is frequently quoted as saying “when I am completely myself, entirely alone and of good cheer... my ideas flow best and most abundantly”. To be in this zone you have to create the condition of good cheer, be present and attentive; do not force anything but instead be receptive.

*Why I want to keep a journal:*

*Dear Diary...*



- Why is it that you can have the intention to keep a journal regularly, but weeks go by in which you ‘forget’ to write anything?
- Do you buy blank books and then neglect them?
- Do you begin a journal with enthusiasm but then realise with dismay that you have ‘nothing to say’ or nothing interesting or important you want to write about?
- Do those blank pages that you are meant to fill, instead fill you with anxiety and panic?
- Does it feel self-indulgent/pointless to spend all this time writing about yourself?
- Are you impatient with yourself and easily bored, and it’s hard for you to maintain consistency?

# Forgetting, Getting Stuck, Giving Up

*When journal writing is not happening*

Things go wrong if your journal becomes irrelevant, and you stop being curious and excited about what will happen when you pick it up and begin to write. You forget all about it, you are inconsistent and don’t follow through, or you don’t feel good about your journal – maybe you vented a lot of sticky negative feelings and now you don’t feel like going near it any more. Maybe you lost interest and moved on to other things. Maybe you had a time when you were so busy or preoccupied you felt you couldn’t keep it up.

Your journal will not judge you if you don’t show up for an appointment. You can always go back and start over. Sometimes it’s better to start again with a fresh outlook in a new book.







# Scribble & Scrawl

*Capture your wild and random thoughts with these scribble journal prompts*

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Take a scribble journal and write down everything that is on your mind. This is a process of emptying out all the contents of your mind. Write down everything that comes to mind in response to each of the prompts here. However, write it down fast and then move on to the next item – don't spend too long on any item. For this exercise you only have to list your thoughts, not look into them in any detail.

Now go over all of this in different colours and cross out anything that is not that important and you can forget about. Then highlight anything that comes to light that you want to retain. Circle anything that is important you attend to, whether immediately or longer term. You might want to migrate these items to a different journal, when you have decided what type of journal/s you are going to keep.



This is an edited extract from *The Journal Writer's Companion*, by Alyss Thomas, available from [www.exislepublishing.com](http://www.exislepublishing.com) and wherever good books are sold. RRP \$34.99

• The things you are thinking about

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• How you are feeling

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• How you feel about your health and wellbeing

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• How you feel towards your family members

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• How you feel about your work

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• Anything you are worried about

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• Anything you feel dread about

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• The things you are hoping will happen

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• The things you are looking forward to

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- The things you have been doing today and what you are doing tomorrow

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- The things you ought to do but may not get round to yet

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- The things you definitely have to do

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- The things you need to remember that you might forget

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- Some enjoyable things you would really like to do if you had the time

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