

Therapeutic Writing: Writing Mindfully

Mindful writing means writing in the moment, in the here-and-now.

One type of mindful writing is writing to describe how you feel right now. Or writing to describe a problem you have right now. What writing mindfully doesn't include is any analysis of your feelings or thoughts about your problem, just description. And no writing about our past either, or our future, only about this present moment. After all, we cannot live in the past, or in the future. The present is where we live.



Another kind of mindful writing involves really noticing something in the world, such as something you can see (or hear or smell) in the room or garden you're in, or that you can see through the window, or in a photograph, and then writing to describe it. I like to think of this kind of mindful writing as a writing meditation.

Writing to describe something in the real world (something you can see, touch, hear or smell) can be calming if you are feeling anxious or stressed. I feel myself becoming calmer within 2 or 3 minutes when I am writing mindfully. Writing mindfully to describe how you feel right now, or to describe a problem you have, can help you get control of your thoughts and feelings.

How to Get Started with Mindful Writing

A great way to get started with writing mindfully is to notice one thing in the world every day and write about it for 2 or 3 minutes. When I do this, I find that some days I write a poem and some days I write a very ordinary and everyday bit of writing – not poetic at all. That doesn't matter. What matters with this kind of mindful writing is that what you write about each day is something in the real world (not thoughts or feelings).

I've got a lovely notebook to put my mindful writing in and my mindful writing notebook now has a satisfying amount of writing in it, and even a couple of (not very skilled) sketches. Looking back through my notebook I see I've noticed many things in my small pieces of mindful writing: beads, birds, skies, wind, snow, Christmas decorations and even slippers. There are some recurring themes in my writing. Nature is a favourite theme for me. What I notice most looking back through the notebook is that I now have a real collection of mindful moments which I can add to and re-read.



Have a Go...

If you'd like to try mindful writing now, choose a photo on this sheet and write to describe what you see. Or look outside, notice something, and write about it.

When you practice writing mindfully, try to write quite quickly, and try not to stop to correct your spelling, grammar and punctuation. The helpful things about writing mindfully are: learning mindfulness by really paying attention to something, and the actual process of writing (especially writing on paper rather than typing). How helpful the content of your writing is for you will vary, for example, if you write to describe a problem you have at the moment, then reading your writing might help you understand the problem or deal with it.

Here's a piece of my mindful writing:

There is a big space in the corner of our living room where this morning the Christmas tree stood. Scattered over the carpet there are strips of green plastic that have fallen off the artificial Christmas tree, and shiny red, silver, blue and gold strips off the tinsel. There are three cardboard boxes waiting by the door to be put in the loft. The boxes are sealed with brown parcel tape. Inside two of the boxes are decorations and the third box contains the Christmas tree.

As you can see, mindful writing doesn't need to be deep or clever or poetic. If you do feel like getting poetic you can edit and play with your writing as I have here:

Tree sized space in the corner
Carpet strewn with shreds
of green, red and silver.
Three boxes packed, sealed
and ready for the loft.



Now over to you – why not try 2 minutes of mindful writing every day?

Further Reading

1. Words for Wellbeing blog: <http://trioross.wordpress.com/>
2. Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/WordsForWellbeing?fref=ts>
3. Therapeutic Writing handouts: Writing for Wellbeing, Journals and Diaries, Freewriting, Reflective Writing.
4. Email Carol at writing.year@cumbria.nhs.uk for copies of handouts and to enquire about ordering the Words for Wellbeing book (£9.50 including P&P)

**** You may photocopy this sheet provided you do not alter it in any way ****