

Therapeutic Writing – Reflective Writing

By reflective writing I mean using writing as a way of thinking (pondering) about something: a conversation, an event, a relationship, a problem, a period of your life. Reflective writing techniques can help you see things from a new perspective and gain insights.

An exercise in reflective writing:

1. Think about a conversation you had with someone recently, one that sticks in your mind.
2. Spend around 5 minutes writing a brief summary of the conversation.
3. Now take about 15-20 minutes to write about the conversation in more detail, but from the other person's point of view. Write in the first person as if you were the other person (and they were you). So when you write about what the other person said and did you will write "I said..." and "I did.." and when you write about what you said or did (from the other person's point of view) you will write "he/she said..." and "<your name> did..."
4. Read both pieces of writing, more than once if you need to, and write about your reactions to them. Highlight, circle or underline anything interesting, surprising or puzzling. Write about your feelings about what you have written. Write your thoughts, any sudden realisations you might have, and connections you notice.

Other ideas for writing reflectively:

- First write about a memory. Now write about the same memory again but this time change the tense from past to present; or change the point of view to that of another person (as above), an animal that was there at the time, or an object such as a coffee cup (see Write Yourself by Gillie Bolton, page 251).
- Do some freewriting about something, for example, a recent event, a problem you have, or a situation you are in. Now read what you've written and make notes on anything you read that is interesting, surprising or puzzling. Note any thoughts or feelings that come up as you read your piece of freewriting.



- Try changing the point of view when you write a journal entry: write about your whole day in the third person “he/she went to...” etc. Taking a more objective view like this can bring unexpected insights.
- In her book *Journal to the Self*, Kathleen Adams describes a technique called ‘Topics de Jour’ which is a simple method for regularly reflecting on different aspects of your life. Number the lines on a page from 1 to 31. For each line write one aspect of your life that you would like to monitor regularly. Look at the list each day and write about the topic that corresponds to that day’s date.



Further Reading

1. Write Yourself by Gillie Bolton. Published in 2011 by Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
2. Journal to the self: Twenty-two paths to personal growth by Kathleen Adams. Published in 1990 by Grand Central Publishing.
3. Words for Wellbeing blog: <http://trioross.wordpress.com/>
4. Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/WordsForWellbeing?fref=ts>
5. Therapeutic Writing handouts: Writing for Wellbeing, Mindful Writing, Journals and Diaries, Freewriting.
6. 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)

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