

## The Inner Excellence Ultimate Dream Journal

Inner Excellence is about self-mastery, self-awareness, and self-education, as well as the pursuit of the selfless and therefore fearless life. We do this through one mindset, three principles, five skills, and nine disciplines.

In the pursuit of self-mastery, it's crucial to examine your life regularly, and deeply, at least once a year. There's a tool/practice that Dr. Andrew Huberman from Stanford calls a *critical-foundational-pillar-practice* for improving mental and physical health. The practice is called expressive writing or therapeutic journaling. I've adapted it to Inner Excellence for you.

There's been over 400 scientific, peer-reviewed studies on a type of journaling advanced by a psychologist at the University of Texas Dr. James Pennebaker. Huberman calls therapeutic journaling so powerful for mental and physical health that it can "lower anxiety, improve sleep, improve immunity, reduce autoimmune disorders, improve memory, and on and on..."

Because this type of journaling has many similarities to the work I do and I believe in the benefits, I've adapted it to Inner Excellence. Please note that while I've not taken anything away from the scientific protocol, I've added some thought exercises to consider that I believe will enhance your experience. [You can listen to Dr. Huberman talk about it here](#) (he discusses the specific scientific protocol at 12:45).

You're going to start to put together your life story, particularly focusing on the low points, to help you process them, and your dreams, to help you clarify them. The purpose of this exercise is to help you construct a meaningful story from your past, to let go of any mental blocks or things holding you back (which you may not be aware of), and clarify the vision for your life. In an email from Dr. Pennebaker (who developed the protocol), he told me, "The goal is to help you identify important issues in your life that may weigh on you—especially things you haven't talked about in detail with others."

We'll start by writing about a topic that was painful or troubling, ideally the most painful or troubling experience of your life. Or perhaps it's something you've been going through the last few months. (Note: this whole exercise is only for yourself, no one else to see.) You're going to translate your feelings into written words to help you process your life story. You're also going to

write about your fears and dreams, what you want most, and why— all to help you process your past and empower your future.

This will help you get aligned with your true self, so you can see your story unfolding in a meaningful way, to help clarify the vision and remove mental blocks.

You're going to write for 15-30 minutes, once a day for four days straight.

### **What to write about**

Think about the most painful experience of your life. This is the ideal topic. If you're not sure what it is, think about how you *don't* want to feel, (i.e. anxious, fearful, alone, angry, etc) and see if you can get that feeling. Then write about whatever memories come to mind associated with that feeling.

Note: Dr. Pennebaker also shared this with me: "In your writing, you might tie your writing to things that happened in your childhood, issues with your family or friends, your current or past relationships, or things going on right now. You might want link the topic with your future [of for your group, about your physical and mental health, your team, your future in athletics]. You might want to write about who you want to become in the future, who you were in the past, or who you are right now. The important issue is for you to really let go and explore you very deepest emotions and thoughts...".

### **The protocol:**

1. Find a quiet place where you won't be interrupted.
2. Write nonstop for 15-30 minutes, once a day for four days straight. (I.e. try to keep all writing breaks less than a minute). 15 minutes is just as good as 30. Don't be concerned about grammar or re-readability.
3. You can write about the same thing each day or different topics.\*
4. Next write down how it felt when it happened (and perhaps before, during and after). What were your thoughts, concerns and emotions? Acknowledge those emotions and give voice to those feelings.
5. Write down what beliefs may have been formed at the time about yourself and the world (ie. I'm not enough; the world is a dangerous place) and then write down the truth about yourself and the world (I.e. I'm a child of God and the world is filled with abundance).

6. Write what your biggest fears have been and how it feels to write about all this.
7. Now write about your ultimate dream. That is... What do you want most in your life? Why do you want it? What it will give you? For example, I want to be world champion or CEO or an amazing mother. I want it because I feel it will give me "\_\_\_\_\_." And if I have \_\_\_\_\_, then that will give me \_\_\_\_\_.

## **The science**

There's been a lot of scientific research that show the benefits of expressive journaling/writing developed by Dr. James Pennebaker.

Here's a summary of some of the findings:

- The human mind naturally tries to understand the world around it. One reason people often obsess about a disturbing experience is that they're trying to understand it. An efficient way to understand something is to translate it into words.
- Confronting painful experiences and emotions can have remarkable health benefits. Not allowing thoughts and feelings about stressful experiences to be expressed can be detrimental to mental and physical health.
- Benefits include a reduction in stress, anxiety and depression, stronger immune system, and greater clarity and focus.
- If we keep ruminating about it, we have fewer mental resources to think about other things.
- By writing about a painful experience, we're translating the event into language. Once it's language-based, we can better understand the experience—and therefore better understand ourselves—and put it behind us.

Note: Some researchers have found that some participants feel negative or down in the hours or days after writing, but there's still long-term, long-lasting benefits.

## **References**

[Huberman, Andrew, PhD. \*A Science- Supported Journaling Protocol to Improve Mental and Physical Health\*. Youtube.com \(The specific protocol starts at 12:45\)](#)

[Mirgain, Shilagh A, PhD, and Singles, Janice, PsyD. Therapeutic Journaling. va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/docs/Therapeutic-Journaling.pdf.](http://www.virginia.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/docs/Therapeutic-Journaling.pdf)

[Pennebaker, James W, PhD, and Smyth, Joshua M, PhD. \*Opening Up by Writing it Down: How Expressive Writing Improves Health and Eases Emotional Pain.\* 2016.](#)

**\*Note:** Dr. Pennebaker told me, “While Huberman’s video is great, I would encourage letting people guide their own writings more. Give them freedom to write about the same or different topics each day. Don’t include the objective fact-based writing rule you included. Very often people will start writing almost randomly and chaotically and then will gradually start pulling things together. I think this can be an important part of the healing process.”