

A top-down view of a wooden desk. In the upper right, a white mug filled with coffee sits on a saucer. To its left is a green, textured object, possibly a plant or a decorative item. In the center, an open Bible is visible, with the text of Jeremiah 4 clearly legible. Below the Bible, a spiral-bound journal with lined pages is open, and a silver pen lies on it. The entire scene is set against a background of a dark wood desk and a light-colored, textured blanket or rug at the bottom.

the joyful coach's mini guide to journaling

an introduction to writing for joy
and clarity, complete with 100
journaling prompts

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introduction

If you've followed me for any length of time, you'll know that I'm a huge fan of journaling. I call it "free therapy", such are the benefits I experience from putting pen to paper each day, and over the years it's helped me work through big decisions, stay positive, and get to know myself a lot better.

Whenever I share photos of my bulging notebooks or talk about the joy I get from journaling on Instagram, I'm always met with a flurry of questions - how do you journal? how do you start? what do you write about? and so on - and so I thought it was about time I put a little guide together.

In this guide, I'll aim to help you get started with your own journaling practice, try to answer some of those questions I get asked most frequently, and I'll also be sharing 100 of my favourite journaling prompts, so that you're never stuck for inspiration as you get started on this journey.

Ready? Let's dive in...

why journal?

So let's start with the first and most obvious question - why should you bother giving journaling a go? Well, I could write a whole book on this topic, but for the purpose of brevity, I thought I'd share with you a list of the most commonly cited benefits of journaling.

First up, studies show that regular journaling can boost your mood/positive affect, and can have a positive impact on your overall well-being. It can help to improve your memory and cognitive function, and it can also help you to come to terms with challenging our traumatic experiences.

Journaling can help to improve creativity, reduce stress and increase your levels of emotional intelligence. It can help with the achievement of goals, evokes mindfulness, and some studies suggest it can even boost your immune system.

Are you sold yet?!

On a personal level, journaling has become an invaluable tool for me. I write 2-3 pages of rambling thoughts every single day, and I always feel better as a result. Putting pen to paper helps me to find clarity, slows down my thoughts, and helps me to access a place of calm that I didn't know was possible before.

But I think most importantly, it gives me space to connect with myself - something that's so easy to forget to do in the busy rush of life, but is oh so important to living a joyful life.

how do i start?

Next up on the list of journaling questions I'm regularly asked is "how do I start?". The simple answer? You just do.

You don't need any fancy equipment to start journaling - just a pen and some paper, perhaps a notebook if you want to keep your thoughts together somewhere. If you're new to journaling try to resist the temptation to go out and buy a brand new notebook - the pressure to keep it neat might end up holding you back from really committing to your practice.

I do think it's important that you do it the old fashioned way and hand write your thoughts instead of typing them - there's a bit of debate out there about whether you can still get the benefits from typing, but most studies agree that writing by hand stimulates and engages your brain better.

Try to find a quiet spot where you won't be interrupted for a little while and start to write. Try not to censor yourself and don't worry about trying to make what you're writing make sense - the aim here is to sort through your tangled thoughts, not to write a bestseller!

when should i do it?

The answer to this one is simple - whenever works for you! I like to journal for around 15-20 minutes each morning as part of my morning routine, but perhaps for you, evenings will work better.

Think about when you'll most feel the benefits of journaling - do you want to use it as a tool to get your head straight at the start of the day, or would you find it more useful to download your thoughts before bed? Also think about when you're most likely to be able to carve out the time - there's no point in trying to create a morning journaling routine if your mornings are already super busy.

Try not to pile on the pressure to journal everyday if you're a beginner - you'll see some benefits from committing just once a week, and then once you're experiencing the benefits, you'll feel motivated to do it more regularly.

what should i write about?

Again, there's no right or wrong answer here, but I know that that can feel frustrating when you're first trying to give it a go. And so instead, I thought I'd share with you the two approaches to journaling that I take to give you a little more inspiration.

The first type of journaling I do is stream of consciousness writing, a technique made famous by Julia Cameron's iconic book, *The Artist's Way*. The idea is that you write whatever comes to your mind until you've filled 3 pages in your notebook. If you're drawing a complete blank, start by writing "I don't know what to write" - before you know it, the words will be flowing from your hand.

I really like this style of journaling as often things come to the surface that I didn't even know I was worrying about, and putting pen to paper allows me to work through them before they start to feel overwhelming.

The other style of journaling I use is to take a specific prompt and use that as a starting point for my writing. It might be something quite simple and obvious - how am I feeling today? - or it might be something more specific or thought provoking - a prompt designed to help you work through a specific block or worry.

Again, the beauty of journaling is that there's no right or wrong way to use prompts - you might only write a sentence in response, or the prompt might inspire pages of thinking. So long as you feel a little lighter and clearer as a result, it doesn't really matter.

To get you started on your journaling journey, I've included 100 of my favourite prompts in the next few pages. I've tried to categorise them into themes to make it easier for you to find the ones that will be most useful to you. Feel free to try them all or just pick and choose those you feel drawn to - and if you want to rephrase them slightly, feel free!

My hope is that they inspire some moments of clarity, connection or joy for you, and that they help you to access some of those marvellous benefits of journaling I shared above. I'd love to hear if you have any favourites!

100 journaling prompts

daily check in

How are you feeling today out of 10?

Is there anything you can do to improve that score?

What do you want your intention for the day to be?

What challenges are you facing today?

What measures can you put in place to overcome those challenges?

What is the kindest thing you can do for yourself today?

What do you want to achieve today?

What can you let go of to help you do that?

What can you do to protect your energy today?

How do you want to feel as you're climbing into bed this evening?

new month

If you had to describe the last month in 5 words, what words would you use?

What went well in the last month?

What felt challenging?

What did you learn about yourself in the last month?

What would you like to achieve in the coming month?

What do you want to do for fun?

Can you foresee any challenges? How can you plan for them?

How will you protect your mental and physical health this month?

What intention do you want to set for the month ahead?

What can you say no to this month to free up more time for joy?

gratitude

List 5 things you're grateful for today.

Make a list of the people in your life that you're grateful for.

What do you miss about your day to day life when you're on holiday?

What do you have in your life that your grandparents didn't have when they were your age?

What do you love most about the place where you live?

What is your favourite part of your day?

Write about your happiest memory from the last month.

Which of your strengths or personality traits are you most grateful for?

Think about a tricky time in your life and try to find something to be grateful for in that experience.

What's one thing you have in your life now that you didn't have this time last year?

self-discovery

If you had to describe yourself in 5 words, what words would you choose?

Spend some time visualising your dream life and then write about it.

What is currently getting in the way of you living that dream version of your life?

What can you do today to move you closer to the dream version of your life?

Write about an experience or event that changed your life for the better.

When do you feel most in tune with yourself?

What is your biggest regret? What did it teach you?

Who do you admire the most? Why? What can you learn from them?

Write a letter to yourself 5 years ago. What do you wish you could tell them?

Write a letter to yourself from the 80 year old version of you. What advice do they have for you?

joy

What does joy mean to you?

How does joy differ from happiness?

What does joy feel like in your body when you experience it?

On a scale of 1-10, how joyful does your life feel right now?

Write about a time you've experienced joy in the last week or so.

Write about your most joyful memory. What is it about that memory that sparks joy?

Who is the most joyful person you know? What do you admire about them?

How could you invite more joy into your daily life?

What are you willing to let go of to create more space for joy?

What actions can you take to spread joy to others?

connection

On a scale of 1-10, how connected to others do you feel right now?

Write about a time when you have felt connected to others recently.

Who do you feel closest to in your life, and why?

Where are you craving more connection in your life?

What actions can you take to improve your relationships?

Is there anyone in your life you need to set better boundaries with? What do those boundaries look like?

Think of your closest relationship right now. What is one thing you could do today to improve that relationship?

Is there a relationship in your life that needs extra attention right now?

Think about a relationship that has broken down in some way. What did you learn from it?

Who do you need to forgive, and why, and what's stopping you from doing it today?

fear

What does fear feel like in your body?

Make a list of 5 things that scare you.

Where do these fears originate from?

How likely are your fears to come true? What is the most likely outcome?

If you knew that failure wasn't an option, what would you do? What would you change?

Write about a time that you were scared but did or achieved something brilliant anyway.

Where has fear held you back from trying?

What's one thing that scares you that you can commit to doing today?

Has fear ever played a positive role in your life?

Who is the most fearless person you know? What do you admire about them?

purpose

What do you value most in life?

How do you define success, and how will you know when you have it?

What are you most passionate about in life? What makes your heart sing?

If you could positively impact one cause, what would it be?

What about your life makes you most proud?

How do you want to be remembered at the end of your life?

Where do you find meaning in your life?

Are there any parts of yourself you hide from others? Write about why this might be.

If you found out that you were going to die tomorrow, what would be your three biggest regrets?

Write about who gives your life purpose.

confidence

What does confidence mean to you?

Write about what confidence feels like when you experience it.

How does having confidence impact your life?

In which areas of your life do you feel most confident? Why do you think this is?

In which areas of your life are you lacking confidence? Why do you think this is?

What is holding you back from being your most confident self?

Are there any rituals or actions that improve your sense of confidence?

Write about a time when you have exuded confidence. How did you act? What was the outcome?

Write about a time when you have acted with courage. What impact did this have on your confidence?

Who is the most confident person you know? What do you admire about them?

goal-setting

How do you feel about goals?

What is the goal you are most proud of achieving?

What is one goal you wish you hadn't given up on?

What is one goal you would love to achieve in your lifetime?

Write about how you would like your life to look in one year's time.

Write three goals that will help you to achieve that vision.

How will you know when you've achieved those goals?

How will achieving those goals positively impact your life?

What can you put in place to ensure you achieve those goals?

Write a letter to the version of you who has already achieved those goals. What advice do they have for you?

some parting words

So there you have it, my mini guide to journaling, complete with 100 of my favourite journaling prompts. I hope this equips you with all the inspiration you need to get started with your own journaling practice, and I hope your practice brings you as much joy and clarity as mine does.

Magic happens when you put pen to paper, even just for 10 minutes, and the benefits can be accessed time and time again. For that reason, I'll never stop recommending journaling as a tool for joy, and I hope this guide has convinced you to give it a go!

I'd love to hear how if you found this guide useful, and please do let me know which are your favourite prompts.

Love,
Sophie x

about the author



Hi, I'm Sophie (aka The Joyful Coach)! I'm a qualified coach and positive psychology practitioner, and my mission is to help as many people as possible live their most joyful lives, whatever that means to them.

I'm a huge believer in the power of positivity and I work with my clients to unpick their limiting beliefs, build their confidence, and give themselves permission to invite even more joy into their lives.

What else should you know? I live in Leeds, UK, with my husband, Sam, and our cheeky cat, Lola. I prefer nights on the sofa to nights on the tiles, although I'll never say no to a glass of red wine. I love cooking in our kitchen, long walks in the countryside, and New York is my favourite place in the world (cliche, I know).

I'd love to chat more over on Instagram or Twitter, or why don't you drop me a little email at sophiecliff@live.com? And if you'd like more details about my coaching packages, head on over to my website, www.sophiecliff.com.