

# Why You Should Be Writing

By Amanda McCracken  
for Aging at Altitude

**H**ave you ever thought about writing a book? Maybe you have a few important stories you want your son or daughter to share with your grandchildren someday. Perhaps there are events in your life that won't let go of you until you write them down. Writing is a way of documenting, processing, sharing and moving forward.

Science proves writing is healing. A New Zealand study followed two groups of healthy seniors who wrote for 20 minutes per day for three consecutive days. One group wrote about daily activities and the other group wrote about their feelings tied to traumatic past events. A standard 4mm skin biopsy was taken from the inner arm of all participants. The physical wounds of those individuals who did the expressive writing actually healed faster. Another study out of Syracuse University found that writing about emotions and stress boosts immunity in patients.

## Start small and create routine

Julia Cameron's book *The Artist's Way* made famous the practice of writing "morning pages." This called for writing three pages long hand (not typed) first thing in the morning before you start any task – when your mind is free of anxiety and ego. If there is a story in those pages you want to share, you can edit later. Just write. Morning pages helps you develop a habit.

Another way of routine writing is starting a prayer and/or gratitude journal. Every night before you go to bed, write down one prayer and/or gratitude you have for the day. Lists are a great way to get started writing too. Make a list of ten memories that make you smile, cry, marvel or proud. Choose one of those memories to write about.

Perhaps the best New Year's Eve resolution I ever kept was writing down (maybe only a sentence) a memory triggered during the day by one of my five senses. For example, one day I wrote about a walk I took with a friend and how the smell of wet mowed grass triggered

the memory of running a cross country race in high school where my grandfather got down on one knee to cheer for me. By the end of the year I had recorded over 700 memories.

## Ideas

If you need a writing prompt to get started, consider prompts for narrative and personal writing from The New York Times Learning Network. Here are ten prompts to get you started:

- My favorite way to spend the day is...
- If I could talk to my teenage self, the one thing I would say is...
- Write about a time when you paid it forward.
- The words I'd like to live by are...
- I really wish others knew this about me...
- What always brings tears to your eyes?
- Using 10 words, describe yourself.
- Write a list of questions to which you urgently need answers.
- Choose an old photograph.

What do you want to say to the people, places and things in this photo?

- What superpower do you wish you had?

## Other ways to document stories

What if you want to publish your stories? You can orally record them through several online tools, with your smart device, or an old fashion recorder. Check out NPR's Story Corp. if you want to contribute your story to a national oral history project. You can have them printed in a book through such online sites as Porch Swing Stories or Story Worth. Consider hiring a ghost writer or writing coach to help you craft and organize your writing. For supportive writing groups or editors, look into Boulder Media Women, Boulder Writing Studio, Lighthouse Writer's Workshop and Boulder Writer's Alliance.

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