

A person is sitting in a car, writing in a notebook with a blue pen. The notebook is open, showing handwritten text and a sketch of a landscape. The person's hand and part of their face are visible. The background shows a window with a view of trees outside. The title text is overlaid on the image.

How to Establish *your* CREATIVE SELF Journaling Practice

a very short ebook
by Jacob Nordby

How to Establish *your* Creative Self Journaling Practice

by Jacob Nordby
author of
The Divine Arsonist
Blessed Are the Weird—A Manifesto for Creatives
[The Creative Cure: How Finding and Freeing Your Inner Artist Can Heal Your Life](#)

© Jacob Nordby 2021 All Rights Reserved

Brought to you by the Institute for Creative Living
www.instituteforcreativeliving.org

What I'm about to share with you is a practice that changed my life. I have used it now almost every day for years. I have also taught this different approach to journaling in my online courses and workshops—and to private guidance clients.

If you're like me, you have heard that, "...you need to journal," for a long time. Maybe a therapist or counselor has suggested that you do it. Nearly every self-help and personal development book comes layered with self-reflection exercises that involve the use of a journal.

You want to know a dirty little backstage secret from the self-help industry?

Okay, I'll tell you. *Almost nobody really does it.*

Everybody knows that journaling is a good thing, but in my experience most people struggle to make it a valuable, regular practice in their lives.

There are many reasons for this. Here are the top three that I've heard:

- 1). I don't like to write. I'm not very good at it, so trying to journal is hard.
- 2). When I try to journal, the only thing that comes out is boring, whiny, barfy drivel.
- 3). I'm under so much pressure that finding the time to do something like this is just too hard.

Everyone is really saying, "I don't care how valuable the experts say this is, I don't see how it will really help me, so it's not worth the time and effort to add one more thing to my already hectic life."

I know, you're saying other things because you're a highly unique individual and not like those other sheep.

Here's the thing. I don't want to preach at you or sell you on journaling.

However, I would love to invite you into a slightly different approach that can become a rich conversation with yourself—and give you surprising benefits for the rest of your life.

What are these benefits?

I'll tell you in a minute, but first let me say that I developed this practice with the help of a few influential books and I'll list them at the end. You are probably familiar with one of the most famous of these books, *The Artist's Way*, by my dear friend Julia Cameron. That's how I got started and is still the foundation upon which this practice is built.

Well, besides making you look deep and mysterious when you're sitting there writing away in a coffee shop, there are several other key benefits to approaching your journal practice from this direction.

- 1). It helps you get reacquainted with what I call “your inner creative self.” This is your whole psyche—which includes your rational mind and the parts that may have been shut down or neglected.
- 2). It helps you process questions, anxieties, and issues in your life, but in a safe, private place where you don't need to defend your thoughts, feelings, or ideas to anyone else.
- 3). It helps you acknowledge your own needs and gain practice stating them clearly to yourself.
- 4). It helps you get in touch with your dreams and real desires. If you've ever said, “I'm not sure what I really want...” this practice can become a guide to show the way until you feel clear.

My life has grown steadily better as I have established this practice over the years. What I mean by that is I've noticed myself get clearer, stronger, less anxious, more able to state my needs, and move in the direction of my dreams. I feel that this is the result of healing the connection—clearing the static so that the voice of my inner creative self can be heard. To my surprise, this voice is so wise, balanced, compassionate, and gentle!

This is the case for those I work with, too. Everyone who uses this practice regularly reports surprising improvements and clarity, often in areas of their lives that have been seriously tangled or painful for a long time.

If you don't usually like to write or journal, I'll offer you small prompts that can pique your curious nature and surprise you when you begin to write so expressively.

The truth is, we are all writers. One way or another, most of us are writing constantly: we write emails and reports for work, type out text messages with our thumbs, and post on social media, just to name a few examples.

I'd like to guide you into these very simple writing practices that can help you hear the voice of your inner self again. When this happens, you will be astonished at times by what comes out. At other times you are likely to laugh with some relief at seeing the stupid, cruel voices in your head spill out in black and white on paper and realize that they are not your own—I know I do frequently.

This begins the process of sorting and separating your own true inner voice from the chatter of social conditioning and harmful beliefs. This practice also develops trust in who you really are and confidence that you can navigate life according to what you desire.

As you experiment with the prompts, I encourage you to remind yourself of three things:

- 1). I am a writer. I can write to myself and express my feelings, needs, desires, and ideas clearly.
- 2). I'm writing this only for myself and to myself. It's not for anyone else to see, approve of, or criticize.
- 3). I don't need any validation from others in this space; I am learning to be my own best friend and ally.

I nstructions. It's really almost too simple. Your mind might do what mine often does—dismiss this as ineffective because it's not very complicated. Can sitting down with nothing but a pen and a piece of paper for ten or twenty minutes every day and answering two or three basic questions really do anything worthwhile?

While I can't answer that for you, *I'd like to invite you to try it.* Maybe you can tell your mind that this practice is supported by tons of research and many books by experts who know what they're talking about. My mind is a little bit snobby and gets a lot of comfort from things like that.

How to begin:

- 1). Get a notepad and pen.
- 2). Set aside ten minutes in a quiet place (if you feel like writing longer, please do—but ten minutes is a great way to start).
- 3). Write the answers to three questions.

Q uestion One—“*What am I feeling right now?*” Let yourself describe ANY feelings you have—including frustration with the process of writing anything down.

This is where you get to be terribly honest; don't try to be lofty, profound, wise, or kind. Let anything come out that wants to come out. If you feel bored, anxious, tired, afraid, curious, happy, sad... say so. Ask yourself why and let the answers come out on the page.

I encourage you to include physical sensations you're having—describe any discomforts or pain, talk about the small things in your immediate environment that feel good. For example, “I feel my butt nestled solidly in the chair here at Neckar Coffee Shop. My head aches a little because I stayed up too late last night, but the steam from my coffee is a promise that something hot and good will help...”

Most of us are so disconnected from our physical selves that writing a few lines about what's going on around us can help create a more grounded sense.

Remember, nothing is too small or silly to write about. The only thing that matters is being honest with yourself.

Maybe you're wrestling with a tough relationship issue—a hurting friendship or romantic partnership, something with a parent or sibling, a worry about one of your children, or something interpersonal at work. Talk about it. Especially describe how you feel about it.

Q uestion Two—“*What do I need right now?*” Much like the first question, the only thing that matters now is that you let yourself tell the truth. Many of us are not in the habit of saying—or even knowing—our needs. This often started in early childhood, when a parent or caregiver (probably unintentionally) communicated to our young psyches that our needs were unimportant or even wrong. This tells a developing mind that having needs isn't safe and it can take some time and dedicated effort to dismantle the old beliefs. I deal with this in much greater depth in my new book, *The Creative Cure*, and the books I share at the end also go into detail about how deep this goes.

Begin to answer the question, “what do I need right now?” Start small and be honest. It might be something as simple as, “I need to pee.” I suggest that you jump up and do that first before anything else happens. The practice of paying attention to your needs, acknowledging them, and meeting them as quickly as possible, is surprisingly therapeutic. It is an important part of the process of healing the connection to your inner creative self.

Please be honest about your larger needs, too. “I need money right now. I feel really anxious about the debts that have piled up...” or “I need a new car,” or “I need a friend—someone I can trust. Someone I feel safe and seen and heard.”

Questions One and Two are meant to get you started and it doesn't matter where you start. Psychologically speaking, all roads can lead you

home to yourself. Expressing the smallest, most shallow seeming anxiety or desire can be a thread you pull that unravels a knotty issue in your life.

Q uestion Three—*“What would I love?”* This is a magical question in that it has the power to shift you into a state of possibility and imagination. I use it often in my own practice and ask it at some point in nearly every personal guidance session with my clients.

I encourage you to pick one of the items that is a challenge from Questions One or Two and ask this question. Write the answers without judgment or skepticism. If your mind is like mine, it might say something like, “Well of course you’d love to give yourself a break and take a vacation to somewhere warm but how’s that going to happen when your kids need rides to college and you have metric tons of work to do. Get real.”

The point of this question is to simply allow yourself to state what you would love in any given situation.

As you write the words, “I would love...” and follow with a statement of an outcome or feeling you desire, you activate your imagination in a positive way.

Many of us believe that we lose imagination as we get older. This is not true. What happens is that we are trained to stop imagining what we would love—and this starts to happen at a very young age, usually about the time we enter kindergarten or a little before. We are taught to grow up, stop daydreaming, be realistic, and watch out for risks. This doesn’t stop the imagination, it simply trains us to use it to paint scenes of what we don’t want—the downside, the failure, the missed opportunity, and the pain of disappointed dreams.

Question Three is an invitation to let yourself retrain your imagination so that your powerful subconscious mind can begin to turn your choices, behavior, and focus toward what you would love.

You can ask Question Three in a different way, too: “How would I love to feel?” This is often very helpful when you’re in a whirlwind of confusion, anxiety, or insecurity. “How would I love to feel?” Maybe the answer is, “I would love to feel calm and centered right now.” You can follow up with, “How would that feel in my body?” This can lead to taking small actions such as breathing deeply, stretching, and reminding yourself of the truth—“I am safe. I am lovable. I am resourceful.” I have often found that this one question can move me into a different state and help me see the next step forward, rather than remain frozen in anxiety or confusion.

I have used this question to help myself move toward finishing a book, losing weight, supporting my children as they become independent adults, healing friendships, and gaining greater confidence and self-worth in my life.

You can, too.

Many people resist establishing a journal practice because it feels like nothing but a festival of complaints and pettiness. It is important to let everything come out and be honest about it, but the Creative Self Journal practice is much more than that.

As you tune into yourself this way, you will notice that you are much more than the anxieties, depression, angers, or pain that may need to find expression. With a little consistency, this practice has an accrual effect. If you are willing to be patient and gentle with yourself for ten to twenty minutes per day over the course of a few weeks and then months, something will change.

My promise to you is that if you use this simple pattern of questions, you will discover that you develop a new relationship. You will heal and strengthen your connection to your inner creative self. As this happens, you will notice that your daily session isn’t a chore—it’s a conversation with a best friend... you.

This best friend never gets tired of listening to you, no matter how often you repeat the same things day after day. This friend is wise and kind.

Your inner creative self longs to become your ally in creating a life that you love.

I'd like to invite you forward just one step in this process now, because that's how this works—just one step at a time. Isn't that a relief?

Notes:

I'm often asked if it's necessary to write by hand. I will say that if at all possible, please use a notepad or journal and pen. If you write on keyboards all the time, you certainly go faster and more comfortably on your computer or mobile device.

There are two reasons for writing by hand:

1). It provides a pattern interrupt for your brain. When you slow down and do something that feels unfamiliar or even awkward, you are breaking out of your accustomed mental patterns. This allows for new insights and creative ideas to show up.

2). You access different parts of your brain and experience more of the sensory spectrum.

If you have physical pain or limitations that make this impossible, the main thing is that you allow yourself space and time to enter this Creative Self Journaling and ask the questions. Some of my clients use voice journals or recording apps on their phones and find that this helps them. I don't believe in a specific dogma about how journaling must be done. That misses the point of this experience—to heal the connection to your inner creative self.

This ebook, the processes I offer here, and the list of books I provide at the end for further reading are not a substitute for the help of qualified professionals. If you are experiencing anxiety, depression, or other symptoms, please seek professional help. After much research and consultation, this material is proven to complement professional therapy or counseling protocols.

Suggested Reading:

[*The Artist's Way*](#) by Julia Cameron—a classic book on creative recovery

[*Writing Down Your Soul*](#) by Janet Conner—this book develops the process of journaling as a conversation with yourself for healing and transformation

[*The Body Keeps the Score : Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*](#) by Bessel van der Kolk M.D.—a deeply revealing book that also supports the use of journaling in healing past trauma.

[*Belonging—Remembering Ourselves Home*](#) by Toko-pa Turner—this book is a rich invitation to call the orphaned, disowned parts of ourselves home.



Jacob Nordby is the author of *The Divine Arsonist: A Tale of Awakening*, and *Blessed Are the Weird – A Manifesto for Creatives*. His quotes have been shared millions of times around the world. He leads the Creative UnBootcamp course for students around the world, and offers transformational group retreats and individual creative guidance sessions. His third book, [*The Creative Cure*](#), released in 2021 with a forward by Julia Cameron. www.jacobnordby.com