

Life Source Writing

A Reflective Journaling Practice for Self-Discovery,
Self-Care, Wellness and Creativity



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A Reflective Journaling Practice
for Self-Discovery, Self-Care,
Wellness and Creativity

by Lynda Monk, MSW, RSW,
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Life Source Writing – Reflective Journal

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*I dedicate this journal to
you – the person about to
fill these pages with your
heart, soul and life.*

*May you live well and live
fully, whatever that means
to you.*



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Introduction

We human beings have both a hunger and a fundamental need to listen to our inner worlds while paying attention to our outer worlds, in order to enhance our physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual well-being. As simple or complex as this may sound, it is a learned skill to attend to one's inner life and to practice the art of self-awareness. Many practices aim to slow us down so that we can listen, breath and simply be: practices such as yoga, meditation and mindfulness. Life Source Writing is a another tool for cultivating presence helping you to have a deeper connection with your own lived experience.

Our lives are stories which offer us rich material for reflection, transformation and personal growth. Although Life Source Writing is not therapy, it can be therapeutic. It starts from a place of presence, centeredness, acceptance, compassion and mystery, and goes from that place to the written page. You can tap into your authentic voice more readily when the mind and body are in a relaxed state. The practice of reflective journaling supports you to connect with your highest truth and to create a meaningful relationship with your own knowing. This personal writing helps you witness your life and engages you more fully with all that it means to be You.

Within this resource I begin by sharing my own journal writing journey and invite you to consider your unique journaling experience so far – perhaps this is your

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first step on this journey. You will learn about Life Source Writing including the unique five step process that defines this reflective journaling practice. There are many suggested writing prompts, tools and exercises intended to help you tap into your creative expression. There is also an extensive list of writing and well-being references offering further information and inspiration as you deepen your journaling craft and your writer's voice. Finally, your reflective journal pages offer themes, quotes and of course blank space for you to write. Wishing you a great adventure on the page!

The Journal Writing Journey

My Journal Writing Journey

The following is an excerpt from my journal and it highlights my personal journal writing journey (at least as captured when I wrote about it in my journal). Please note that it is an actual journal entry and as such it is unedited.

Personal Journal Entry – from February 28th, 2008

My brown desk had three drawers on the left hand side, and a pencil drawer under the table top of the desk. My favourite part was the bookshelf hutch that sat on top of the desk and created this private little nook for me to lean over, writing in a wooden cave of childhood secrecy. My desk lamp always flickered, a long flourescent bulb that buzzed into the space of my writing. The walls were pink, the room small, a window looking out to our front yard beside me as I wrote. My little pen and pencil set, matching of course, as I am a Virgo, tucked neatly alongside the 2x3 pocket journal, a little loop of vinyl holding them in place, beside the silver metal key hole that could lock my words in place.

I don't remember how old I was when I first started putting words on paper for pleasure and storytelling. Was I printing or writing? Did I pause to check for spelling or just free fall onto the page with no teacher's voice correcting me along the way? Did I tell anyone of this writing obsession or was it a secret? I can see my Nancy Drew books on the shelf above my desk so perhaps it was all very mysterious. Eventually my journal book surrendered the key and the book grew bigger, larger pages, thicker spines, artistic covers, some lined, some blank sheets, coils, spines, the pens were blue, green, purple, then a stint in pencil just in case I had to erase my words leaving no trace of my inner world, thoughts and feelings to be found by another.

In my early twenties, I remember writing in my journal, drinking coffee – regular – one cream, one sugar, and long inhales on DuMarier lights, king size. The paper stained with java and jealousy and mistakes. In University I wrapped in deadlines, books, papers, and learning – often loving my affair with my journal more than discussions of anti oppressive social work practice and neo liberalism and the hungry hippo, explorations of Canada's poor. Prolific in projects, graded for my ideas and compassion and thoughtful analysis of social problems and human suffering, opinions cultivated in my observation of the world around me, watched through the lens of my pen moving over paper in my journal. I can hear the scratch of my .5 mm pilot pen scratching the 20lb sketch pad inking ideals into essays and presentations.

Later, as a young social worker, I knocked on the door of my client's townhouse in a low income housing community off Southdale Road in London, Ontario. Violet (name changed) had 3 children, two from one father, the third with another, and her belly full with babe from her most recent temporary bed partner. She opened the door, not with a greeting but a swing of the door knob into the already shattered drywall. As more pieces of plaster fell onto the hallway floor, I stepped over dog feces and dead diapers, through the opening to the kitchen and asked Violet how her week had been. Dirty dishes stacked on the counter, the table, and a broken glass on the floor in the corner, swept there during our visit the previous week. Her 18 month old son stepping his left foot into the kitty litter box and I reached to swoop him into my arms as Violet set her cigarette onto the edge of a tinfoil pie plate

and asked me if I wanted a cup of coffee, the bottom of the pot still luke warm. She offered me a cigarette and I impulsively and intentionally took it. She had to light it since up until that moment I was a non-smoker and did not have a match. Somehow in the space between our shared inhale and exhale of grey smoke, we connected in the only place we now had in common.

I wrote about that day and the many home visits that followed over the next three years. I'd write about taking Jimmy and Vicky (names changed) to the foster home they often had to go until Violet was able to have her next abusive partner move on. I sat with her with ice packs over black eyes and helped paint over a chicken bone glued to her kitchen wall as she tried to clean her life up. I would pick up Jimmy walking home from the corner store with cigarettes in his pocket at 8 years of age. He would see my car, I would brake and he would sit slouched in the passenger seat of my silver Ford Futura, telling me about the big truck he was going to buy someday, describing in three blocks all the places he would go with his friends.

I wrote and I wrote in those early years as a social worker within child welfare. At midnight, four in the morning after getting home from an emergency child abuse investigation, I would write with the smell of smoke, blood, and lost innocence on my finger tips, in my skin. Hardships, violations, rape, dead babies, battered little boys, traumatized girls, sometimes picking them up in their pajamas and terror to drive them to a stranger's house in the middle of the night. I would not go home right away. I knew I could not sleep, and I would find an all night coffee shop and I would write and smoke and my tears would mix with ink and my night's experience turned into words and blur and moments I would try to forget and yet always remember.

I did not know about vicarious trauma as a twenty-two year old social worker. I had no warning in all those university classes that beyond the ecological model of social work practice and neat theories of human development and Paulo Friere's politics of oppression that all of this would have a smell and a bitterness that I would taste with each swallow, or that I would wake in the night cold with sweat, or feel my heart race when I saw naked skin with bruises and cuts when a four year old girl had to pull

her pants down and show me where Daddy had hit her with his belt. We didn't talk about this at staff meetings or in supervision. We reported statistics and case notes and recorded the facts for court. Every now and then black humour and a chuckle filled the staff room, the sounds always felt broken and cracked to me, less like human laughter and more like the cry of a caged animal. Victims and helpers all in steel sided circumstances – together with no place to go except towards whatever ray of hope and innocence might be seen from the outside looking in, or the inside looking out – either way, always on the wrong side of something – even rightness.

I wrote then. I filled journal after journal after journal of the stories we did not speak. I wrote in the parking lot, sitting in my car, after the funeral of a thirteen-year-old boy who hung himself in his family garage after the last class of the day. I wrote deep into and out the other side of all this pain and suffering, his and mine. I did not know it then but I was writing to keep myself whole, sane and observant of life bigger than all this blackness. I was writing to find and celebrate resiliency, mine and others. I was writing to construct meaning of the most meaningless tragedies. I was writing to hold perspective, stay in touch with optimism. Writing allowed me to keep breathing when I was holding my breath for too long. Writing held me up, sat me down, kept me believing in the power of the human spirit and it still does.

I have written on beach chairs over white sand in Hawaii, put words on pages during pregnancy, miscarriages, marriage and divorce. I have moved my mind and my life across miles and experiences creating myself word by word, reflecting on joy, love, loss, hope, marveling at what I remember and what I forget. I have written while students in my vicarious trauma workshops have done their own reflecting. I facilitate and I pause and I write while they get coffee on their breaks, or work in small groups on an exercise.

I wrote from my mind to my body preparing my womb to release my first born son. I breathed into my lower back, trying to visualize my hips widening. I sat on a big purple birth ball and leaned over to the mattress of my hospital bed and used it as my desk as I wrote during the early stages of labour. I poured pure love onto the

pages with my newborn son cradled in my arms. When I wake in the morning and fold into my husband's arms, my mind wanders to my journal on our nightstand. I kiss him and he rises to make our morning coffee and I reach for my paper and pen, beginning putting words, lists, poems, ideas, longings and gratitude on the page, this space where I live and love and learn.

My journal is a sacred space – it is where I give birth to myself and my life over and over again. This practice of journal writing is at once an extension and the core of who I am as a woman. I know I would be someone different, less here in this world without it. With it, I embrace all that is – as I know it and don't know it in this one moment – whilst all these other moments of my life stack up behind me, layered like rose petals, soft and held up by a strong, spiky stem of lived experience. In this life, with the blank page and full presence, I am complete.

Lynda Monk

Your Journal Writing Journey

What is your personal journal writing journey so far in your life? You might want to write about this.

About Life Source Writing

Life Source Writing is a reflective journaling practice that leads to greater self-discovery, self-care, wellness and creativity.

Life Source Writing is a process for using relaxed, spontaneous writing as a practice for self-awareness and personal well-being. It is a contemplative art. It supports you to be awake and aware of the present.

Life Source Writing integrates the natural healing properties of expressive writing with centering, grounding, relaxation and affirmation techniques. This process allows for deepening the benefits of writing itself while at the same time supports the writer and the writer's voice.

Life Source Writing invites you into the centre of your life, into the heart of yourself. It engages a powerful five step process that supports you to go to the page and helps you be open and available to yourself when you get there.

Life Source Writing is a reflective journaling practice that supports you to meet yourself—your ideas, your creativity, your questions, your answers—on the page.

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It is a practice, in that it is something to return to over and over again—similar to other reflective practices such as yoga, meditation, prayer, and any self-care rituals that lead to feelings of vitality, discovery and well-being in mind, body, heart and spirit.

Life Source Writing is about space—stillness—pause—potential—readiness. It is transformative. Just sitting at the source—that still place within that is all potential, is light, love, creativity—to live at the source, relax at the source – to leap into what is—this is the act of touching the centre of what is – this is what it is to be fully alive. Here we can find stillness within the movement of the breath, and reach out to mirror this movement with our pen gliding over paper, bringing us to and from ourselves all at once.

Life

Lived experience

Story

Sacred

Meaning

Unique

Source

Breath/Chi

Creativity

Expansive

Full potential

All that is

Writing

Expressive

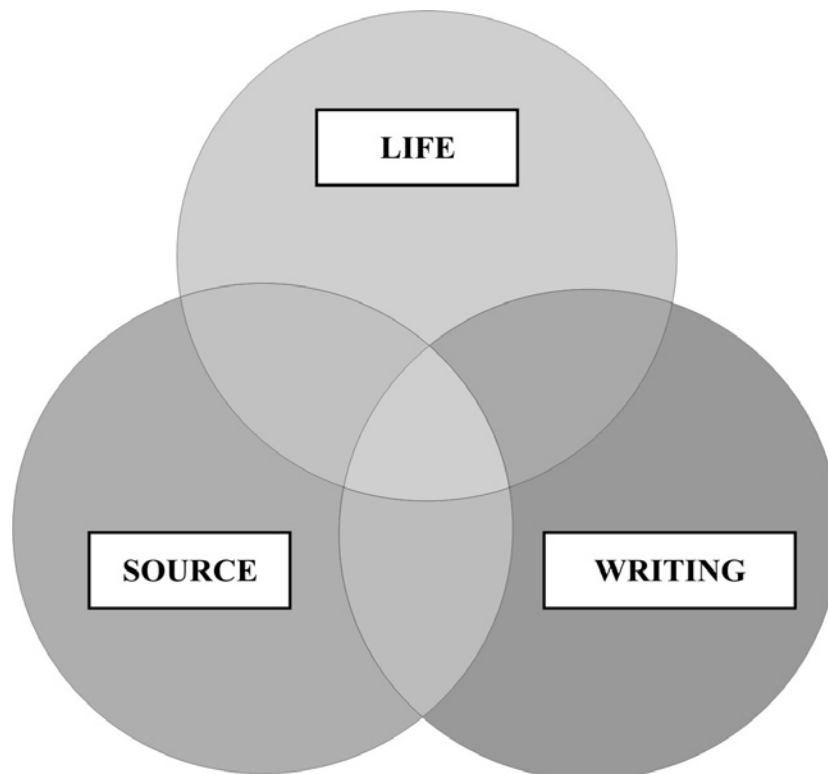
Observant

Authentic

A movement

A voice

Life Source Writing Model



Life Source Writing As a Practice

- Write on a regular basis without censorship, judgment or concern for syntax and grammar
- Dedicate a time for writing each day (or as often as possible)
- Write for writing's sake
- Write for yourself
- Listen to the mind and be aware of the body
- Know your own rhythms

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- Feel your way into what wants to be expressed
- Write and breathe with awareness
- Allow and cultivate silence
- Have trust and faith in the writing process itself

The Ritual of Life Source Writing

- The ritual of writing involves paying attention to your tools (pen, paper) and your space (private, public, quiet, music?...)
- You want to be able to feel the connection and texture of the pen on the paper
- You want to be able to hear your own thinking and feel your own feelings as you write
- Enter your writing with all of yourself, what you know and what you don't know
- Always start where you are at in the moment
- Date your writing

Only Three Rules for Life Source Writing

1. Write often
2. The principle of non-judgment (for self and others)
3. Try not to have any other rules

Life Source Writing: A Five Step Process

Anytime you sit down to your life source writing practice...

1. Arrive Fully to Your Writing
2. Engage the Relaxation Response
3. Write (minimum of 10 minutes)
4. Reflect & Question
5. Affirm

You will find your own rhythm with these important elements of Life Source Writing. I encourage you to make the process and practice your own in ways that feel right to you.

1. Arrive Fully to Your Writing

Anytime we arrive fully to anything we are more Present. Presence is a way of being, a way of focusing and a gift we give to our self and others. It requires that we minimize external distractions and allow ourselves to truly notice and show up for this one moment.

To arrive fully to your writing involves bringing your awareness to the moment and to the act of writing itself. While you are focused here, it means you are not there – this is the act of showing up fully.

To do this, before you write, simply arrive by mentally saying to yourself, “I am here to meet this page and my reflective journaling practice with my full self present.” Take a breath – notice as you inhale, pause and exhale. Say to yourself “I am fully present. I am here to write.” Drawing attention to your breath is one of the simplest ways to arrive fully to any given moment.

Once you are fully present, you can set any intentions you might have for your reflective journaling practice. Your intentions are another way to set your goals, direct your energy, invite your mind, body, heart and spirit to focus in a certain area both consciously and sub-consciously. Intention setting grants permission. Here are examples of intentions you might set for your reflective journaling practice...

“As I write today, I would like to learn more about...”

“As I write today, I would like to deal with...”

“As I write today, I would like to heal...”

“As I write today, I would like to listen deeply to my own inner wisdom...”

2. Engage The Relaxation Response

The relaxation response is the opposite of the stress response. Why is engaging the relaxation response relevant to your reflective journaling and writing process? Because it involves the psychological and physiological state of being that is optimal for creative expression.

Briefly, the stress response occurs within the sympathetic branch of the automatic involuntary nervous system and is responsible for increasing things like blood pressure, breathing rate, muscle tension, insulin and adrenaline. When the stress response is occurring in our minds and bodies this lowers or reduces our creativity, our thought processes, and the functioning of our immune and digestive systems respectively. This is how and why exposure to prolonged levels of high stress can make us vulnerable to illness and cause disease.

On the other hand, the relaxation response, which is responsible for rest and recuperation, occurs within the parasympathetic branch of the automatic involuntary nervous system. In this state, blood pressure, heart rate, metabolism, blood sugar levels, cholesterol levels and so forth all go down. While our thought processes, creativity, immune system and digestive functioning increase. This state is critical for replenishment, cultivating clarity and overall health. It is a fully relaxed state that many people often find lacking in their lives – busyness, rushing about, multitasking, and so forth are the antithesis to the relaxation response.

When you are relaxed this helps you write
and when you write this helps you relax.

Lynda Monk

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The stress response and the relaxation response can not exist at the same time – it is physiologically impossible to have both arousal and calm all at once. What state are you in right now?

Research shows that the relaxation response:

- Is the bodies natural antidote to stress
- Helps us recover and re-energize
- Supports health
- Promotes creative thinking, problem solving and memory
- Helps us interact more effectively
- Scientifically proven to do all of the above
(Benson, 1992; Davis et al., 1995)

In short, you have control over engaging the relaxation response which fosters greater creativity and well-being. Bringing your attention and your choices in sync with this reality supports not only your reflective journaling practice, but is also a key element of your overall health and wellness. Expressive and reflective writing on its own has been proven to result in greater health and well-being (Pennebaker, 2004; Lepore & Smyth, 2002). When you can also bring a relaxed state of being alongside your writing, this is a powerful means for greater creativity and well-being.

How to engage the relaxation response?

Here are some tips for engaging the relaxation response:

Breathing with awareness

You can engage the relaxation response by breathing with awareness. Try this: take a deep breath in and notice the path your breath takes as it enters and leaves your body giving you life. Continue to breathe with awareness for at least one minute.

Eight step process

The following is an eight step process, developed by the author of *The Relaxation Response* (1975/1992). Dr. Herbert Benson suggests doing the following:

1. Pick a phrase or word that reflects your basic belief system
2. Choose a comfortable position
3. Close your eyes
4. Relax your muscles
5. Become aware of your breathing and start using your word as a mantra
6. Maintain a passive attitude (towards intruding thoughts)
7. Continue for a set period of time
8. Practice the technique twice daily (this will train your mind/body to recognize and bring about the relaxation response)

Guided meditation

Guided meditation provides a fast, simple and effective way of uniting with your inner source of wisdom and well-being. Powerful visualization, progressive relaxation and reflection techniques help you achieve increased feelings of calm, peace, balance and profound relaxation. You can purchase guided meditation recordings, including at the Creative Wellness online store (CD or MP3 recordings available) at www.creativewellnessworks.com.

Now that you are relaxed, or at least recognizing the importance of a relaxed state to both your reflective journaling practice and your overall health and well-being, it's time to write.

3. Write

So far, you have arrived fully to your reflective journaling practice. You are relaxed or at the very least aware of the importance of continuing to cultivate a relaxed state to support you as you enter your writing. Step one – arriving fully to your writing, followed by step two – engaging the relaxation response – might have only taken you a few moments to do, or you might have spent a bit of time with these front end elements of your reflective writing practice. There is not a right or wrong way – you will know and find your own right way to use these steps and tools within your writing practice.

Supportive reminders for your writing:

- Simply go to the page and start writing (minimum of 10 minutes).
- In this fully present and relaxed state – tune inward, what do you notice? What do you hear? Is there a story you want to tell, a problem you want to solve, a feeling you need to vent, a memory you want to explore, a goal you want to define, is there a quote you want to start from, or a single word that prompts you...
BEGIN WHERE YOU ARE AT IN THE MOMENT AND WRITE.
- Your writing is the sound of your own voice – your thinking, your feelings, your life – your whole self is here for you, like a beautiful garden in full bloom.
- Remember you are not writing for grammar, syntax, punctuation – Life Source Writing is not about the writing craft, although it greatly cultivates such if you wish, rather this reflective journaling process and practice is about listening, hearing, noticing, capturing, articulating and being present – with yourself and your circumstances – without judgment, with deep curiosity and self love as your guides.
- See pages 33 to 44 for writing prompts, tools and exercises.

Write

You are fully supported

Enjoy!

Writing a journal means that facing your ocean you are afraid to swim across it, so you attempt to drink it drop by drop.

George Sand

Notes:

4. Reflect & Question

It is often our curiosity and our questioning that brings us to the page in the first place. It is this longing that inspires our pens to write, our hearts to feel. You might be wondering about something, trying to sort out your thoughts and feelings, or brainstorming solutions to a challenge you might be having. You might be hungry for a more meaningful relationship with yourself and realize that journaling and writing are pathways into a nurturing and insightful relationship with the self.

Life Source Writing suggests that you bring your curiosity and questions to the other side of your writing as well. Yes, with your reflective journaling practice, you initially go to the page with certain questions, intentions or reflections in mind. It is also powerful to ask questions of the writing you have already done. So before you close your journal – pause, reflect and question. For example, you might ask:

- What does what I wrote mean?
- How does it fit?
- What does it offer?
- How does it change me?
- Is there anything else I want to say?

At times, after writing in your reflective journal you might feel a little confused by what you have written, surprised by something that emerged through the writing process itself, allow yourself to get curious about these areas to. You can write some more and mine into the thoughts and feelings that are emerging, start your continued writing with things like...

- What I mean by this is...
- I also want to say that...

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- I am also wondering about...
- I notice...

And go deeper...

- What's another way this could be?
- What am I resisting?
- What's important to me about this is...
- What can make this easy?
- What's next?
- I am discovering...

Curiosity is a true cornerstone to personal growth and well-being. The very nature of curiosity puts you in a state of wonder and not knowing. Allow yourself to dig down into your writing, to peel off layers and to enter your own wisdom and musings on the page. This is where true self intimacy lives, in the places we truly reveal ourselves – openly, honestly and authentically – you then can act as a witness to your own life.

Notes:

5. Affirm

Affirmation is a way of locking things in while also being in the energy of gratitude. It is a way of constantly expecting the world to support you in your highest sense of well-being, success and truth. Affirmations are tools for bringing about more of what we want in our lives and they can come in many forms including visualizations, mantras, self-talk, inspirational quotes, and simple statements. Ultimately, an affirmation is a statement that describes a goal in its already completed state.

Affirm is the final step of the Life Source Writing process. It is a final pause to acknowledge the time you have spent with your reflective journaling practice. You can affirm this time and yourself by simply stating internally something like:

"I am grateful for the time spent with my writing practice today."

"I appreciate this time to reflect and write and simply be."

You might also use fun affirmation tools such as Angel Cards, Heart Cards, and other resources that foster a validating and positive vibration within you to bring your reflective journaling time to a close.

Notes:

When we as writers talk about finding our voices, we mean: What do I sound like when there is nothing and no one else speaking? What do I have to say once the distractions of my life are stilled?
Laraine Herring

Notes:

About The Brain and Writing...

Left Side Of The Brain

- logical
- words
- reason

Right Side Of The Brain

- abstract
- creative
- images

According to Betty Edwards, author of *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, “drawing is the nonverbal language of art”. I believe writing is the verbal language of art.

The poet John Keats wrote that understanding poetry required that we must be willing to put ourselves in a special state of mind, which Keats called “negative capability”. He described this state as one in which a person “is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts; without any irritable reaching after facts and reason”. This is also a highly recommended state of mind for your life source writing practice!

*Life isn't a
support-system
for art. It's the
other way around.*

Stephen King

Writing Tip...

When you are writing, if you are feeling stuck, or like words won't come, or that your writer's voice is becoming judgmental or rigid, it can be helpful to turn to images to get the right brain more involved in your writing. You might want to keep an imagery journal alongside your writing to help with this balance between your right and left brain.

Writing With the Other Hand

"Because we are naturally right – or left handed – and because we spend our entire lives using our dominant hand for most tasks – forcing ourselves to use the other, or nondominant, hand challenges our bodies to perform very familiar tasks in unfamiliar ways. Writing with the nondominant hand is believed to stimulate parts of the brain not normally used in writing" (Jepson, 2008, p.58). This can open new directions for our writing, our ideas and our lives.

Try this...

Write for five minutes using your nondominant hand. Now stop, what's available to you and your writing from this perspective?

About The Mind and Body...

- They are one and function as a whole
- Sometimes to understand the whole, we need to give attention to the parts
- Breath is the union that creates the whole
- Therefore to bring your whole self to your writing, breathe and write

Life
naturally tends
towards
wholeness and
growth.

Joan Borysenko

Writing Tip...

Try writing from your body and your mind (think of it as “psychosomatic” writing—involve the “psycho” – mind, and somatic – body, into your writing). You can do this by writing from questions such as “if my shoulder could speak it would say...; if my pain could speak it would say...; if my back could speak it would say...; if my movement could speak it would say...; if my stillness could speak it would say...; if my joy could speak it would say...”

Expressive & Spontaneous Writing Techniques developed by others...

- Linda Trichter Metcalf & Tobin Simon, **Writes**, from *Writing the Mind Alive*, 2002
- Julia Cameron, **The Morning Pages**, from *The Artist's Way*, 1992
- Natalie Goldberg, **Writing Practice**, from *Writing Down the Bones*, 1986
- Ira Progoff, **Intensive Journal**, from *At a Journal Workshop*, 1975

Know
Your Teachers,
Mentors and
Supports

Oh, to have the luxury of contemplative time! To pour every ounce of energy into creating beautiful things. To train our eye on one – one – goal at a time. To give freely without being torn in a thousand directions; to live without apology for what's left undone.

This is true freedom. It's what women yearn for and rarely find. Sparks of inspiration are buried under deadlines and dirty laundry. We're too tired at the end of the day to paint the picture or write the poem that danced through our mid-morning daydreams.

The first step: buy a journal (a notebook will do) and promise to write for ten minutes every day. Do it when you're alone, even if it means locking yourself in the bathroom. Do it religiously.

*Ellen Sue Stern
American Author, Lecturer*

Life Source Writing - Reflective Journaling Prompts, Tools and Exercises

Writing prompts, tools and exercises are intended much like the diving board at a pool – they are springboards into your own writing, ways to access and open your authentic voice. You will gravitate toward different tools at various times, trust yourself to know what is most useful for you in this moment and jump in.

Reflective Journal Writing Prompts

What are prompts? Prompts are simple ways to get started – whether on a particular piece of writing, a journal entry, or as a means to help get your creative juices flowing.

Sentence Starter Prompts

Sentence starters are just as they sound – a string of words that start a sentence and you take it from there. You can select one and write, come back to the list and pick another one and write some more. Often single sentence starters unlock your mind, body and memory – taking you into your writing.

Life Source Writing – Reflective Journal

- The other day...
- I lose track of time when...
- I often wonder about...
- I am most proud of...
- I get really excited...
- My greatest joy comes from...
- The campground...
- I was cooking dinner and...
- The lights went off...
- The photo on the wall...
- There was once...
- If I knew I couldn't fail, I would...

In the Moment Prompts

The following prompts are intended to help bring your attention and awareness into the moment and write from this place.

- I feel...
- I can hear...
- I can smell...
- I notice that...
- Right now there is...

Memory Prompts

Our memories offer rich material for our journaling and for self-discovery. The following prompts are intended to help you tap into your memories.

- I remember...
- I forget...

Journal writing can make you grateful for the life you are living – with all its complexity.

It can make you laugh, seethe, cry, howl, rejoice.

List Prompts

Lists can also help stimulate your memory. What comes to mind from these lists, select one and start to write.

- Jobs you've had
- Your vacations
- All the houses you have lived in
- Friends you've lost touch with
- Friends you've had for years
- Birthday parties
- Favourite items of clothing
- Things you collect
- Inspiring quotes
- Most exciting moment
- Peak experiences in your life so far
- Lessons learned

It can bring to life your artist's soul.

It can make you honest.

It can give you a greater sense of choice about how you are living your life.

Stephanie Dowrick
Author of *Creative Journal Writing*

Life Source Writing – Reflective Journal

Create your own writing prompts

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Reflective Journal Writing Tools

Journal writing tools are different techniques you can bring into your writing to help foster creativity, capture lots of ideas, and explore things from new perspectives.

Free Writing is a term used to describe the act of going to the page without concern for the destination when you get there. This type of writing is always free from concern about grammar and other language rules.

Timed Writing is free writing with a time limit. You can do a timed writing based on a topic, from a prompt, or just pick up your pen and write. Timed writings can be five minutes, twenty minutes, three hours, a two-day retreat... you decide.

Powerful Questions are open ended questions that deepen our reflections and help us learn more about ourselves. Select a question and simply start journaling your response. There is no right or wrong answer, the significance is in being with the question itself and allowing the answers to find their own way.

- What do I resist?
- What am I resisting at this time in my life?
- What do I tolerate?
- What am I tolerating at this time in my life?
- What do I say “yes” to?
- What do I say “no” to?
- What is my biggest dream for my life?
- What gets in my way?
- What am I unwilling to change?
- What is the decision I have been avoiding?
- What is it to be gentle with myself?
- What acknowledgement can I give myself today?
- What is it to be focused?
- For what, am I motivated?
- Where do I limit myself?
- Where do I shine?
- What’s next?
- What’s here right now?

Life Source Writing – Reflective Journal

Create your own powerful questions

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Objects

Take a look around your home or office or the environment you are in right now. What objects do you see? Select an object that has a great deal of meaning to you. Write about the story of this object.

Writing from Quotes

You can collect quotes and use them to inspire your thoughts and feelings. You can launch from a quote into your own reflective journaling and writing. A couple of quotes to get you started...

“Let yourself be silently drawn by the stronger pull of what you really love.” Rumi

“If I create from the heart, nearly everything works; if from the head, almost nothing.” Marc Chagall

Reflective Journal Writing Exercises

Writing exercises offer some guidance, suggestions, activities or ideas you can use and explore within your reflective journal.

Body Break

Place your hands together, palm to palm in front of you. Allow your hands to open, like the cover of a book. Separate them as slowly as you can. Notice how it feels when skin touches skin, and how it feels when separation occurs. Now write...

“Open and close this book of your body as many times as you like.”

This exercise is from *Writing Begins with the Breath: Embodying Your Authentic Voice* by Laraine Herring.

Look Ahead

Look ahead six months. Standing there, what decisions would you make today?

Write.

Look ahead five years. Standing there, what decisions would you make today?

Write.

Change of Scenery/Regaining Flow

If you ever get stuck or experience what some refer to as “writer’s block” – here are some suggestions to help you regain your expressive flow.

Change Your Environment

If you are writing sitting in your favourite recliner, get up, walk around, move to the couch, to the bedroom, to the kitchen table, look around, what is new here?

Shift from being indoors to outdoors, notice the sound of birds or traffic or whatever surrounds you. Now what's available to your writing?

Move Your Physical Body

Your body is the home for your emotions, your mind and your spirit. All parts of you need to be engaged to really tap into your voice, your essence. Turn on some music, dance in your living room. Go to an exercise class. Ride your bike. Do some Yoga. Start moving your body in any way that you wish. Leave the writing for a bit. Get physical and return to the page. What does your movement have to say?

Perspectives Exercise

Choose a topic that is important to you. Generate a list of at least five perspectives you could hold about this topic and write from each perspective. Which perspective do you want to choose to be in about this topic? Write about that too.

For example, the topic is Weight Loss. The perspectives might be:

1. The *It's Time perspective* – I have been wanting to lose weight for a few years now and it is time to take action.
2. The *Why Bother perspective* – my weight is average, why bother putting all the work into trying to lose weight.

3. The *Personal Best* perspective – being my ideal weight is a commitment to being my personal best in all aspects of my life. My weight is just one more reflection of caring for myself.
4. The *I'm Too Tired* perspective – I have enough on my plate and I am too tired to also fit in running, yoga and getting to the gym.
5. The *Healthy Self* perspective – I value living a healthy life and being a healthy weight is an extension of this core value.

Choose a perspective: The *Personal Best* perspective.

Journal: How does this perspective support me to lose weight? What's available here in this perspective?

Walking Meditation

Go for a walk in as natural an environment as possible – perhaps in a park, along the beach, amidst a trail in the forest – anywhere that gets you in touch with nature and a bit removed from noise and multiple distractions. As you walk, notice your feet making contact with the earth beneath you, your heel, sole of your foot, toes all touching the earth. Notice the placement of each foot as you walk. Move as slowly as you can. Stay connected to your breath as you move. After at least twenty minutes of this walking meditation, pick up your journal and write.

Here is an excerpt from my own journal following an exercise with similar instructions during a writing workshop facilitated by Natalie Goldberg, author of *Writing Down the Bones*:

Moving Slowly in the Garden at Hollyhock

Natalie said move as slowly as you can, placing the bottom of your feet gently against the earth. Feel the connection with the ground beneath you and notice your breath as it enters and leaves your body.

So that's what we did, all 40 of us at Natalie Goldberg's writer's retreat at Hollyhock September 14–19, 2002.

We walked slowly in the garden.

I silently put one foot in front of the other. Slowly I lifted up my right foot, placed it ahead of me on the soft dirt path, then raised my left foot and let it move forward and meet the earth. I noticed my breathing. I named red carnations, poppies (right foot), hostas, hollyhocks, black-eyed Susans (left foot, step).

At first this garden stroll felt peaceful and relaxing. I followed Anna Maria like a baby duckling, not thinking for myself direction or turns in the path. Mindlessly rather, mindfully I kept placing one foot in front of the other, garden snails moving faster than I, slugs appearing hasty in their movement compared to my slow walk in the garden. Bees searched for pollen, small birds took flight from slender green stems, and white butterflies swooped like angels at waist height. Soon the slow motion took on its own rhythm, feeling almost separate from my will but intrinsic to my body.

Moving methodically and intentionally, feeling awake, alive, and aware: After about 20 minutes of this meditative march, I began to feel restless, near the edge of agitated. The walk stopped feeling relaxing and started to feel painfully slow. I noticed the wooden gate between the garden shed and the gift store and I felt like bolting. I wanted to lengthen my step, stretching longer, faster, into a sprint through the parking lot, down the road and into the wide open space of freedom and speed and distraction. But despite this temptation, I just kept walking along the path in step with all the other ducklings.

In the silence of this sojourn, I started wondering why I felt so agitated. Why did I want to bolt from the gentleness of the stroll and the splendor of the garden? I continued inching over the earth. I started recalling all the

things and people from whom I have bolted, including my husband and first house. The job selling photocopiers, my lover on the sail boat, ideas for books, cities I have lived in, my family after my grandma died, feelings about being adopted, memories of the time he choked me in South America, one university degree to the next. Right foot, left foot.

As I recalled my bolting, I stopped noticing my breath. Perhaps I was holding it? I stopped noticing green leaves, thorny rose branches, and wild orange poppies. I no longer was connected to the bottom of my feet touching the ground. I was tossed away. Natalie said, "Don't be tossed away. Stay with it. Stay with your resistance and your fear and you will crack open. Your writing will crack open." In the slow moving walk in the garden, I could feel myself cracking open and I wanted to fly like a butterfly light and free.

When do I walk slowly?

What cracks me open?

What do I fear?

When do I bolt?

How am I in my own stillness?

Who am I in silence?

I am trying to move more gently through my own life's garden.

Resources

There are many great books that are filled with journal writing prompts, tools and exercises. Some of my favourite resources include:

Life Source Writing – Reflective Journal

Journal to the Self: Twenty-two paths to personal growth

by Kathleen Adams

One to One: Self-understanding through journal writing

by Christina Baldwin

Pencil Dancing: New ways to free your creative spirit

by Mari Messer

Writing for Your Life: A guide and companion to the inner worlds

by Deena Metzger

Eat Mangoes Naked; The Bodacious Book of Succulence;

Inspiration Sandwich... Anything by SARK

Get Creative

Create your own prompts, tools and exercises. Find your own favourite journal writing resources and inspirational companions. Creativity has no bounds – allow yourself to dwell with infinite possibilities – both on and off the page!

Have fun.

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We do not write in order to be understood;
we write in order to understand.

Cecil Day-Lewis

Your Reflective Journal

the invitation to write
returning to the self
personal growth
creating sacred space



The Invitation To Write

The pages that follow hold the space for you to write and reflect and simply be. There are quotes held in the corner of the page, resting there for you to use, bump into, write from or write into – they are there to support and inspire you as you write your own unique self onto paper.

Enjoy

Arrive

Discover

Wonder

Feel

Nurture

Breathe

Be curious

Replenish

Reflect

Reframe

Reveal

Wander

Decide

Life Source Writing – Reflective Journal

Play

Open

Notice

Remember

Forget

Dance

In

The

Moment

*You have to give
yourself the space
to write without a
destination.*

Natalie Goldberg

Now...

Write

Write

Write

Your Reflective Journal

We have to accept ourselves in order to write. Now none of us does that fully; few of us do it even halfway.

Don't wait for one hundred percent acceptance of yourself before you write, or even eight percent acceptance.

Just write.

The process of writing is an activity that teaches us about acceptance.

Natalie Goldberg

Your Reflective Journal

Remember, you are not writing to create literature; build an archive; justify your existence; leave a memoir; or entertain, amuse, placate, or pacify an audience (although these often result). You are writing to expand your perspectives, to create openings in your life, to advance the action in your personal story, to glimpse a different picture of yourself. You are writing to gain power.

Laura Cerwinski

Your Reflective Journal

*Creativity is the
imagination at play
with the things it
loves.*

Carl Jung

Your Reflective Journal

*Write yourself: your
body must make
itself heard. Then
the huge resources
of the unconscious
will burst out.*

Hélène Cixous–Sorties

Your Reflective Journal

*Creativity requires
the courage to let go
of certainties.*

Erich Fromm

Your Reflective Journal

*See life as it is, but
write about life as it
might be.*

*Write what won't
let you sleep in the
middle of the night.*

Paul Raymond Martin

Your Reflective Journal

*Writing asks us
to settle inside of
ourselves and be
awake.*

Natalie Goldberg

Your Reflective Journal

*I want to write but
more than that I
want to bring out all
kinds of things that
lie buried deep in
my heart.*

Anne Frank

Your Reflective Journal

*Writing is fueled
by your
creative life force...*

*which once
unleashed has
its own
mysterious power...*

*just as words
themselves do.*

Caroline Joy Adam

Your Reflective Journal

*The act of
moving the pen
across
the page
can be meditative,
creating a
calming state.*

Henriette Anne Klauser



Returning To The Self

Life can be so full there are times when it distracts us from ourselves. Returning to the self is an intentional act where you consciously choose to be present, to notice, to connect with your inner life while being fully aware of your outer world. As you return to the self, you are naturally more in tune with your thoughts, feelings, and choices. It is in the now where well-being and healing reside. As you turn within you can tap into the deep reserves of energy, vitality and wholeness that are always there for you. When you return to the self, you are in touch with a universal life force, your life force. Your reflective journaling practice is both a tool and a companion for this inner journey, for this deep presence with yourself and your life.

Your Reflective Journal

*The world
outside is a
reflective mirror
of the love
we hold within.*

Julie Blue

Your Reflective Journal

*Your vision
will become
clear
only when you
look into
your heart.*

*Who looks
outside, dreams.*

*Who looks inside,
awakens.*

Carl Jung

Your Reflective Journal

*You can have
anything
you want
if you
want it desperately
enough.*

*You must
want it with an
exuberance
that erupts through
the skin and
joins the energy
that created
the world.*

Sheila Graham

Your Reflective Journal

*When
we are ready
to listen with
our heart,
we are
transformed.*

Dr. James Levin

Your Reflective Journal

*Besides the
noble art of
getting things done,
there is
the noble art
of leaving things
undone.*

*The wisdom of
life consists in the
elimination of
non-essentials.*

Lin Yutang

Your Reflective Journal

*Arriving someplace
more desirable at
some future time
is an illusion.
This is it.
We take care of
the future best
by taking care of the
present now.*

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Your Reflective Journal

*The progress of our
soul is like a perfect
poem. It has an
infinite idea
which once
realised makes all
movements full
of meaning and joy.*

Rabindranath Tagore

Your Reflective Journal

*Be patient toward
all that is unsolved
in your heart and try
to love the questions
themselves like
locked rooms and
like books that are
written in a very
foreign tongue. Do
not now seek the
answers, which
cannot be given you
because you would
not be able to live
them. And the point
is, to live everything.
Live the questions
now. Perhaps you
will then gradually,
without noticing
it, live along some
distant day into the
answer.*

Rainer Maria Rilke

Your Reflective Journal

*Ah! To do nothing
– and do it well.*

Veronique Vienne

Your Reflective Journal

When we allow ourselves quietness and inner contact regularly, we may no longer need to get sick in order for our inner selves to get our attention.

Shakti Gawain



Personal Growth

Personal growth means something different to each of us. The heart of personal growth is deepening our learning and forwarding our action in directions that foster our most authentic, healthy and joy filled life. It is the way we show up new to our lives and our circumstances – with greater self awareness always being a key goal. Your reflective journaling practice supports you to have more relaxation and self nurturing, while helping you cultivate deeper levels of insight and self intimacy. This is where true personal growth happens – within a loving relationship with yourself – where you take the time to be kind and gentle with yourself – where you listen to your own knowing – in this case, where you write it all down – bringing you closer to this life you are living.

Your Reflective Journal

*The important
thing is this: To be
able at any moment
to sacrifice what
we are for what we
could become.*

Charles Dubois

Your Reflective Journal

*You need chaos in
your soul to give
birth to a dancing
star.*

Friedrich Nietzsche

Your Reflective Journal

The truth is that our finest moments are most likely to occur when we are feeling deeply uncomfortable, unhappy, or unfulfilled. For it is only in such moments, propelled by our discomfort, that we are likely to step out of our ruts and start searching for different ways or truer answers.

M. Scott Peck

Your Reflective Journal

*People are like
stained-glass
windows.
They sparkle and
shine when the
sun is out, but when
the darkness sets in,
their true beauty is
revealed only if there
is a light
from within.*

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross

Your Reflective Journal

Change. It has the power to uplift, to heal, to stimulate, surprise, open new doors, bring fresh experience and create excitement in life. Certainly it is worth the risk.

Leo Buscaglia

Your Reflective Journal

*The only
person you are
destined to
become is the
person you
decide to be.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Your Reflective Journal

*Life isn't about
finding yourself. Life
is about creating
yourself.*

George Bernard Shaw

Your Reflective Journal

*Look for your own.
Do not do what
someone else could
do as well as you.
Do not say, do not
write what someone
else could say,
could write as well
as you. Care for
nothing in yourself
but what you feel
exists nowhere else
and out of your self
create, impatiently
or patiently... the
most irreplaceable of
things.*

Andre Gide

Your Reflective Journal

*Patience is peace.
Learning to be
patient is a continual
practice that
takes years to ripen.
Let it unfold,
day by day, and
be gentle with
your self in the
learning.*

Joan Borysenko

Your Reflective Journal

*If you begin
to create the results
you want today,
you are more
prepared to create
the results
you want ten years
from now.*

Robert Fritz



Creating Sacred Space

Sacred space is any space – location, time, moment – that you claim as yours, as somehow important to who you are and who you are becoming. It is a space – both literal and metaphorical – infused with what has meaning to you. Your core values are being honoured here. You are aware of all that is – you might call that GOD, or spirit, or nature, or breath, or intuition, or this deep knowing and connection you have with something greater than yourself – this is present in sacred space. Meaning, values, and awareness create resonance within you and combine to form energy that supports you to take charge of your life and live fully.

Sacred space, as I choose to refer to it here, is any location, symbol, intention or moment that allows you to notice what is, to hear your own thinking, to be fully present in the now. You create sacred space every time you show up to know yourself deeply, to be with the truth of who you are – you create sacred space when you reflect and write and this sacred space in turn creates you.

Your Reflective Journal

A sacred space is any space that is set apart from the usual context of life... You really don't have a sacred space, a rescue land, until you find somewhere to be that's not a wasteland, some field of action where there is a spring of ambrosia – a joy that comes from inside, not something external that puts joy into you – a place that lets you experience your own will and your own intention.

Joseph Campbell

Your Reflective Journal

*Magic moves
across the Earth
connecting, waving,
creating. Like a giant
ribbon on a gift
of love breathing,
flowing, waiting.*

Pat Rothero

Your Reflective Journal

We sit silently and watch the world around us. This has taken us a life to learn... for silence is pure. Silence is holy. It draws people together... this is the great paradox.

Nicholas Sparks

Your Reflective Journal

*In the dew of little
things, the heart
finds its morning and
is refreshed.*

Kahlil Gibran
The Prophet

Your Reflective Journal

*Love winter, when
the plant says
nothing.*

Thomas Merton

Your Reflective Journal

Advice from a Tree

“Stand Tall and Proud

Sink your roots deeply into the Earth

Reflect the light of a greater source

Think long term

Go out on a limb...

Be flexible

Remember your roots”

Enjoy the view!”

Ilan Shamir

Your Reflective Journal

Think of your own home. Is there a place there that you, and those with whom you live, to be still, to be quiet? Having such a space is important, for when you go there, you are immediately surrounded by a feeling that you want to go in.

David Kundtz

Your Reflective Journal

*You know they
straightened out the
Mississippi River
in places, to make
room for houses
and livable acreage.
Occasionally the
river Floods these
places. "Floods"
is the word they
use, but in fact it
is not flooding; it
is remembering.
Remembering where
is used to be. All
water has a perfect
memory and is like
that: remembering
where it was.
Writers are like
that: remembering
where we were,
what valley we ran
through, what the
banks were like, the
light that was there
and the route back
to our original place.*

Toni Morrison

Your Reflective Journal

*I am what
is around me.*

Wallace Stevens

Your Reflective Journal

*I stand between
quiet and silence.*

Lizzie Wann

Summary

Life Source Writing is intended to support you to go to the blank page often. The five steps offered are like a wrap around to your reflective journaling practice, with arriving fully and engaging the relaxation response as the foundation to going to the page, followed by reflecting, questioning and affirming your writing and your experience while there.

As we begin to explore our lives, our experiences, and ourselves through reflective journal writing we naturally become more self aware, we instinctually look for ways to accept ourselves, to love ourselves and to honour who we are and who we are becoming.

We also tap into a deep well of vitality, truth and authenticity as we write our lives within our journals. We start to notice our habits, our patterns, our ways of being, perhaps we come face to face with our perpetual doing. We get invited to arrive with awareness into this one moment, into an intimate listening of our inner selves while engaged more fully with our outer lives.

We open. We soften. We transform. We grow. In *The Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, Mansfield writes: "Everything in life that we really accept undergoes a change." As we get to know ourselves and accept ourselves we change.

Life Source Writing – Reflective Journal

It is my hope that the Life Source Writing process gives both form and support to your unique experience with reflective journaling. Always know that when you engage in the act of self-discovery and self-care you are choosing a path of courage and meaning. Also remember that although writing is a solitary act, the collective benefits from our individual efforts to be seen and known.



About
Lynda Monk, MSW, RSW
& Creative Wellness

Lynda is the founder of Creative Wellness, a coaching and consulting business that specializes in work–life balance. As a registered social worker and life coach, she helps individuals and organizations cultivate clarity and find their balance through alignment with core values – leading to greater success, wellness and fulfillment in both life and work.

She recently produced the Creative Wellness Guided Meditations CD © 2008 including six mini retreats for balance, self–care, replenishment, clarity, relaxation and celebration – a resource for stress management and well–being in mind, body, heart and spirit.

Life Source Writing – Reflective Journal

Lynda has been journal writing and deepening her own creative writing voice for over twenty years. She is currently authoring a memoir of adoption entitled *Umbilical Cord* which is being created in part from her own reflective journal and life source writing practice. She is also co-authoring, with Ahava Shira and Wendy Judith Cutler, a book entitled *Writing Alone Together: a creative journal memoir and writing companion*. She has over twenty professional publications including training manuals, workbooks and articles across topics such as suicide prevention, self-care, stress management, vicarious trauma, healthy workplaces and care for the caregiver.

Life Source Writing: A Reflective Journaling Practice for Self-Discovery, Self-Care, Wellness and Creativity © 2009 – is available as an e-book or in hard copy via the Creative Wellness online store at www.creativewellnessworks.com. Life Source Writing Retreat Workshops are hosted on Salt Spring Island, BC and are also available in your location or within your organization by request. Watch for the new Life Source Writing Virtual Retreat – virtual retreats are conveniently and affordably accessed by telephone. Feel welcome to contact lynda@creativewellnessworks.com for more details.

Please visit www.creativewellnessworks.com and sign-up for our free “Creative Wellness Tips and Tools” bi-weekly newsletter and receive your free copy of “The Top 10 Tips for Balanced Living.”

Be well and write. Write and be well.

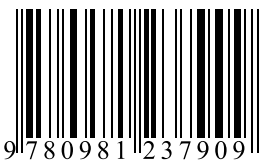
Lynda Monk

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