

Writing Down Life, A Guide to Becoming a Lifelong Journaler in 10 Minutes a Day

Hello and welcome! It is so nice to meet you here on the pages of this little booklet. My name is Mackenzie Chester. I am a homeschooling mother of six children ages 10 and under and I live a creative life that flows in and out of visual arts, music, and blogging. The most important practice in my life as a writer/musician/artist and a mother is hands-down keeping a journal. Journaling is the heartbeat of my creative life. It is the thread that is stitched through every changing season of my life. It is the way I recognize myself--like a mirror for my soul. You will never see me without a journal close by.

Do you have a stack of journals that you started but never finished? Have you always wanted to write your story on the pages of a blank book but never knew where to start? Do you feel like you are so run down by life that you have very little time to reflect on what is actually happening underneath the surface? Do you have the bones of good ideas that never get fleshed out?

If you said yes to any of these questions, this little guide is for you.

Journaling is a life-changing practice. It has the potential to jumpstart your creative life, to make you more focused, to bring clarity to confusing chapters of your life, to help you process your day-to-day human experience in a way that is empowering and life-giving. It gives you the ability to remember, to work through things that you want to forget, to capture and catalogue the thoughts and ideas that are important to you in each changing season of your life. And it is ultimately the writing down of a story that is uniquely yours and *only you* can tell.

And the best part?

It is soooooo easy to put into practice. So for whatever reason you are you came here, welcome! I hope that in this simple guide you find the tools for using pen and paper to record something that is meaningful in your life.

Let's get started.

How Do I Begin?

I know this sounds too simple, but to become a journaler, all you have to do is sit down and write.

Let's talk about making this process as easy and effective as possible.

What you need:

A pen or pencil

Something to write in
10 minutes a day

My recommendation is that you start with a notebook you already have laying around your house. If you have to buy something, that puts you one more step away from beginning. A composition notebook is a perfect first journal. It is solid enough to feel like a book, but it is not so beautiful that you're afraid to write in it. If you have an old journal that you started but never finished, turn to the next clean page, date it, and begin. It's still your life. It is all connected.

I prefer pens with a nice flow of ink, because when I start writing, I don't like to get cramped up from pushing down too hard. I don't like to stop to sharpen pencils or even click the mechanical ones. This is obviously a personal preference. Some people prefer to write with pencils. Try to find something (again, around your house if possible) that you enjoy holding in your hand and moving across the page.

You have your pen, you have your notebook. There is just one more thing you need: 10 minutes of uninterrupted time. I know for some of us, especially those of us with little ones, even ten minutes of uninterrupted time is a stretch. But think about your day and see if there is a time where you can daily make ten minutes without interruptions a 90% possibility. This is your daily journaling time.

What do I write?

Okay, this is the amazing part. When you are beginning the practice of journaling, it doesn't matter what you write. Let me say that again. **It doesn't matter what you write.** What we are trying to do in these 30 days is help your brain to connect your thoughts with words. So whatever you are thinking, you can write it down. There does not have to be anything profound written here. It doesn't have to be nice and share-worthy for your children's children to read. You can rip it out and burn it as soon as you've finished if it is something you would never want anyone to see. All you have to do is keep your hand moving for ten minutes, writing whatever comes into your mind. If you can't think of anything to write, you can hit go on the timer and say something like this:

Ten minutes. I have no idea what I'm going to write for ten minutes. I don't like doing this. It feels weird. But I have to keep writing. I got up at six o'clock this morning. The baby was crying. The baby is sweet. She is six months old. How quickly time flies. I can't believe what a blur life is... It seems like yesterday she was born. I remember her birth so clearly...

This is a great example of boring writing. It is total stream of consciousness and nothing I would ever care to read again or share with anyone. This is going to make up a great portion of your journaling entries, especially in your first journal. Isn't it great??? There is no pressure to write

anything amazing. But what you will see happening is this: The more you practice writing out your thoughts, the more you will find meaning buried within the pages of your handwriting. You will see little glimmers of interesting writing. You will begin to see themes emerging that are important to you. You will write down memories that you will be so glad that you didn't forget. The memories will have a depth to them that a photograph can not touch. You will begin to recognize the things that have value to you, and your writing will reflect that proportionately.

The guidelines are simple:

Set a timer.

Write your thoughts.

Try to keep your hand in constant motion.

Don't stop writing until the 10 minutes are up.

Repeat daily.

(And when I say daily, I mean as often as possible. If you miss a day, pick it back up the next. That is real life. If you hit your journal most days, you will begin the daily habit of journaling and you will reap the incredible benefits of routinely writing down your life.)

It is literally that simple. Why not start right now???

Love and lots of pages filled with the story only you can tell,

Mackenzie Chester

Thank you for reading this little guide. For more tips on staying creative while raising a family, building creative family culture, and finding meaning in everyday life, visit my website at www.mackenziechester.com

Ps. Some Ideas for when you can't think of anything to write about:

The ideas are there, in your head already, waiting to be pulled out and scribbled down on the page. But some days, it is helpful to have a little spark to start your creative fire going. If you need some ideas, here is a quick list to get you started.

1. I remember... (This can go on and on and on. Just start with writing down memories from different seasons of your life.)
2. Make a chronological list of all the books that have shaped your life.
3. Write out a prayer.
4. Make a list of all of the memorable meals of your life.

5. Choose one of the senses and describe a memory that is deeply rooted in smell, taste, sight, sound, or touch.
6. Try to describe a memory as a photograph.
7. Write about something you would like to forget. (Feel free to rip this one out and burn it when you are done. I really mean that.)
8. Write about a gift that you have been given.
9. What do you remember about a person who has passed away?
10. How is your life different than you thought it would be at this age?
11. List everything you can remember about junior high.
12. Write about a teacher that had an impact on your life.
13. Make a list of things that you hope to do one day.
14. Make a list of all the names of people you remember from your childhood.
15. What does a typical day look like for you? Write about it.
16. Make a list of all the places you have had dreams about.
17. Write about a person who changed your life.
18. Record everything that you remember that has happened today.
19. Write about a place you took a walk. What did you see, touch, smell, experience on that walk?
20. Write about a special birthday party.
21. Write in detail about a holiday that stands out in your memory.
22. Explain how to do something that only you know how to do.
23. Write out your life history in the movies you have watched.
24. Describe your idea of the perfect day.

25. Imagine your life ten years from now. Write it down.
26. Write about a person with whom you have a complicated relationship.
27. Write the story of the day you met one of the most important people in your life.
28. Make a list of things that make you happy.
29. Make a list of things that drive you crazy.
30. Make a chronological list of the songs that have defined your life.