

Manage yourself by journaling

Daily writing can be wonderfully therapeutic, insightful, and even helpful in managing your time and yourself. And beginning a new year at college – whether for the first time or not – can be a great time to start a new and helpful habit.

Journaling – simply recording your ideas, plans and goals – is a useful way to organize your thoughts, priorities your objectives and evaluate your progress. Of course, there are many other benefits to journaling; in fact, the list of benefits is pretty expansive:

Journaling evokes mindfulness, making you aware of how you spend your time, what influences your decisions, and even how you interact with others.

It can help you achieve your goals by giving you a daily reminder to focus on what's important to you and offering you insight into how much you're actually investing in your goals.

It can also build emotional intelligence as you explore what motivates other people in your life, how they might make their own decisions or form their own opinions.

Journaling Improves your communication skills simply through the practice of writing. As you stretch yourself to express your feelings and objectives, you'll see your vocabulary naturally grow to include the more precise and specific words you need.

It sparks your creativity by giving you a private, safe space to explore ideas you might otherwise ignore or set aside.

It can enhance your self-confidence, too, as you see yourself achieving short- and long-term goals, exploring your own thoughts and your decision-making abilities, and watching the growth and development that takes place over time.

Of course, the hardest part of journaling is simply getting started. That blank page can seem intimidating, so start with small steps. First choose your medium. Will you write in a notebook? If so, choose your favorite, along with the perfect pen or pencil. Of course, you might prefer to write on your laptop or tablet or even use an app on your smartphone. Choose a tool you're comfortable using so you'll be eager to work.

An important component to choosing your medium will be deciding how you want to document your journaling. Sure, you can write prose; it's the traditional way to go. But if writing isn't your thing, consider poetry or just sentence fragments. Or get a bit more creative and record your thoughts by cartooning or creating word clouds... whatever suits you.

Next, determine what you'll write about. A simple starting point is to simply document your activities: where did you go, what did you do, what do you plan to do later. Then you can start to add more complex observations and insights as you get in the habit: what scares you, what interests you, what you saw today. You can work yourself up to more self-aware topics, like decisions you're contemplating (no matter how small) and what motivates you or holds you back. And if you find you have writer's block one day, look back at previous entries to see what has interested you in the past.

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If you find it challenging to get started each day, consider journaling before you even get out of bed, or make it the last thing you do before you go to sleep. Keep yourself inspired with a list of possible journaling topics or writing prompts (my favorite childhood memory, for example).

No matter what you choose to document in your daily journaling, view it as an investment in yourself and your goals. It doesn't take much time each day, and it's definitely worth the effort.