

Writing: Be a lamp unto yourself! Sort out your thoughts, emotions, and patterns.

By Bob W.

For me, the key to changing harmful patterns was discovering the extraordinary value of keeping a diary or journal. Through keeping one, I learned about how people, places, and things influence my mental, physical, and emotional health, which in turn affects my eating choices. Get to know *your* DANGER zones and what supports *your* success.

A food diary or journal is like a treasure map—is a tool to help you learn:

1. It helps end denial, “Oh, it’s not that bad!” and fosters honesty with yourself.
2. It helps you see patterns of alcohol and drug use, foods, people, places and events.
3. It helps you develop compassion toward yourself and gratitude for others who have helped you along the way.
4. It helps you see how baby steps, over time, will make a HUGE difference in your life!

Through writing in a journal you can really learn about your eating patterns. Sometimes you might find that you don’t want to face your behaviors or yourself. At those times, it may be too painful to see what you are doing.

Explore record keeping using various styles & topics for your journals

Why keep records? Good managers keep records. Come to know yourself and to honor you with yourself choices!

- ❖ You will see what is happening in your life.
- ❖ You can identify patterns (people, places, and foods). You will see patterns that promote success and patterns that show you "danger zones"--areas where you get off track.
- ❖ You are then able to review the facts and then PLAN realistic solutions!

Records help you see what is happening and track your goals. You may see patterns you want to change, and patterns that show your progress. Keeping a diary can also trigger a positive response, because when you write an entry, you'll have the opportunity to *see and think* about your choices. Choose journal tools that support your awareness and ability to untangle patterns and then practice positive substitutions that can work for you.

Be skilled in the art of learning from every situation—draw forth what is waiting to be born.

Journaling is writing down your thoughts, feelings, or memories in whatever type of writing method you choose.

There are many different types of journals

1. **The Log-Type Journal** is used to help one to achieve specific goals. You can take baby steps toward your plan each day without feeling overwhelmed. It can give you a great sense of accomplishment with every step you take.
2. **The Healing Journal** is used for those who want to heal themselves emotionally, physically and/or spiritually. The beauty of this type of journal is that it can be your friend. It is nonjudgmental. It can help you feel better as you write, somehow, magically, you can often come up with the answers you need in order to heal yourself. Healing does not always mean cure, but it can mean improvement.
3. **The Cathartic and Unsent Letter Journal** can be used to help vent our frustrations. Putting your feelings down on paper gives you the opportunity to think things through, calm down, and put everything in its proper perspective.

Topics to explore

Which situations and times do people or social groups influence you the most? At work? During pot lucks? At your church or spiritual group? With family and friends? At the neighbors? On vacations and holidays? At restaurants? When you're feeling overwhelmed (too many needs and requests for your time) and out of balance? What's your challenge?

Consider that you probably have been through these situations numerous times in the past. What can you LEARN from them? HOW can you make more effective choices next time? Do you need support from others? OA sponsor? OA group? Who will help you keep on track? When will you ask them? What will you say? Who will especially test your resolutions? (Your mother-in-law, mother, children, spouse or partner, waitresses, relatives, friends?) What will you say and do to help yourself? What are you grateful for? What blessings do you enjoy? What is *not wrong* in your life?

In conclusion, journals are a way to help us take control of our lives. Journals can help us put things in perspective, while helping us to achieve our goals, grow as people and vent our frustrations. We can learn so much about ourselves through journal writing. They are also fun to look back on to see how much we've changed!

The Ovals

AIM FOR the Inner Oval

Focus On: Healthy Maintenance Schedule—what you can do

Effectively deal with high-risk situations when they occur. Learn from each experience.

- ✓ Daily choices of foods, skills, and activities that support a healthy lifestyle, as well as mental and emotional well-being.
- ✓ Focus on foods, activities, and daily patterns that naturally keep you feeling balanced, happy and glad to be alive.
- ✓ List all foods and beverages that do not cause you to want to overeat and activities that support your flexible plan of eating. What makes you feel truly alive and contented?

The Middle Oval: The Gray Area

- ✓ “In this situation, it’s best that I not do it for now...and in this situation, I can handle it quite well.”
- ✓ Foods which we are uncertain about
- ✓ Foods and situations that could lead us to the outer oval of imbalances and problems
- ✓ Potential binge foods—come up with behavioral strategies to manage them

The Outer Oval: The Problematic Area

Identify your potential high-risk situations. What can you learn from them?

- ✓ Be honest and gentle. List all foods, beverages, and activities that trigger you to eat much more than you had planned. Be specific. These are the foods and activities that will go in your outer oval. Is your favorite food “*more?*”
- ✓ Foods and activities in this oval are carefully chosen (for now) and should be monitored to observe your reactions to them. Be gentle. Be honest. Be aware. These will probably change over time.
- ✓ List foods and activities that keep you in isolation and fantasy.
- ✓ List the foods and activities that many times have triggered a set back.

How about for you? What do your ovals look like?

