



# EXPRESSIVE WRITING

## ART THERAPY EXERCISE

As you do the following exercise, it's helpful to keep in mind that expressive writing focuses more on your feelings and less on the details of your experiences. You can write the details for context, however, the general benefits of expressive writing is centered on expressing your thoughts and feelings about the experience or event, as it is generally our feelings about the experience is what is holding us back.

This exercise is based on the work by James Pennebaker and involves a free flow of writing about a stressful experience. This writing exercise can then be used to identify important emotions that arise during the writing process.

**NOTE:** If you're creating your artwork in a journal, you may want to consider your choice of materials to include in this exercise so that your journal remains useable. If you prefer to use bulky textures that don't suit a journal/book, you can create this exercise on a loose sheet of paper instead.

- Take a few minutes to sit quietly before you start the exercise. You may like to sit with your eyes closed and use some breathing exercises. A great breathing exercise that can help regulate your breathing is the 4-7-8 method developed by Dr Andrew Weil. To undertake this exercise, inhale for 4 seconds, hold your breath for 7 seconds and exhale for 8 seconds. You may want to repeat this process for 4-6 times.
- Grab a piece of blank paper. As this exercise begins with writing and is followed by creating an artwork, you may want to use a blank sheet of paper that can withstand the properties of art supplies.
- For approximately 10-20 mins write about your experience. You don't need to write neatly or even legibly as you will be creating art on top of your writing. Focus on the emotion and the meaning behind the experience and not so much on the details
- After writing about your experience, take a moment to sit quietly with your thoughts and refocus your breath using the breathing protocol at the start of this exercise. Inhale 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds and exhale for 8 seconds.
- Now is the time to transform this written experience. Grab a paint and cover over your writing. As you are painting over your writing, reflect on how we have an opportunity to redefine the space we find ourselves in. We have an opportunity to use our day as a fresh canvas to invite understanding, introspection, and self-compassion into our lives. You may wish to choose paint colours that reflect this opportunity.
- Once the paint has dried, think of imagery or affirmative words that you might want to create on top. Don't think too hard about these decisions and work with the flow of what comes to mind. Keep in mind that your goal is transformation and embracing a fresh canvas to your day.

To read more about *Art Therapy and Expressive Writing: Words and Images*, visit our blog post on the below link: <https://arttherapyresources.com.au/expressive-writing>