

 **QUESTIONNAIRE**

Please help us plan our writing sessions over the next eight weeks by completing this short questionnaire.

Name: _____

1. What sort of writing are you interested in (do you like poems, stories, writing about your own life or others', or do you keep a diary or journal)?

2. What sort of writing have you done in the past, or do you do now?

3. What do you enjoy reading?

4. How do you hope writing might help you in your current situation? Please continue over the page if necessary.

Thank you.



A DAY IN THE LIFE

This is a form of diary writing, capturing thoughts and feelings in the moment on the day they happen. For someone wishing to capture their experience on paper but unable to think back or far ahead, the containing format of a worksheet with prompts and boxes can be liberating.

Think of something you've done today and write a description of what happened.

Before I did this I was thinking...

Before I did this I was feeling...

Afterwards I thought...

Afterwards I felt...



TIME CAPSULE

The time capsule enables the writer to reflect on a longer passage of time, perhaps a week or a month. Adams notes that it can 'capture the essence of your life as it was being lived at a given moment' (Adams 1990, p.159). Here I offer some structured formats for expressing a moment in time and reflecting on thoughts and feelings.

The month of _____ in the year 20__ Today's date _____

The word or phrase that best describes this month is...

A significant event in the past month was...

My most significant achievement in the past month was...

My mood in the past month has been...

When I think back over the last month, what stands out for me most is...

This form of worksheet, with defined prompts as a starting point for writing, helps the writer get started. As confidence in the writing grows, people will begin (or can be encouraged to begin) to provide their own prompts and pose their own questions and topics.

 ONE YEAR ON

This can be used to prepare for the potentially difficult time of the anniversary of the bereavement, religious holidays (when the loss is keenly felt), or the deceased person's birthday. Someone stuck in their grief process, or at a still early stage, may not be able to imagine a different way of feeling, but the focus on the natural movement of the calendar may help to unblock them.

Today's date _____ Next year's date _____

One year from today I hope I will be...

I will have sorted out...

I can imagine myself...

 **QUESTIONNAIRE**

Please complete this short questionnaire to tell us what you have gained from these writing sessions. Your feedback will help us plan future writing activities and understand which themes and exercises are most effective in a group like this one.

Thank you for taking part. Your comments will be shared between [the facilitators] but are otherwise confidential.

Name: _____

(If you would rather remain anonymous, feel free to leave your name blank)

1. What would you say you have gained from participating in this group?

2. How would you say writing in this group has helped you?

3. Which themes or exercises have you enjoyed or found most useful?

4. If you have kept a journal, how has this helped you?

5. Is there anything you have not enjoyed about the writing group?

6. Do you have any suggestions about how we could improve these writing groups?

7. Do you plan to carry on with your writing?

Thank you. I hope you will continue to write.

TABLE 14.1 THE FIRST MEETING

Resources	Names of participants, name badges, notebooks (if you are providing these, or a spare pad of paper), spare pens.	
Room	Table around which everyone can sit and see each other in a quiet, well lit room. A box of tissues should be available. A white board or flipchart with pens is useful, also Post-it notes in bright colours.	
Refreshments	Tea, coffee, water (biscuits are a nice touch if you can provide them).	
Welcome	Facilitators welcome everyone and explain the purpose of the group. Run through housekeeping information (fire exits, location of WCs and so forth) and reiterate start and finish times for the sessions. Provide contact details for facilitators and request that participants to let you know if they are unable to attend. Mention ground rules and say writing will be shared, but only if and as far as participants feel comfortable doing so (this will be revisited and developed at the end of the session).	10 minutes
Introductions	Work in pairs, threes or as a full group (depending on numbers). Introduce yourself by saying something about your name and its meaning. Share names with the whole group and reflect on the stories that have arisen from people's names.	25 minutes
Start to write	Acrostics: invite the group to write an acrostic using their name, or a word they would use to describe themselves. Offer an example: Just About to try a New writing Exercise . Be prepared to join in if that seems to encourage others to start writing.	5 minutes writing, with a 1 minute prompt after 4 minutes; 10 minutes sharing
More writing	The furniture game: offer the following prompts and invite the group to write short descriptions of themselves as a piece of furniture, a tree, an item of clothing, an animal, a kind of music or the weather. Invite them to share their lists and reflect on their choices and any insights that arise.	10 minutes writing; 20 minutes sharing
Wind down	Invite the group to reflect on the session. What have they liked or enjoyed? Has it met their expectations? What would they like to do more of (they might say more about their reasons for coming to the group and how they see writing as an activity). Draw up ground rules based on their experience of the session. These can be revisited at the start of the next session.	10 minutes

TABLE 14.2 THEME: JOURNEYS

Resources	Spare writing paper and pens. A selection of postcards.	
Room	As for Table 14.1.	
Refreshments	As for Table 14.1.	
Welcome	Welcome back. Invite the group to reflect on their experience of the first session and any thoughts or feelings that have arisen for them from the writing. Revisit the ground rules and invite people to add to them or refine them.	15 minutes
Warm up	Invite people to write about what has brought them here today in literal terms (the bus, the car, the train), as well as motivational (what they hope to get from the session, or what mood they are in). Invite them to share what they have written and talk about their reasons.	5 minutes writing with a 1 minute prompt at the end; 15 minutes to share
Exercise	A Journey (see pp.111–114): guide the group through the exercise. When you come to the part when they are invited to send a postcard home to their left luggage, offer them a selection of actual postcards to choose from.	45 minutes including 30 minutes for writing and 15 for sharing
Wind down	Continue the sharing if more time is needed. Reflect on the theme and any memories or thoughts about the future it may have elicited. Finally, invite the group to say what they will do when they get home – the end of a different journey.	10 minutes

TABLE 14.3 THEME: CAPTURING MEMORIES

Resources	Spare writing paper and pens.	
Room	As for Table 14.1.	
Refreshments	As for Table 14.1.	
Welcome	Welcome everyone back. Ask if anyone has been writing since your last meeting and invite them to reflect on this or share anything they wish to with the group.	10 minutes
Warm up	1. Check in by inviting them to say one thing for which the past week has been memorable (such as a new experience they have had, or something they have done or enjoyed). This will help you assess the mood of the group and individuals and encourage sharing and comparison of experiences.	10 minutes;
	2. Invite them to think about their journey to the place where you are meeting. Have they noticed anything unusual along the way, or anything they have not noticed before on an otherwise familiar route?	10 minutes
Exercise	Write a captured moment: lead the group through the journal exercise in Chapter 3, pp.79–80, using an entrance meditation. Invite them to share their writing.	45 minutes including 25 for the meditation and writing, with a 2 minute prompt before the end; 20 minutes for sharing and reflection
Wind down	Close by asking the group if anything else now comes to mind from the past week. The captured moment exercise may have brought other thoughts and images to mind. Encourage them to use this technique for themselves during the week and to bring their writing to the next session if they wish.	15 minutes

TABLE 14.4 THEME: ANNIVERSARIES

Resources	<p>Spare paper and pens. In preparation for this session, ask the group to bring an item with them that sums up how they feel about an approaching date in the calendar, whether a personal anniversary such as the first year following their bereavement, or a shared moment like New Year or a religious holiday when they will be missing the one who has died.</p> <p>Prepare a handout with your chosen reading, if you are using one (see Chapter 5, pp.122–123 for examples of Christmas readings).</p> <p>If you are using the same anniversary for everyone, prepare a handout of coloured paper with the structure of an acrostic: for example, Christmas, Birthday, The First Year. Otherwise, bring a supply of blank A4 coloured paper.</p>	
Room	As for Table 14.1.	
Refreshments	As for Table 14.1.	
Welcome	Welcome everyone back. Invite the group to share any writing since the last meeting and to reflect on it. Check in by asking them for their own personal weather forecast.	15 minutes
Warm up	Invite people to introduce the items they have brought with them, relating to an anniversary theme they all share. Spend time hearing people talk about these items and what they symbolise or signify.	20 minutes
Exercise	<p>If you are using a reading, provide the hand out and read it to the group. Invite them to read it again to themselves and reflect on its meaning and the stories they have just shared about the items they have brought.</p> <p>Hand out the coloured paper. Invite them to think as far back in time as they can to an example of the anniversary they have in mind; perhaps their first memory of Christmas. Invite them to write their memory using the acrostic form (they can use the one prepared around the theme or write their own).</p>	5 minutes for the reading; 20 minutes for the writing; 20 minutes for sharing
Wind down	Reflect on the exercise and check out by revisiting the weather forecasts. Reflect on any differences people have expressed.	10 minutes

TABLE 14.5 THEME: AT THE TABLE

Resources	Spare paper and pens. Bring some food related items such as a jar of marmalade, Marmite, tea bags, Bisto or other well known brands. Alternatively, provide a handout with a reading from a food writer such as Nigel Slater (see Chapter 7, pp.155–156).	
Room	As for Table 14.1.	
Refreshments	As for Table 14.1.	
Welcome	Welcome everyone back. Check in by asking what is everyone's favourite meal of the day. It is possible that some will mention loss of appetite or the difficulty of cooking for one. Reflect on these comments before moving on.	15 minutes
Warm up	Present the food items you have brought along. Go round the table and ask for 'one food I love' and 'one food I dislike'. Compare tastes and offer their own memories of well known brands from childhood.	20 minutes
Exercise	Invite the group to think about a meal they remember from earlier in their life; one that stands out as truly memorable, perhaps because of a special occasion or because of who used to cook it, or because it was a favourite. Suggest that they recall a meal that was enjoyable and delicious. When they are ready, invite them to write the story of that memorable meal. Offer them a prompt to think about the smell, taste, look and texture of the food, any sounds they associate with it; chatter in the kitchen, the sound of soup bubbling on the stove, conversation in the restaurant and so forth. After about 10 minutes ask them to pause and read back to themselves what has been written, underlining anything that strikes them as significant, or about which they could write more. Ask them to continue until they have written as full a description as possible, using all the senses. Finally, invite the group to share their writing.	45 minutes, including 20 for writing and about 25 for sharing
Wind down	Reflect on the memories this has produced. Ask them what they will eat or drink when they go home, as a treat to themselves and an exercise in self-care and nurturing.	10 minutes

TABLE 14.6 THEME: SUITS AND BOOTS

Resources	Spare paper and pens. Bring a handout of a poem or reading such as those suggested in Chapter 5, pp.115–116. In preparation, ask the group to bring something with them that has a significant association with someone they would like to write about.	
Room	As for Table 14.1.	
Refreshments	As for Table 14.1.	
Welcome	Welcome everyone back. Invite people to place the items they have brought on the table in front of them.	15 minutes
Warm up	Go round the table and ask people to comment on what they are wearing today, especially if they are wearing something they always have with them, such as a favourite tie or piece of jewellery. Reflect on the stories that will arise from this, about people who gave the items to them, or why they choose to wear certain things.	20 minutes
Exercise	Read the poem, if you are using one. Having read it and reflected on the meaning and the sense in which it evokes a character through an inanimate object, invite the group to write freely about the item they have brought with them and associations it carries for them. After 5 minutes, ask them to focus on describing the person with whom they most closely associate the item, and a memory they have of them using it or wearing it. After a further 15 minutes ask them to read what they have written and then spend the final minutes adding anything else they want to say about them or to them. Invite them to show the object to the rest of the group and share their writing.	45 minutes, including 20 minutes for sharing
Wind down	Reflect on the memories the writing has produced and the characters it has evoked. Ask them what they will do with the item when they get home. If it is usually kept hidden away perhaps they might leave it on display for a change.	10 minutes