

Write and Don't Stop

Creating New Pathways

Thoughts are connected with:

- Other thoughts
- Emotions
- Physical sensations
- Mental pictures

Making these associations creates new neurological pathways. Writing connects the **space** between you and your thoughts with the physical sensations of vision and feel. It is also a very concrete starting point.

I haven't seen another effective starting point besides the writing exercises. It is the foundation of this whole project.

Begin Writing Now and Learn Why Later

My first step with every patient I evaluate is to have them write down their negative thoughts and instantly destroy them. Nothing meaningful will occur until you engage. Just do it. You will learn why later.

The reprogramming process begins the day you begin to write. Write down your craziest, bizarre, even despicable negative thoughts. Write, Write, Write!!!! Then INSTANTLY throw them away. You must throw them away so you can write with complete freedom.

The central nervous system aspect of pain is based on the concept of laying down pathways not psychology. I ask my patients to take the word, psychology and remove it from their vocabulary. Traditional psychology is not effective in helping you out of your pain. As you talk about your pain you are just reinforcing the pathways—nothing changes.

Your thoughts are only thoughts

A thought is only a series of connections between neurons within your brain. There is no substance to it. **None.** However, as your body might secrete chemicals in response to this thought, it seems like it is real and part of your identity. Your goal is to bring this thought to life as vividly as possible so you can then process it.

Three events occur with Writing

- 1) you create a new neurological pathway by associating the thought with sight and feel
- 2) You create a "space" between you and that thought.
- 3) You slow down these spinning circuits.

For instance, if you write down, "My daughter is lazy," then you have slowed your thinking down. You might notice that you have labeled her. In addition, your eyes read those words and the thought goes back into your brain on a different circuit. You have also felt your pen write the words, so it is also associated with a sense of feel. You now can see the effect this thought may be having on you and your relationship

with your daughter. You now have the choice of creating an alternative response and a new neurological circuit.

Using the Auditory Route

Some advocate saying the thought aloud, which would go back into your brain through your auditory nerve. The net effect is that you have dramatically heightened the awareness of the offending thought or pattern of thoughts.

David Burns, in his book “Feeling Good,” suggests an exercise where you stand in front of a mirror and talk to yourself with the voices that are in your head. You would never talk to another human being the way you talk to yourself. (Check on [David Burn’s comments](#) on this.)

My Experience

I personally practiced variations of these exercises for many years. I still do. There is no end point. It was the process that finally pulled me out of a severe anxiety-driven depression. I also had the support of a psychologist and psychiatrist, which I think can be extremely helpful. However, the core of the process was the repetitive writing on an almost daily basis.

I eventually found it important to immediately throw the piece of paper away. It is not so you can “get rid of the thoughts.” They will recur over and over again. It is so you can write down any thought with freedom. The nervous system is extremely complex. A small percent of connections in the brain are going to result in thoughts that are bizarre, crazy, despicable, unspeakable, and simply unacceptable at every level. However, they are just thoughts. You are not your thoughts. The more you try to suppress them, the stronger they will become.

Conversely, if you think about your negative thoughts and try to rationalize them in your head, they will start to spin a lot faster.

You Can Only Let Yourself Heal-There is nothing to “Fix”

The writing process is not a quick fix. I have had patients come back disappointed that they have not had more immediate results. They are writing with an agenda. They are writing to “fix” themselves or get rid of the pain. The purpose of writing is to start connecting yourself with you. That is all. The rest will occur at its own pace. The more effort you put in the more quickly you will notice changes.

Why Don’t People Want to Write??

Most patients have told me that the writing process has initially been disturbing. I then know they have really engaged in the process. If you do not begin to uncover some uncomfortable emotions, you have not really committed to the process. I have been at this long enough to know that if someone is telling me how great life is on the first follow-up visit, they have not begun writing.

Remember that these negative thoughts are just irrational circuits. They are not who you are and in fact are the opposite of who you really are.

Within a couple of weeks, the initial discomfort with these thoughts will diminish. The energy spent in trying to deal with them will be available for you to live your life on your terms. I have probably 200-300% more energy than I did in high school. The effects of this simple tool are deep and consistent. It is just the way the brain works. [Unhooking from the Train](#)

—Dr. David Hanscom