

THE ART OF JOURNAL WRITING

THE ART OF JOURNAL WRITING



What is a journal?

The personal journal is a grab-bag of souvenirs, reflections, ideas, incoherent ramblings, quotations, newspaper cuttings, random notes, character sketches and impressions of new friends. It records dreams and nightmares, the germs of poems, depression and elation, couch-therapy confidences, trips, new loves, anxieties and heartbreaks, glories and humiliations. When marvellous phrases leap into our brain between the flashing lights at the street intersection, when we awake to find ourselves creating poetry from a dream, when we begin carrying around an oversized notebook to capture doctor's office doodlings, then we know we are developing the journaling habit, a fortunate and necessary attribute of writers.

Why keep a journal?

A journal is non-threatening and intimate. Often it is the necessary escape-valve which unblocks creativity. You don't HAVE to produce anything brilliant in a journal. On a dull day you might simply catalogue what you had for Dinner and Tea. But given the freedom from pressure to create something specific, your daily entries will gradually become pools of creativity which overflow and surprise you with their eloquence. They will provide sources from which to draw more polished writings. Perhaps we have become conditioned to be the passive consumers of other people's creativity, so much so, that our own lives may seem dull and trivial by comparison. At best, they might not seem worth the effort of recording and preserving; at worst, it may seem pretentious even to wish to do so.

After all, hasn't everything that was worth saying been said and done already by the 'great' writers? And if we can't rival Nabokov, Shakespeare or Tolstoy, why should we even bother to scribble a line? That 'Demon Pride' lurking over every written word is one of the most insidious blocks to creativity I know. It must be recognized, confronted and overcome each day. By all means, inspect your newborn creative offering critically if you must, but be prepared also to tolerate its flaws. Even a Prima Ballerina must take a first step...and a first fall.

How often should we write?

Daily, if possible, but that is probably an unrealistic goal for many of us at first. Some days, we may squeeze out only an inch or two; other days, whole pages will write themselves without effort or pain. The best way to start, I believe, is with a bound ledger type journal without dates or markings of any kind, ruled or unruled, whichever your preference. Write whenever you feel the urge, but help that urge along by setting an ideal goal of at least one long entry each week, in which you sum up the events that have passed. Writing does help us to clarify what we remember, think and feel. It encourages us to capture precisely such elusive shadows as feelings and ideas, goals and dreams.

How to begin?

Our first written words may be like the rusty waters of a long-dry fountain. Strenuous pumping will gradually force up a clear and powerful flow. We must expect our first offerings to be peppered with familiar expressions, clichés, abstractions, vague generalizations. Rarely, however, do we recognize them for what they are—the washed-up debris of our common literary heritage. Time-worn expressions and hackneyed phrases such as 'black as ebony' and 'white as the driven snow' come to mind, as familiar as driftwood. Take a closer look at these elements when they appear spontaneously in your prose. Ask yourself: To what degree do they convey the truth of what YOU want to say? Over time, as you strive to tell your individual story, your language and style will create its own 'thumbprint,' forging itself into something unique and meaningful along the way.

Christina Manolescu © 2015

Author Publisher: **PRINCE CHAMELEON PRESS**

<http://www.princechameleon.com>