



# Verbal Expressive Writing

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Freely writing your thoughts and immediately destroying them has been the starting points for almost every person I have seen heal. My concept of why it is effective is because humans cannot escape their thoughts, this process allows you to separate from them. The reason to destroy them is be able to write with freedom and also so you don't analyze them. These are not "issues" that are on the paper. They are only thoughts. If you want to spend time with them, you will reinforce them. Your brain will develop wherever you place your attention. You might as well put your hand into a wasp's nest.

## Begin writing now

I ask my patients to begin the expressive writing quickly before they read my book. From the beginning it creates some kind of shift and conceptually opens the door to change. Many people resist this simple exercise. That includes me. I am not sure why so many people resist this foundational step, since there is no risk or cost. Hundreds of research papers have demonstrated its effectiveness. But I hear and endless number of reasons why he or she can't write. One of them is, "My hands hurt or are unsteady." "I don't have the time." "My life is unusually stressful." There is another alternative – the verbal route.



## The mirror

Dr. Wegner, author of the famous "White Bears" article on suppressing thoughts pointed out that the verbal route of expressing thoughts is also effective. I recall in the midst of my misery that one exercise that helped create a shift was one suggested by David Burns in his book, *Feeling Good*. He said to stand in front of a mirror and talk to that person using the self-critical voices in your head. You would never talk to another person in that manner. Of course, you can speak with freedom and there is nothing to destroy. I have to say that it was disconcerting and I quickly realized how toxic these thoughts were. So I suggest to my patients that they can express themselves verbally in private.

One research paper looked at switching the self-talk voice from the first to the third person. Of course, most of our self-talk is negative, which is an unfortunate part of the human experience. They were able to document on

functional MRI (fMRI) scans, which document area of brain activity that this process calmed down the region of the amygdala (considered the danger signal area) without engaging the higher thinking areas of the brain. In other words, it cut through the need for using your cognitive function to do battle with anxiety.