Reflective Writing Guide

Blood and Marrow Transplant (BMT) Journeys
Making Meaning through Reflective Writing
Getting Started

This section helps you get started with journaling.

W.R.I.T.E Process
Tips for Successful Journaling
Journaling Options
W.R.I.T.E PROCESS

Identify a time to write. Collect your writing paper and pens.

Settle into a comfortable chair or space.

Use the W.R.I.T.E. method—5 easy steps to help you get started.

W • What
R • Reflect
I • Investigate
T • Time
E • Exit
**USING THE 5-STEP PROCESS FOR W.R.I.T.E.**

The W.R.I.T.E. process helps you focus your journaling process and get started writing quickly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>W</th>
<th>What do you want to write about? What’s going on? What are you thinking about? What was your role?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Reflect on it. Close your eyes. Take 3 deep breaths. Focus. Maybe start with “I feel…” or “I want…” or “I think…” or “In this moment…”</td>
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<td>I</td>
<td>Investigate your thoughts and feelings. What feelings and perceptions surrounded your experience? What might this experience mean in the context of your transplant journey?</td>
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<td>T</td>
<td>Time yourself. Write for 5-15 minutes. Think about setting the timer on your cell phone or kitchen timer, or write the end time at the top of the journal page.</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>Exit smart. This means read what you’ve written and reflect on it in a sentence or two: “As I read this, I notice—” or “I’m aware of—” or “I feel—.” As you re-read your writing, do you notice any themes? Do they illustrate your values or how you live your life? What questions could you now ask to further extend your reflection?</td>
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W.R.I.T.E. used and adapted with permission from The Center for Journal Therapy, Wheat Ridge, CO. To learn more, visit: [https://journaltherapy.com/journal-cafe-3/journal-course/](https://journaltherapy.com/journal-cafe-3/journal-course/)

Justin, transplant recipient with his donor Aja-Reigh
TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL JOURNALING

As you start writing, consider the following tips. Use the space provided to write other tips for yourself that you need to help you keep centered in your writing. And remember – enjoy the journey!

- It’s quality, not quantity that counts with reflective writing.
- It’s not just about saying what you did, it’s about saying why or how you did it, what you learned from it, and what you might change because of it in the future.
- Don’t think about grammar, punctuation, or spelling until after you get your thoughts down.
- Write in the first person
- Write honestly and for yourself, not others
- Write as if you are writing to your future self

My Personal Tips

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Bob, transplant recipient, with Karen, his wife and caregiver

Operated by the National Marrow Donor Program®
JOURNALING OPTIONS

In addition to paper and pen, there are other methods you can use to help you write about your transplant journey. Check out these ideas:

**Gratitude**
Happy Tapper
(Fee to purchase)
Learn more: GetGratitude.co/about

**Day One Journal**
Bloom Built Inc.
Learn more: DayOneApp.com

**Journey – Diary, Journal**
Two App Studio Pte. Ltd.
(Android only)
Learn more: Journey.cloud

**Penzu**
Penzu
Learn more: penzu.com/journals

Be The Match does not endorse or promote any specific journaling app.
Giving Journaling a Try

There are many methods for journaling. This sections reviews a few of them.

- Clustering / Mind Mapping
- Use a Prompt or Answer a Question
- Free Write a List
- Try a New Perspective
CLUSTERING / MIND MAPPING STEPS

1. Write your topic in the center of a piece of paper.

2. Draw related ideas on “branches” extending out from the central topic. Start a new branch with each new idea.

3. Map quickly, without pausing, to keep ideas flowing. Associate freely. At this stage, anything and everything is OK.

4. Circle the key points or ideas. Look at each item and consider how it relates to others, and to the topic as a whole.

5. Map the relationships between the ideas or key points using lines, arrows, colors. Add words or phrases to link them.

SAMPLE

- Spouse
- Friend
- Mom
- Spiritual

- Doctor
- Nursing staff
- Counselor

- Managing pain
- What do/did I fear?
- What makes/made me feel loved?
USE A PROMPT OR ANSWER A QUESTION

A prompt can help you start thinking down a specific path. Do any of the following prompts give you some inspiration? Pick one and give it a try on the left.

Prompt Ideas
• Right now I feel…
• I am grateful for…
• The moment I knew there were new cells in my body, I…
• I’d like to thank…

Question Ideas
• Think of a challenging situation. How did you handle it? What did you learn?
• What advice would you give to your pre-transplant self?
• How does it feel to be at your current place in your transplant journey?
• What excites you about your future?
• Share your favorite affirmations and what they mean to you.
You may want to journal, but perhaps you have separate ideas and thoughts floating around in your head. Sometimes, taking all of your ideas and focusing around a subject can help. By starting a list, you may discover how to organize your thoughts. Use the questions below, and free write a list—whatever comes to mind. Don’t think about it before you write it. Just write it.

**Questions**

- What experiences did you have during your transplant journey?
- What feelings do you remember?
- What would you change about the experience?
- What types of things did you learn from the experience?

**My List**

Begin your list here.
TRY A NEW PERSPECTIVE

People tend to attach emotion to experiences. Sometimes looking at our experience through another lens can help get the words out. Try responding to the question below.

Imagine you are a fly on the wall watching yourself as you learned about your diagnosis. What do you see?

OR

Imagine you’re a fly on the wall watching yourself on your transplant day. What do you notice?

Free write your thoughts here.

I’m not really into journaling, but I did a bit with my transplant. To my Caring Bridge log I added my notes from when I was first diagnosed. Eventually, I had the journal printed into a book as a reminder of where I have been and how much I have accomplished.

– Charlotte, transplant recipient
Now you are ready to further develop your story. This section offers ideas for this step.

What Can I Do to Develop My Topic?
Inspiring Web Sites
Coping with Emotion
WHAT CAN I DO TO DEVELOP MY TOPIC?

Once you have a focused idea for your writing, consider expanding your thoughts in a systematic way. Even after your free write, you might still have questions about what to discuss. Re-read what you have written and consider developing your work using some of the following ideas.

• Expand your **sensory perceptions**. What else did you see, hear, feel or smell?

• Think about your **emotional perceptions**. How did you feel when you were experiencing what you wrote?

• What **experiences, ideas, and observations** did you have regarding your experience or in the context of what you have already written?

• What did you find confusing, inspiring, difficult, or interesting? **Why**?

• Think about how you:
  ✓ **Solved** a particular problem
  ✓ **Reached a conclusion**
  ✓ **Gained perspective and distance**
  ✓ **Reached a point of understanding**

Tom, transplant recipient with his health care provider
INSPIRING WEB SITES

Need some more ideas? Check out these web sites for tips, reflections, supply lists, and discussions about journaling.

Journal with Purpose – Inspiring Creative Journaling
Helen offers journaling challenges, ideas for setting up your journaling, an inspiration gallery (including examples of mind maps and sketching), among other fun stuff. Check out her web site at http://www.journalwithpurpose.co.uk/.

The Daily Digi
The Daily Digi offers lots of ideas for journaling. Check them out at http://thedailydigi.com/category/the-write-way/.

Creative Writing Now
William Victor’s site Creative Writing Now offers insights, supply lists, and tips for journaling. See his site at https://www.creative-writing-now.com/what-is-a-journal.html.

You can also find inspiration on YouTube and Pinterest.

Enjoy!

I blogged through my entire experience. It was cathartic. I shared the good, the bad and the ugly. Lots of laughs and lots of tears. My readers really enjoyed it. To this day I run across people who tell me how much my honesty through my journey helped them with what they were going through. I did it for me, but it helped others. Such a blessing.

‒ Wendy, transplant recipient
COPING WITH EMOTION

Writing is an extremely emotional process! The process requires that you “re-visit” a trauma from the past, and sometimes, can cause people to re-experience the same feelings they felt during that time. These feelings can be surprising and overwhelming.

You might find that you feel a bit sad or down during or after your expressive writing, this is normal and okay! Experiencing strong feelings as you write is a normal response to remembering, or re-visiting trauma.

The feelings usually go away completely in an hour or two; however, if you feel sad longer or have thoughts that continue to upset you, talk with a friend or family member, a mental health professional, or call the Patient Support Center. They can help you manage your thoughts and feelings and process the experience of re-living your transplant journey through written expression or other art forms.

Patient Support Center
Call: 1 (888) 999-6743
Email: patientinfo@nmdp.org

Ines, transplant recipient
Other Forms of Expression

We invite you to submit your story to the BMT Journeys book. This section explains how.

Making Meaning Through Music
Making Meaning Through Poetry
To me, music is an art. While in the hospital having my BMT, I taught myself how to play the guitar with an app on my iPhone. The music therapist and I would play together a few times a week. I became known to the nurses as “the patient that plays the guitar.” Especially rewarding to me was when the midnight-shift nurses asked me to play for them the night before my discharge.

I play my guitar or listen to music, especially when I have a day that I feel sad. It helps my heart and soul and lifts me up.

David, transplant recipient
The poem on the next page, entitled, “Routine”, was written by Teresa, a transplant survivor, about her days in the hospital.

It helped me release some of the feelings I had at that time. I used to think about nights in the hospital quite often, and since I’ve written the poem, my mind has been freed of those lonely nights.
Midnight
In a hospital bed.
Alone.
Anxious thoughts running through my mind.
I need to sleep. To heal.

IV pump humming.
I tell myself to relax. Breathe slowly. In and out.
Let the wave of calm wash away my worries.
Sleep finally comes.

4 AM
In a hospital bed.
The kind nurse is sorry for waking me.
The ritual begins.
Name and birthdate.
I open my mouth and extend my arm.
Thermometer, cuff, oximeter.
Temperature, blood pressure, O-2 saturation.

Another blood sample.
The results will dictate my day.
What will it be? Red Cells? Platelets? Magnesium?
Antibiotics?
The nurse flushes my port, thanks me, leaves.

4:15 AM
In a hospital bed.
Alone.
Anxious thoughts running through my mind.
I need to sleep. To heal.
Consider Submitting Your Story or Other Form of Expression

An Invitation to Share Your Writing or Other Form of Expression

Who Can Participate?

How Do I Submit?

Getting Help
AN INVITATION TO SHARE YOUR WRITING OR OTHER FORM OF EXPRESSION

Are you a blood or marrow transplant (BMT) recipient, caregiver or parent caregiver?

• We invite you to submit a work of written or visual art inspired by your transplant experience.
• In 2018, we’ll publish a print and online book with a selection of submitted written and artistic expressions of transplant experiences.

Sharing your experience may:

• Help you cope with your recovery
• Give future BMT patients and caregivers a sense of connectedness, strength and hope.

You don’t have to be a trained writer or artist to participate. Your story is enough to help another patient or caregiver through their transplant journey.

Please submit 1 written or artistic work per person. This could be a:

• Story, poem or other written work that is no more than 1,000 words.
• Painting
• Sketching or drawing
• Photograph, or similar media

Remember
✓ Your submission won’t be returned
✓ Keep your submission relevant to your transplant experience
WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

To participate, you must be either:

• **A BMT recipient.** You may have had any type of BMT, including allogeneic (unrelated or related donor), autologous, haploidentical, stem cell, or umbilical cord blood.

• **A caregiver or parent caregiver** of someone who has had any type of blood or marrow transplant as outlined above.

If you’re younger than 18 years old, you must have parent or guardian permission.

Briana, transplant recipient, with her two donors, Fernando and Jose
HOW DO I SUBMIT?

You have 2 options:

1. **Online:** Use the online form:
   BeTheMatch.org/BMTJourneys

2. **By mail:** Complete the enclosed submission form and send it with your submission to:
   Be The Match Patient Support Center
   Attn: BMT Journeys Project
   500 N 5th Street
   Minneapolis, MN 55401-1206

Remember
- You’ll get a confirmation notice within 7 days of receipt. Keep this for your records.
- Your submission will **not** be returned to you.

My daughter was only 3-years-old when I was diagnosed and 4 during my transplant. Her main concern was that I was going to lose my hair, and if I would "still be pretty" when I had no hair. I wanted to write down things that she would say during that time and put together a children's book (unpublished) inspired by her concerns titled, "Will you still be pretty?"

– Sharon, transplant recipient
GETTING HELP

The Patient Support Center is available to coach you through the writing and submission process. Please don’t hesitate to reach out.

Our services include:
- Confidential telephone counseling and 1-on-1 support
- Financial grants
- Support groups and telephone workshops
- Caregiver support
- Tips for talking with your health care team
- Educational books, DVDs, newsletters and fact sheets
- Information and support in many languages

Phone: 1 (888) 999-6743
Email: patientinfo@nmdp.org
Website: BeTheMatch.org/patient

Leah, BMT Patient Navigator
AT EVERY STEP, WE’RE HERE TO HELP

As you journey through transplant, you’re not alone. Be The Match® is ready to help. We offer many free programs and resources to support patients, caregivers and families before, during and after transplant.

LEARN: BeTheMatch.org/patient
REQUEST INFO: BeTheMatch.org/request
EMAIL: patientinfo@nmdp.org
CALL: 1 (888) 999-6743

Every individual’s medical situation, transplant experience and recovery is unique. You should always consult with your own transplant team or family doctor regarding your situation. This information is not intended to replace, and should not replace, a doctor’s medical judgment or advice.