

John R. Ballew, M.S.

Licensed Professional Counselor
537 Linwood Avenue, NE Atlanta, Georgia 30306
(404) 874-8536 johnballew@gmail.com

KEEPING A THERAPY JOURNAL

Journaling can be particularly useful when we are going through significant times in our lives such as periods of change, introspection or personal growth. Keeping a journal during therapy can help you to get the most from the work you are doing. It's a way to clarify your thoughts, feelings, goals and values.

Many people would like to keep a journal – or more often, feel like they *should* – but don't do it because they are unwilling to commit themselves to writing in a log every day. This belief (“I've got to write in my journal every day or what's the point of having a journal at all?”) is a kind of perfectionism. I recommend letting go of that idea, and committing yourself instead to writing in the journal when it is *useful to you* – when something happens, when you get an insight, etc.

Remember: this is **your** journal, and no one else is going to see it unless you choose to show it to him or her. There are no rules. Resist the urge to censor yourself. Don't get distracted by negative thoughts about how you write.

I recommend keeping a journal in three parts:

1. **Questions and issues you want to explore.** This might include areas you want to explore with your therapist. It can help to set an agenda for the counseling process. Remember: therapy is about you, your goals and desires.
2. **Emotions that come up for you.** Psychotherapy is often not so much about what you think as about what you feel. Take time to journal about how you feel from time to time during the day. You may be surprised at what you learn.
3. **Insights you gain from your exploration.** Insight can be very useful; it can also slip away like a dream. Writing down what you learn about yourself can help to make it more permanent. It also forms a record you can return to later. This may help you to “become your own therapist” in the future by returning to what you've already learned about yourself and by reminding you of your experiences.

Many people write in a journal and then never go back to look at what they've written. I believe that's a mistake. You may very well be writing the most important book you'll ever read! Going back over what you've written every few months, or even once or twice a year, can help you get the most out of your experience.