

The Benefits of Journaling for Personal Professional Development and How to Do It



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Reflective journals, well known in the form of diaries, have been kept by all sorts of people for many different purposes.

Writers, for example, use them as a means to generate ideas or to experiment with language. In the natural and social sciences, researchers keep notebooks in which details of experiments, interviews and surveys are recorded. Business executives use them to guide, manage and reveal their professional development.

In the *mahayana* tradition of Buddhism there is a practice known as *lojong* – ‘training the mind’ (lojong is Tibetan: lo means ‘intelligence’, ‘mind’, ‘that which can perceive things’; jong means ‘training’, or ‘processing’). The purpose is to enhance awareness by catching our first thoughts and ideas as they emerge through the reflective or contemplative process.

The Reflective Journal is a practical tool by which the “mental place” and the “capacity to pause” can be created by anyone. In an [article for the Harvard Business Review](#), Nancy J. Adler points out the importance of taking time to reflect in the fast-paced, frenzied lives

that we live: “Using a journal regularly will give you the courage to see the world differently, to understand the world differently, and to lead in new and needed ways”.

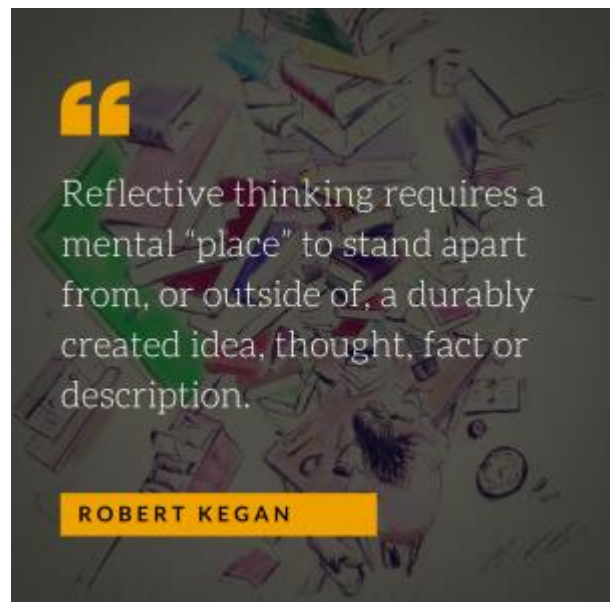
Increasingly, people are discovering the value of journaling for Personal Professional Development. Some have still to discover its power.

Benefits

Journaling is a great space where learning can happen and insight may occur. This ‘space’ supports change in personal thinking which is at the heart of the learning experiences we provide at The Keynes Centre.

Using a **Journal** is long recognised a most helpful tool for reflection – it is a powerful way for getting to know oneself more deeply – and creatively – ideas will come which otherwise would not surface in the hurly-burly of daily life. Writing will help focus your thoughts and clarify your thinking. A Journal can be used as a record of your thinking, ideas, insights, questions, and concerns and will also show your developmental journey.

The purpose of the Reflective Journal is to facilitate, in a private way, the process of intellectual transformation which accompanies critical reflection on sources of knowledge, i.e. the selected books in the case of our **Book Club** or selected films in the case of our **Film Club**, and the faculty for making good judgements. Through the Reflective Journal participants can ‘see’ how their own thinking is progressing over time and how they are making their own contributions to what they think about issues.



The Reflective Journal is an individual forum for reworking information drawn from external sources covers personal observations, questions, and hypotheses and, indeed, digests any matters causing unease, interest and challenge. It is used to contemplate ideas from

discussions, own thoughts or any other source of knowledge and to revise thinking by helping to

Sort thoughts

Come to a viewpoint

Watch for confirming indications

Practice using the viewpoint

Maintain awareness of thinking.

This is a great tool for them to record and reflect on their reading and learning processes, revisit or redefine their achievements, chart the thinking process, identify 'brick walls' or learning 'milestones', and celebrate successes and reassess challenges.



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The most important feature of the Reflective Journal is that it is personal and private, allowing the writer the freedom to surface, express, explore and develop ideas without the restrictions, fears, assessments of external observers. It is the place where we can focus and productively engage with the 'internal dialogue' always going on inside of us.

Some suggestions for moving beyond the 'blank page':

Record and reflect on your learning process and identifying 'brick walls' or learning 'milestones';

Exploring the limiting assumptions held about oneself; facts (objective), possible facts (subjective) and bedrock assumption (subjective);

Identify and challenge the assumptions underlying your own and/or another's beliefs and behaviour; and explore and imagine alternatives to your own current ways of thinking, acting, living;

Explore any number of questions about yourself, for example:

- . What have you been doing and why?
- . What did you learn from it?
- . What did you expect to discover?
- . What did you unexpectedly find?
- . How will you build on what you discovered?
- . What difficulties did you encounter?
- . How can you transform difficulties into opportunities?

If you are reading a book or watching a film, engage in a dialogue with the author/filmmaker, for instance:

- . What is the key idea in the book/film?
- . What is the context in which book was written/ film was made?
- . For whom was the author writing/ filmmaker making the film?
- . What question is the author/filmmaker trying to answer? And what answer is given?
- . What relationship did you expect to have with the author/filmmaker and idea before reading/watching it?
- . What relationship do you have now, after reading/watching it and reflecting on it?
- . How does it change your thinking? What questions does it raise for you?

Hannah Arendt tells us that to think with 'an enlarged mentality' means that 'one trains one's imagination to go visiting'. The journal is a record of one's visiting the ideas of others. It is, most of all, their own, so it is a powerful device to experiment with different approaches in order to discover one's own mind and find one's own 'voice'.

Human freedom involves the capacity to pause, to choose the one response towards which we wish to throw our weight.

– Rollo May –

Journaling:

1. The first, and most important, point to make about Journaling is that **it is about setting aside a time and space to attend to yourself** – something we all too often do not give ourselves in the modern world. It is a difficult but worthwhile habit or discipline to develop the attentiveness to our inner self. And it is essential to commit to it – we will have little enough time to be with ourselves when all is said and done.



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2. Solitude is not easy to bear or to achieve. Nowadays we have to arrange for it. We can be apprehensive of being alone with ourselves, in a place and time without noise, traffic, television, phones Being busy is not only habitual but enticing – it can be used to protect ourselves from our inner selves. **Solitude is not loneliness or aloneness: I am with myself – and who better company than myself?**

3. Your goal in journaling is to **be with yourself in dialogue so as to surface the thoughts from 'the back of your mind'** which are blocked by the immediate preoccupations of the everyday. Journaling is an aid to help you listen to yourself. Do not give in to the temptation to run away by daydreaming or snoozing or other escape. Instead learn to enjoy having some time and space to be in good company – your own. Over time we will learn to listen to ourselves, appreciate its values and many benefits, and come to look forward to it.

4. Therefore write easily, happily and freely. It is not about being judgmental about yourself (or others) in any way – silence that ‘inner critic’. **Do not limit your explorations**. Flow. The practice is to hear your inner self – the wise one of you – by removing yourself from the prison of your daily preoccupations and thoughts. It is a healing and growing process.

5. Some ‘journalists’ find it a good practice to **create a space– both mental and physical – apart from hustle and bustle** in which to engage in their journaling without intrusions. This can even be outdoors in a pleasant setting. Keep it a simple, uncluttered, non-distractive place. You may find it helpful to decorate it simply with an abstract object of beauty, a nice candle, a piece of text – to help focus early on – use a pleasing notebook and pen and whatever works for you.

6. Because it is so easy today for this space to be taken, or given, away **planning for this and scheduling it regularly** is recommended. It is a sacred place for you to dwell for a while with yourself. There is no need to be apologetic in any way or to anyone: protect that opportunity to attend to yourself – you need it.



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7. **Simplicity and regularity** – even for a short period (15 minutes, rather than an hour sporadically) – is the key.

8. You may find it helpful to **start and, perhaps, end with a ‘prayer’ (not necessarily religious)** – some words spoken (quietly; even addressed only to self) – to settle and orient oneself to your forthcoming exploration. Because we go into a private area does not mean it is quiet – you are there and you bring your baggage – anxieties, worries, fears, memories, angers and so much more – there are internal distractions as well as external distractions to be left behind.

9. Use visualisation to put all the baggage in a box and then leave them at the door as you go in. Do not worry! The box will still be there when you come out – you can trust it won't run away. You can collect the baggage afterwards to take with you, if you choose, or leave there – indeed take it to the garbage bin and throw it in it. Feel the freedom. In the room give yourself just that space for yourself: you deserve it.

10. Set aside all restraints of writing style, literacy, grammar, spelling and so on. Your journal is only for you, do not be judgmental – it is a tool, a good tool and it works: trust it.

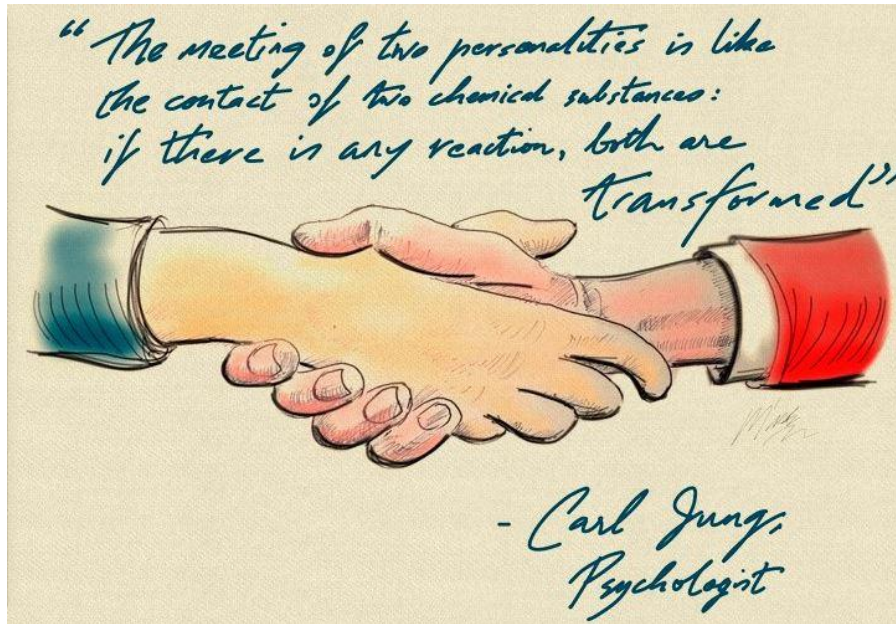
11. Use questions if you are unclear for the moment. **Note your doubts, uncertainties and matters not sure about** (but remember 2 above). Questions are also effective prompts.

12. Write what is truthful for you. **Journaling is about honesty**, not saying what you think you should say or what you think other people would expect. No one is going to know. Any other use of a journal will corrupt the process and only you will be fooled.

13. Many find it beneficial to start their days with their journaling ritual. **The experience created doesn't cease when you close your journal** – it will accompany you through your day and orient your thoughts for the better; it will enable you to live actively and mindfully in the world.

14. Some also find it of benefit to **carry their journal with them during their day** so as to engage with it as thoughts surface, as they unexpectedly do.

Dialogue with Others:



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1. The 'power of two' is a power to be used for **development** and **creativity**.
2. Pairs can read or watch something together or individually. Then, after each has done their reflective journaling on the experience in private, they can come together to **share insights** surfaced in their journaling.
3. It is not necessary to share what has been written in the journals, although that too can be done if people are sufficiently close. **There is no need to share** what you have written for this to work. Initially, it may be better to identify a set of questions arising from the experience and reflections.
4. The important thing is that this is an **aid to practice listening to another** (see 1 above), for moving towards a shared understanding of how you both think.

5. Avoid any elements of competitiveness, one-upmanship, rowing, adversarial and winning style: a dialogue is not about proving yourself right and your partner wrong. Those needs should be addressed elsewhere.

6. Sharing your ideas on a common experience is a way of living which supports, encourages and guides each party to the dialogue.

Obstacles:

There is no end to the barriers we put up to being in our own company

- don't trust it's private
- a dog to walk
- not experience value so think waste of time
- fear of knowing oneself
- feel foolish writing to oneself

and so on : list your own here

Some Reflections on Writing

“Almost all good writing begins with a need in the author to explain something to himself – a strong emotion, a childhood terror – a line of reasoning that needs testing on paper or the re-examination of circumstance to be sure that it justifies a general statement. This last kind of need produces the nuts and bolts group ...”

– John Kenneth Galbraith (emphasis added) –

“If you want to know whether you are thinking rightly, put your thoughts into words. In the very attempt to do this you will find yourselves, consciously or unconsciously, using logical forms. Logic compels us to throw our meaning into distinct propositions, and our reasonings into distinct steps.

It makes us conscious of all the implied assumptions on which we are proceeding, and which, if not true, vitiate the entire process.

It makes us aware what extent of doctrine we commit ourselves to by any course of reasoning, and obliges us to look the implied premises in the face, and make up our minds whether we can stand to them.

It makes our opinions consistent with themselves and with one another, and forces us to think clearly, even when it cannot make us think correctly. It is true that error may be consistent and systematic as well as truth; but this is not the common case.

It is no small advantage to see clearly the principles and consequences involved in our opinions, and which we must either accept, or else abandon those opinions. We are much nearer to finding truth when we search for it in broad daylight. Error, pursued rigorously to all that is implied in it, seldom fails to get detected by coming into collision with some known and admitted fact.”

– John Stuart Mill, Inaugural Address, University of St. Andrews, 1867 –

“Writing a story or novel is one way of discovering sequence in the experience, of stumbling upon cause and effect in the happenings of a writer’s life. This has been the case with me. Connections slowly emerge. Like distant landmarks you are approaching, cause and effect begin to align themselves, draw closer together. Experiences too indefinite of outline in themselves to be recognized for themselves to connect and are identified as a larger shape. And suddenly a light is thrown back, as when your train

maker curve, slowing that there has been a mountain of meaning rising behind you on the way you've come, is rising there still, proven now through retrospect".

– Eudora Welty, One Writers Beginnings, Faber, London, 1985–

"I am just now beginning to discover the difficulty of expressing one idea's on paper. As long as it consists solely of description it is pretty easy; but where reasoning comes into play, to make a proper connection, a clearness and a moderate fluency, is to me, as I have said, a difficulty of which I had no idea".

– Charles Darwin, from Desmond & Moore, Darwin; 183 –