

Why I Keep a Journal (And Why You Should Too)

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“Hello, my name is Yi-Yi Huang and I am 6 years old. Today I am going to tell you a story about my sister’s 18th birthday.”

That’s the opening line of my first diary entry. It’s no “Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again,” but I’ll take it. Hey, I was six at the time. Give me a break! I had no idea at the time, but that first diary entry wouldn’t be a one-off thing. My journaling adventure began at that point and I plan on doing it for the rest of my life.

Over the years I’ve written countless entries in numerous journals. If I were to stack them all, they’d be the height of a toddler. From spiral-bound notebooks that you get in school to leather-bound journals that I bought on a trip to Greece, each holds a special place in my heart. They’re all snapshots of my life in that very moment. My likes, my dislikes, my dreams, my crushes (shout out to Ben taking up most of the space in my diary and in my brain!), and my fears. All contained in a notebook with chicken scratch writing.

My journals have seen me through puberty, fights with parents, disappointing friendships, struggling through university, and navigating being an adult. These journals see the best and worst of me, and it’s between me, my pen, and the paper. It’s for nobody else.

So what’s the deal with journaling? It’s like with any other habit, it takes time and consistency to get into. It’s a way for me to express my emotions and to make sense of my feelings no matter how small they may seem. It’s how I work through my anxieties and my intrusive thoughts. It’s where I’m the most honest about myself to myself.

Here are a few tips that I’ve picked up along the way that have helped me continue to journal throughout the years:

1. Choose a journal that sparks joy in you
It doesn’t have to be fancy or expensive, but you need to love it enough to write in it. For me, I know that I like leather-bound journals that are lined inside. No lined pages? Forget it! I’ll never write in it.
2. Carve out time to journal
This is a no-brainer, but carve out time to write in your journal. It doesn’t have to be for long and it doesn’t have to be every day. Even taking five minutes to write a short entry about what you did that day or how you’re feeling about something can make a huge difference.
3. Don’t put any pressure on yourself
This is an activity that’s for you. Write for yourself and nobody else. I used to put a lot of

pressure thinking that my diary might put me on the map (who am I? Anne Frank?), so I thought I had to write in perfect sentences. But write however you want to! Bullet points, Pig Latin, you name it. It's up to you what you write and how you write in your journal.

4. Use your journal however you see fit

I've gone through phases with my journals. Sometimes it's a log for all my to-do lists and a list of where I can keep track of my achievements. Other times, it's a way for me to work through my struggles or for me to complain about my life. It can even be where you ask impossible questions as you try to ponder about the meaning of life. It can be whatever you want it to be.

5. Try it out

You'll never know if you like it until you try it! If the idea of a blank page scares you, try out journal prompts. You can find notebooks that have them built-in or you can find a list of them online.

There's also a small comfort that you can always look back at your journals once a difficult moment in your life has passed. It's proof right before your eyes that you got through something! I love reading my past entries and thinking, "Wow, I really made a huge deal over nothing, huh?" It's personal growth that you can see and feel good about.

Let me know in the comments below if you love to journal and if you have any tips for keeping it up!