



The Writing Practice Prescription
Thinking Outside the Pill Box with Pen and Paper
 by Ellen Taliaferro, MD, FACEP

“There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you.”
Trauma survivor, Maya Angelou

You can write your way to better health and well being

If you, like millions of Americans, struggle with chronic health issues such as asthma, arthritis, cancer, numerous autoimmune diseases, or chronic pain syndromes, consider adding an ongoing writing practice to your routine.

Research studies by James Pennebaker, PhD, and others shows that expressive writing about past troubling events is an effective health tool. These studies divided participants into groups and asked them to write about a traumatic event for a set period of time. The research participants writing about past or current trauma in their lives showed improvement in performance, well-being, and physical health.

You can start your practice by identifying some traumatic event

in your life. Write about that event as fast as you can for at least 15 minutes a day, three times a week. Write without regard to spelling or grammar. This is the minimal recommended time for scheduling writing in your schedule.

You can also write more often and for longer periods of time if you wish. This form of speed writing lets the contents of your mind spill onto the page, bypassing your inner critic, which can halt the writing process faster than you can blink.

In our Half Moon Bay Writing Workshops, *Seeking Wellness--Story by Story*, we ask attendees to write about a major emotional event in three stages to reveal, reflect, and revise.

Writing to Reveal

We teach what we need to learn.
We preach what we need to do.
We write what we need to know
 --Ellen Taliaferro

Use your scheduled writing time to capture the emotionally charged event in the greatest detail that you can recall, including what you saw, heard, smelled, and felt. Write about this experience until it is as detail rich as you can make it. You might well need several sessions to finish this stage of your journey.

Writing to Review and Reflect

“An unexamined life is not worth living.”
 --Socrates

Next, review what you have written. Then use your speed writing sessions to reflect about how your traumatic event changed your life. Write about any regrets you have as well as rewards and

benefits you have experienced because of what happened.

Writing to Revise

Life imitates art far more than art imitates life.
 --Oscar Wilde

Good writing comes not from the writing, but from the rewriting. Revision is everything. If an emotionally-charged event in your life left you with a story that has an ending that you don't like, take a clue from professional writers and rewrite the ending. Let your ongoing writing practice guide how you will achieve the ending you desire by doing what you can, with what you have, right here, and right now.

Keep up your writing process

Improving your health through a writing practice is not an event but an ongoing process. Write as often as you can to keep searching for how to best improve your physical, mental, spiritual, and social health. Don't fire your doctor or therapist but do add yourself to the your healthcare team and become responsible for your health and well-being. All you need to do this is persistence, patience, and an ongoing writing practice dedicated to healing.

Ellen Taliaferro
www.healthaftertrauma.com

LOVE YOURSELF UNCONDITIONALLY