

Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Adapted For a 7-Step Sample Course

Howard Schubiner MD, Mind Body Medicine Program©

Please visit www.unlearnyourpain.com for Dr. Schubiner's complete Mind Body Program

*May you have the commitment
To heal what has hurt you,
To allow it to come close to you,
And, in the end, become one with you.
-- Gaelic blessing*

What Is Journaling?

Journaling is the process of writing about our experiences, thoughts, and feelings. One way to promote health is to write about times in our lives that were stressful, difficult, tense, or traumatic. It provides an avenue for the expression of thoughts and memories that may have been internalized (kept inside), worsening physical symptoms. William Boyd, a pathologist at the turn of the 20th century, describes this process well, *"The sorrow that hath no vent in tears, may make other organs weep."* Writing is one type of therapy that can be used to aid this process.

How Does It Work?

Studies have found that if we express feelings about a time in our lives that was very traumatic or stressful, our immune function strengthens, we become more relaxed, and our health may improve. Writing about these processes helps us organize our thoughts and create closure to an event that the mind tends to suppress or hide—often resulting in physical symptoms.

Does Anybody Need to Read It?

No one needs to read what you write! You can throw what you write away if desired. In fact, burning or destroying the writing can ceremonially bring closure to a difficult time in your life. Some people prefer to keep their writings to look back on and see how they have grown from the events.

Are There Any Side Effects or Things I Should Be Aware Of?

Recalling stressful memories can make you feel uncomfortable for a few days. If this were not the case, the body would not use so much energy trying to repress them. The benefits from journaling become most apparent weeks to months after writing. For some people this process can bring back to mind some unpleasant or painful events that may need the help of a licensed counselor. Please notify your medical provider if you develop feelings that would benefit from further discussion. This is often the first step in promoting healing from within.

This page was adapted from a chapter on journaling by David Rakel, MD, in Rakel, DP (Ed.) Integrative Medicine, 2nd Ed., Philadelphia, PA: WB Saunders, an imprint of Elsevier, 2007.



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

To Learn More:

Excellent resources for more information on this subject include:

- Howard Schubiner's Mind Body Syndrome website is www.unlearnyourpain.com. (Please watch the lectures that are available on this website for free.)
- Howard Schubiner's book about Mind Body Syndrome, entitled *Unlearn Your Pain*, is available from amazon.com or his website above.
- The book *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions* by James W. Pennebaker is available from amazon.com.
- The website of "The Center for Journal Therapy" is found at www.journaltherapy.com.
- For questions or comments, or to sign up for the 4 week TMS (tension myoneuronal syndrome)/MBS (mind body syndrome) classes, contact Dr. Fortney at luke.fortney@fammed.wisc.edu, or call Michelle Thomas MA at (608) 265-0280 (or 262-WELL and press option #2).

The information in this handout is for general education. Please work with your health care practitioner to use this information in the best way possible to promote your health and happiness.

Basic Instructions for the Week:

- Follow the instructions for each day (clearly marked Steps 1-7). Take extra time or paper as needed as you move through the exercises. **You may want to do this process over 2-4 weeks instead of just 1 week.**
- This writing is for you alone and you don't have to share it with anyone, so be honest and brave in your mind/body exploration through this writing process. If you approach this process with curiosity and openness, you will discover much more about yourself and experience far more benefit.
- In writing, describe your authentic feelings and let go of trying to "do it right." Allow the emotions to run freely in your writing.
- Write continuously. Do not worry about grammar, spelling, or sentence structure. If you come to a block, simply repeat what you have already written.
- Each step builds on the previous one, so if you miss one, go back to it and complete the activity before moving on to the next one.
- Work with a therapist for any challenging or difficult experiences that may arise. Remember that "the way to get out of something is to first move through it."
- Email Dr. Fortney with any questions (luke.fortney@fammed.wisc.edu).



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Getting Started: Mind-body Health Agreement

I am responsible for my health, my life, and me. The path to healing involves looking at the truth of my life, accepting the state and conditions of my life as they are right now, and accepting responsibility for those things I can change. Happiness is an inside job and only I can discover this for myself. No one can give this to me, and no one can fix all my problems or make all my challenges go away. I intend to lean into the tension and stress areas of my life with curiosity and be present with my pain as it arises as best I can. With practice, patience, and persistence, little by little I will be kinder and friendlier toward myself and others. I will not project hate and blame onto others because that only distracts me and prevents me from healing the root cause of my pain—unheard and unseen loss, anger, disappointment, sadness, grief, fear, and guilt. May I be able to accept those things I cannot change, have courage to change the things I can, and have the wisdom to know the difference. I understand that this pain I feel shows up as a ‘sideways leaking-out’ expression of my deepest inner-hurt, where my innocent child-like heart feels wounded. There is no person, pill, supplement, or procedure that can fix what hurts deep inside—only the messy, frustrating, long, and at times unpleasant work of being honest with myself and the circumstances of my life. May I be able to re-create myself and be kind to myself and others. I must see what lies hidden, pushed down, and out of sight—an imprisoned and ignored companion who demands to be seen and known. I admit that I’d rather numb myself, run away, fight with, and dismiss all this pain—but the hard truth is I’ve already tried these and a myriad of other things without any luck. I am stuck with this, just as it is...me, just as I am—in this moment and in these circumstances. But I also know that I have a choice, that I can accept what is happening, stop ignoring and fighting it, sit with my pain, and finally be healed by it. I pledge this to myself, for my happiness and wellbeing, and for the happiness and wellbeing of those I care about.

“The sorrow that hath no vent in tears makes other organs weep.”
--William Boyd, MD

Your Signature and Date



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

STEP 1: MAKE YOUR LISTS

Part 1: List of Stressors That May Cause Symptoms

List of Past Traumatic or Stressful Events: Include any past interactions or events (big or small!) which caused hurt, shame, embarrassment, pain, fear, anger, guilt, etc. Just list each event under each letter. *Ignore the "+" line for now.*

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- b. _____
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- c. _____
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- d. _____
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- e. _____
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- f. _____
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Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

List of Current Stressors: Include any issues, events which are currently causing stress, anger, tension, pressure, fear, hurt, guilt, etc.

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Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

List of Personality Traits: Include perfectionism, do-goodism, low self-esteem, high expectations of self, worry, fear, anger, hostility, time-urgency, guilt, dependency, isolation, needing to be good, needing to be liked, overly conscientious, being hard on yourself, overly responsible, having rage or resentment, holding in feelings, being overly cautious, etc.

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Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Part 2: List of Triggers That May Affect Stress and Tension

Triggers of Stress:

List activities, movements, places, thoughts, emotions, body positions that may trigger or precipitate any current troubling symptoms (pain, anxiety etc.)

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Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Part 3: List of Things That Do Not Seem To Trigger Symptoms

Times of Ease and Wellbeing:

Make a list of the activities, movements, thoughts, emotions, times, places, etc. that are not associated with and do not trigger your symptoms (i.e., the associations you have of being well).

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STEP 2: HOPE & GRATITUDE; FORGIVENESS & BARRIERS

Part 1: Hope and Gratitude

List of Things You Would Like To Do:

Make a list of the activities, movements, thoughts, emotions, people to see, things to do that would be good for you. Include things that will make you feel good, that will advance your life in some way. Include things that will also make others feel good as well or that will also be good for others, but focus on things that will be good for you. Include physical activities that you have not been able to do, but would like to do.

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Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Gratitude List:

Make a list of things for which you are grateful. Include anything you can think of such as having a roof over your head, food to eat, the sun rising each day, the color blue or purple, friends, family, etc. Consider including things for which you may be only partly grateful for, e.g. difficult people or things that may have taught you important lessons. Add to this list each day if you like.

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Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Part 2: Forgiveness and Barriers

“Forgiveness means giving up all hope for a better past.”

Make a list of the people that you would like to forgive for something they might have done. Include people that you would like to ask for forgiveness for something you may have done. Finally, list those things for which you would like to forgive yourself.

Those You Would Like to Forgive:

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Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

List of Barriers to Feeling Better:

Make a list of possible reasons why your mind might want to hang on to stress and troubling symptoms such as pain. These reasons are most often illogical and unconscious. Do not be afraid that this list will harm you in any way. It is to uncover hidden reasons in the unconscious mind that might get in the way of feeling well. We all have some of these hidden barriers.

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Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Step 2 (cont.) Choose one of the topics from the list you made on Day 1 (Step 1) & do a “fast-write” following the instructions below:

1) GRATITUDE:

I am grateful for _____ and this is why:



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

2) FORGIVENESS (Four options):

**A. I forgive _____
for _____ and this is why:**

OR

**B. I ask forgiveness from _____
for _____ and this is why:**

OR

C. I forgive myself for _____ and this is why:

OR

**D. Someday I may want to be able to forgive
_____ for
_____ and this is why:**



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Do a “free writing” exercise using one of the forgiveness options.

NOTE: Forgiveness doesn’t mean that you agree with or are OK with the hurtful behavior that happened. It means releasing any residual “stuff” that is still stuck and carried around in the mind and body.

“Forgiveness means giving up all hope for a better past”
--Jack Kornfield



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

3) BARRIERS TO WELLBEING:

My mind may prefer to hang on to my symptoms and stress because

But, this is why I really want to feel better and this is how I'm going to overcome this barrier:

“The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.”

--Carl Rogers



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

STEP 3: “WRITE IT OUT” PROCESS

Read about and then do today’s two writing exercises that can help you successfully use the mind/body connection for healing

First go back to your lists with “+” lines in them and write out how that event, person, or situation changed you in some positive way. There is always some good and benefit in anything no matter how difficult or painful it may have been at the time. How has it changed you for the better and made you who you are today? The Chinese expression says, *“In any catastrophe, look for opportunity.”*

Then, on the next pages, you will find descriptions of two techniques— **1. Clustering** and **2. Free-writing**—that comprise a process called the **“Thirty-Minute Jog”** from which you will be benefiting over the week. Pages set up for you to practice these techniques follow. Please use more paper as needed.



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

HOW TO AVOID SOME COMMON PITFALLS IN THE WRITING EXERCISES

(ADAPTED FROM JAMES PENNEBAKER, ONE OF THE ORIGINATORS OF THERAPEUTIC WRITING)

DON'T USE WRITING SOLELY AS A WAY TO VENT ANGER AT SOMEONE. Do not try to list all the shortcomings of another individual without reflecting on your own role in the relationship. Some people use writing as a method of complaining about others or about their situation. Doing this on a continual basis is not helpful. Ask why does this person upset me as much as they do? What is my part in this relationship or situation?

DON'T WRITE ABOUT NEGATIVE EVENTS OVER AND OVER IN A REPETITIVE FASHION. Without self-reflection your writing can become like a verbal form of obsessive thinking. One needs to integrate through writing the various aspects of the event in order to shed a more positive light on the situation.

SELF-REFLECTION IS HEALTHY, BUT IT CAN BE CARRIED TO AN EXTREME. To the degree that writing helps us understand and reorient our lives, it is beneficial. If we self-reflect to the point of self-absorption, it can become maladaptive. On the other hand, some people write in an intellectual style that doesn't touch their feelings. Find a middle ground so that your writing is self-reflective, i.e. it allows you to see your real self in a way that leads to understanding and moves you forward towards understanding and integration.

DON'T USE WRITING AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR ACTION. If direct communication with an individual is really what is called for, it is better to speak directly to that person.

WRITING SHOULD NOT BE A SUBSTITUTE FOR FRIENDS OR THERAPISTS. Although disclosing through writing can be safer and without social ramifications, talking with others can sometimes be more helpful. Talking to other people can give you feedback and keep you from blowing your thoughts and emotions out of proportion. Friends can offer emotional support, advice and other forms of assistance you can't get from just writing. Therapists can offer professional consultation, reflection and advice.



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Clustering Instructions (Step 3, Part 1)

Clustering, also referred to as “webbing”, is an effective way to brainstorm your way to discovery on your own. Whereas the associations in a brainstormed list tend to run consecutively—that is, item 10 on your list was prompted by item 9, item 9 on your list was prompted by item 8, item 8 on your list was prompted by item 7—clustering is different. You might think of clustering as “three-dimensional,” compared to two-dimensional outcome of brainstorming. Clustering allows you to access more ideas more quickly and uses the circling of your ideas on paper to help you more easily go between your right brain and your left brain, a key to creativity in solving problems.

The five easy steps to producing a cluster include:

1. From your list of stressors, write a one to four-word phrase in the center of a blank page and circle it; this is the nucleus of your cluster.
2. Set a timer for 10 minutes.
3. Begin to free-associate on the word or phrase serving as your nucleus— whatever connected thought you have, write it down in a one to four-word phrase, *then circle what you’ve written and connect it by a line to the nucleus.*
4. Now you have two possibilities to prompt your thinking: what you wrote in your nucleus or what you just wrote in the satellite circle and connected to it. See what you think of based on either, write down a word or phrase that represents that idea, circle it, and connect it to the circle that prompted it.
5. Continue this process until the timer signals your ten minutes of clustering is up, remembering to circle and connect your ideas as you cluster.

For more information on clustering, see *Writing the Natural Way: Using Right-Brain Techniques to Release Your Expressive Powers* by Gabriele Lusser Rico (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, Inc., 1983)



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Clustering “Thirty-Minute Jog” Part 1

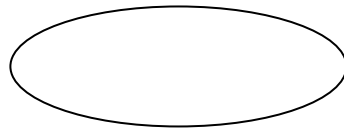
First follow #'s 1-4 (of 14):

- 1. Transfer any item that you have written from your lists of stressors to the circle nucleus on the next page.**
- 2. Set your timer for 10 minutes.**
- 3. Create a cluster of free-associated connections you have around the nucleus in ten minutes.**
- 4. Turn the page to continue to the next step of your Thirty-Minute Jog.**

Repeat this exercise at least one more time with other stressors. Use extra paper if needed.



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises





Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Free-Writing Instructions (STEP 3, Part 2)

Free-writing—or “fast-writing” as it more appropriately might be called—is a favorite method among writers. The technique involves just what the alternative name suggests: fast writing, or writing fast without any edits or concern for grammar for a pre-determined length of time. The idea behind it is that when you write faster than you normally would, helpful material, that you would usually censor before even writing it down, is allowed to surface. Just let it flow.

Natalie Goldberg (see reference below) refers to the outcome of free-writing as “first thoughts,” and suggests the following six steps:

- Keep your hand moving. Write faster than you would normally write in a reflective mood; attempt instead to take dictation from your thoughts as they stream across the radar screen of your mind.
- Don't cross-out anything. Even if you didn't mean to write what you did, leave it stand.
- Don't worry about spelling, punctuation, grammar.
- Lose control. Just let it flow.
- Don't think. Don't get logical. Let it be messy.
- Go for the jugular. If, as Goldberg says, “Something comes up in your writing that is scary or naked, dive right into it. It probably has lots of energy.” Or, in this case, lots of information and insight to offer you.

For more information on free-writing, see *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within* by Natalie Goldberg (Boston: Shambhala, 1986) or *Writing Without Teachers* by Peter Elbow (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Free-Writing “Thirty-Minute Jog,” Part 2:

Next follow #'s 5-9 (of 14):

5. Fill in the blank in the sentence on the following pages with the same item you put in the center of your previous cluster writing exercise.
6. Set your timer for 10 minutes.
7. Complete that first sentence and free-write on what follows for you from that sentence until your time is up.
8. When writing, you want to allow yourself to express any emotions that you might have. (You may be unaware of some of them). Allow yourself to write whatever comes into your mind. Describe what happened in this situation from your point of view. Allow yourself to express things as strongly as necessary. Because this material is for you alone, all of this material will remain confidential. Use phrases such as, “I feel _____” and “I felt _____” often. Many people learn things about themselves or others by doing this kind of writing. Often, what comes up is surprising. Let your hand guide you and see what comes out onto the paper.
9. Then turn the page for the final steps of your Thirty-Minute Jog.



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Expression Free-Write:

My feelings about me and _____ include:



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Day 3 Free-Writing “Thirty-Minute Jog,” continued:

Then follow #'s 10-14 (of 14):

10. Complete this free-write by writing the following affirmation below three times:

I am relieved to express these feelings.

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11. NEXT STEP: Fill in the blank in the sentence on the following page with the same item you put in your web and used in the first free-write.

12. Set your timer for another 10 minutes.

13. The idea here is to process your feelings. Expressing emotions is important, but it is also critical to understand them, gain perspective on them, and begin to move past them. Therefore, in this free-write, make sure to use phrases such as, “I see that...”, “I realize...”, “I hope that...”, “I need to...”, “I want to...”, “I can...”, “I will...”, “I understand that...”, “I appreciate...”, “I wonder if...”, “I have learned...”, “I have discovered...”, etc.

14. Complete that first sentence and free-write on what follows for you from that sentence until your time is up.



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Processing Free-Write:

My understanding about me and _____ includes:



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Complete this free-write by consciously writing the following affirmation below three times:

Understanding these issues will help me feel better.

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•

•

Repeat it!

Repeat the previous writing exercise at least one more time with a different item from your list of stressors. Feel free to repeat this process a few more times.



STEP 4: MAKE A LIST OF “UNSENT” LETTERS TO WRITE

What? Obviously, an unsent letter is simply that: a letter you write, but do not send. It is an excellent way to express yourself and your feelings about the important issues in your life. Holding feelings in is one of the ways that Mind Body Syndrome continues to cause symptoms. Therefore, expressing feelings is a great way to help heal yourself. Considering the list of stressors, traumas, and personality traits you initially compiled and also what you learned from the 30-minute jogs you wrote previously, create a list of possible recipients to whom you might send an “unsent letter.” These letters will not be letters that you fold and put in an envelope and which you then address, affix a stamp to, and drop in a mailbox. Instead these will be letters you write, but do not send, letters that allow you to explore whatever you need to explore regarding another person and your relationship to him or her. These letters can be letters expressing anger or guilt or worry, but they can also be letters expressing love, expressing “good-byes” or whatever things you need to express.

Who? You may need to write to a parent or another relative, a current or former spouse or “significant other,” a dependent, a friend, neighbor, colleague, boss, subordinate, or co-worker. You may need to write to someone who has died or a person from whom you are estranged, as well as to people who are very much present in your life today. You can also write to yourself, or to your pain, your unconscious mind or your feeling about an event.

How? You may want to complete a cluster in the space below using some of the roles suggested above (e.g., “relatives,” “friends,” co-workers,). Trust any “intuitive” feelings you might experience. Then, on the following page, compile a list of “recipients” to whom you think it would be beneficial to write an unsent letter.



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

My list of possible “recipients” of an *unsent* letter includes:

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Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Part 1: Select Those You Think Might Prove Most Beneficial

You will be choosing one of the “recipients” listed above to write an unsent letter to. Again, trust any “intuitive” feelings you might experience. Once you begin writing, you may discover you need to send several letters to the same person or entity. Feel free to do this if necessary. Then you may choose to move on to other letters.

Part 2: Getting a Letter Started

When you write, feel free to allow your mind and hand to write whatever needs to be said to the person, group of people, or entity you’ve chosen to address. Since the letter will not be sent, you can say anything that comes to your mind without censoring what you write. For example, you might choose to use profanity or to express extreme emotion. This is perfectly acceptable. Begin your letter with as much as you need to tell this person. Let your mind, your heart, and your hand go in whatever direction they will. Trust that you are safe in writing this letter and that it will prove most helpful to express any thoughts or feelings that cross your mind while you’re writing as fully as you are able to on paper.

How Long? Write as long as you need to no matter if it’s one page or 20 pages. An additional blank page has been provided for each letter; please feel free to use the backs of pages or to add additional pages if you need more space on which to complete your letter(s).

How Strong? When you start writing, you may be surprised by the strength of the emotions you have been holding toward a particular person. It is very helpful with respect to your healing to express these emotions that have built up and that you have been carrying.

Part 3: Letters to Yourself

After each letter, reflect on and write a description of what you have learned from this person, and/or what you have gained from your interaction with this person (even if the interaction was very destructive), and in what ways you can see that you may have grown as a result of your relationship with this person. State how you’ve been able to deal with any issues related to this relationship and/or how you plan on dealing with the issue left behind or a current relationship with this person. Write these reflections in a letter to yourself.

Part 4: Finally, Affirm It!

After every day of writing this week—both unsent letter and letter-to-yourself reflection days—please write your affirmations on the page provided.

For more information on unsent letters, see *The New Diary: How to Use a Journal for Self Guidance and Expanded Creativity* by Tristine Rainer (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1978).



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Step 4: Writing an Unsent Letter

From your “Unsent Letter” list, date and write an unsent letter below to a person, a group of people, or an entity (God, spirit, etc). Express your thoughts and feelings fully. Use as much paper as needed and remember to sign your letter at the end.

Dear _____,



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Affirm It!

Complete the writing of this unsent letter by *consciously* writing the following affirmation—fill in the name of the person to whom you addressed the letter—below three times:

I am grateful to explore my relationship with _____ .

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Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Step 4 (cont): Reflect on the unsent letter you wrote, and address the following questions in a letter to yourself below

1. What have you learned from this person and/or what have you gained from your interaction with this person (even if the interaction was very destructive)?
2. In what ways can you see that you may have grown as a result of your relationship with this person?
3. How have you been able to deal with any issues related to this relationship and/or how do you plan on dealing with these issues in the future?

Dear _____ (fill in your name),

Repeat it!

Repeat the previous writing exercise at least one more time with a different recipient from your list of possible unsent letters. Feel free to repeat this process a few more times.



STEP 5: WRITING DIALOGUES BETWEEN PAIRS

Considering the lists of stressors, traumas, and personality traits you initially compiled as well as what you learned from the 30-minute jogs and unsent letters you wrote, create a list of possible people or entities that you would like to engage in dialogue.

These dialogues will be written instead of spoken. Some may be short, ten-minute jottings, while other may be longer pieces that you return to again and again to explore whatever you need to explore regarding another person or a part of yourself and your relationship to him, her, or it.

These dialogues are imaginary conversations that you will write. Obviously, you will not actually hear the other person or entity speak. You don't need to plan the conversation out ahead of time; the idea is to just begin it and develop a back and forth so that the conversation proceeds ahead to wherever it goes.

Who? You may need to dialogue with a parent or another relative, a current or former spouse or “significant other,” a dependent, a friend, neighbor, colleague, boss, subordinate, or co-worker. You may choose to dialogue with someone who has died or a person from whom you are estranged, as well as with people who are very much present in your life today.

The choices above are the same ones you considered in deciding to whom to write your unsent letters, but there are other “entities” that you might want to consider dialoguing with, beyond your unsent letter audience:

- You may want to write to one or more body parts that are causing you discomfort. What part of you is attempting to get your own attention to help heal you?
- You may choose to dialogue with an event or situation in its entirety, not just one other person involved in it.
- You may choose to create a dialogue between two parts of yourself.

“(The written) dialogue is a conversation carried on with yourself to help you gain insight into a person, event, or subject you wish to understand better. The dialogue (can help) you deal with a situation you feel confused about. You can dialogue with aspects of your personality, people you know, or people you have never met—dream figures, inanimate objects, images, symbols, parts of your body, your religious or racial or cultural heritage, events, or institutions. You can even use (this technique) with the nameless voices that (sometimes) seem to be arguing in your head. In the dialogue you address the subject, whatever it may be, and simply allow it to speak to you in response.”



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

How? Again you may choose to first complete a cluster below using some of the roles suggested on the preceding page (e.g., “relatives,” “friends,” co-workers”). You might also want to consider what body parts, events or situations, or parts of yourself you’d like to create a dialogue between as well. Trust any “intuitive” feelings you might experience.

In the fast writing and the unsent letters, you had an opportunity to express yourself fully. However, in the dialogues you will not only express yourself, but you will get the opportunity to also listen to someone else or a part of yourself. There may be some things that you need to hear that will help you heal.

Now, compile a list of pairs between which you’d like to conduct a dialogue.

*For more information on writing dialogues, see *The New Diary: How to Use a Journal for Self Guidance and Expanded Creativity* by Tristine Rainer (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1978), p. 102 - 113.

My List of Possible Pairs For Dialogues

1 _____	2 _____
1 _____	2 _____
1 _____	2 _____
1 _____	2 _____
1 _____	2 _____
1 _____	2 _____
1 _____	2 _____
1 _____	2 _____
1 _____	2 _____
1 _____	2 _____
1 _____	2 _____
1 _____	2 _____
1 _____	2 _____
1 _____	2 _____
1 _____	2 _____



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Select Those Pairs You Think Might Prove Most Beneficial:

Choose one of the pairs listed above to write a dialogue between. Again, trust any “intuitive” feelings you might experience. Once you begin writing, you may discover you need to continue a dialogue for more than one day with the same person or thing. Feel free to do this as necessary. Once you have learned what you need to learn or express what you need to express, you can move on to dialogue with other people or entities.

Some people have found it helpful to dialogue within a group (as if creating a meeting or conference call). For example, you could dialogue with yourself, your pain, and your unconscious mind.

Instructions for Getting a Dialogue Started:

When you write, feel free to allow your mind and hand to write whatever needs to be said to the person, situation, or entity you’ve chosen to address. And allow the person, situation, or entity to respond however it feels that he, she or it needs to respond. Since the dialogue will remain on paper you can say anything that comes to your mind without censoring what you write. For example, as in writing an unsent letter, you might choose to use profanity or to express extreme emotion. This is perfectly acceptable.

You can begin the dialogue by simply asking a simple question to get the conversation going, such as “Why did you...”, or “What do I need to hear from you?” Allow for a lot of back and forth in the conversation. As important as expressing yourself to whom or what you are writing to, it is equally important to be able to listen. A dialogue allows you to listen and to hear what you might need to hear. Many people have found that they need to learn something from others in their life or from their pain or symptoms. A dialogue is a great way to learn what you need to learn in order to give up your MBS symptoms.

Another option is to begin your dialogue by writing what you think you most need to tell the other party in the dialogue. Let your mind, your heart, and your hand go in whatever direction they will. Trust that you are safe in creating this dialogue and that it will prove most helpful to express any thoughts or feelings that cross your mind while you’re writing as fully as you are able to on paper.

How Long and How Strong? Write as long as you need to no matter if it’s one page or 20 pages. An additional blank page has been provided for each dialogue; please feel free to use the backs of pages or to add additional pages if you need more space on which to complete your conversation.



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

As with your unsent letters, when you start writing, you may be surprised by the strength of the emotions you have been holding toward a particular person, event, or entity. It is very helpful with respect to your healing to express these emotions that have built up and that you have been carrying. You may find yourself surprised by how the other “speaker” in the dialogue responds to you. It is also helpful, in terms of your healing, to let the other party respond fully. Pay attention and listen so you can hear things you may need to hear. You may choose to write a dialogue with the same people or entities each day for several days or you may choose to dialogue with different people or entities each day.

Try This! On at least one of the days you write a dialogue, try writing the side of the dialogue that represents your conversation with your dominant hand (i.e. your right hand if you are right-handed; your left hand if you are left-handed) and write the *other* side of the dialogue with your *non-dominant* hand (i.e., your left hand if you are right-handed; your right hand if you are left-handed).



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Step 5 (cont.): Write a Dialogue Between Pairs From Your List

From your list of pairs (between persons, events, and/or entity), identify who the speakers will be, then write a dialogue between them below. It is helpful to continue to write the name of each speaker preceding what he/she/it says. Express your thoughts and feelings as fully as you can. Allow both speakers to respond freely and fully. Use as much paper as needed. Don't think too much about it; just let the writing flow from your imagination.

Speaker 1) = _____ **Speaker 2 =** _____

The Dialogue:

1) _____: “

2) _____: “



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Affirm It!

Complete the writing of this dialogue by *consciously* writing the following affirmation—fill in the name of the person, event, or entity with whom you conducted the dialogue—below three times:

I am grateful to explore and increase my understanding of my relationship with _____.

•

•

•



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Step 5 (cont): Reflect on the Dialogue You Wrote in a Letter to Yourself

1. What have you learned from your interaction with this person, event, or entity (even if the interaction was very destructive)?
2. In what ways can you see that you may have grown as a result of your relationship with this person, event or entity?
3. How have you been able to deal with any issues related to this relationship?
4. How do you plan on dealing with these issues in the future?

Dear _____ (fill in *your* name),



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Affirm It!

Complete the writing of this reflection by *consciously* writing the following affirmation—fill in the name of the person with whom you conducted the dialogue on which you were reflecting—below three times:

I am grateful to explore and increase my understanding of my relationship with _____ .

•

•

•

Repeat it!

Repeat the entire previous writing exercise at least one more time with a different dialogue pair from your list. Feel free to repeat this process a few more times.



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

STEP 6: REFLECTION: Read through the previous dialogues and write your responses to the questions below.

- 1. What have you learned from your writing so far? What have you discovered about yourself or about others in your life?**
- 2. How have you dealt with the issues raised in these writing exercises so far?**
- 3. When stress, tension, dis-ease, anxiety, and other issues occur in the future, how can you more skillfully deal with them?**



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Contemplative Writing Exercise:

Reflection and Awareness

Do you know what your values are, or what is really important to you? When is the last time you sat down and considered these questions? If you are like most people, you probably don't remember the last time you created the space and time to consider what is meaningful and important to you.

Try this: Take 10-20 minutes, find a place to sit down where you won't be disturbed. Read through the questions, then go back and give your full attention to each question. Read the question slowly to yourself a few times, then close your eyes and internally ask the question. Allow a pause here, without jumping right to thinking, conclusions, or action. As best you can, write down the first few things that come to mind under each question. Don't worry about getting it right or doing it in any particular way. Just ponder the question momentarily, and then write down the first few things that come to mind.

After moving through all the questions in this way, come back to the top and read through each question and your responses. As best you can, with a friendly attitude toward yourself, allow these responses to be present just as they are, perhaps newly arisen in your awareness, allowing your life to be just as it happens to be right now.

- What are my most deeply held values? In other words, what is most important to me?

- What are my sources of strength and support? (people, places, events, times, things, etc.)

- What do I need to do to that will keep me healthy, happy, and strong?



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Wrapping up: Commitment to This Work (last class)

“When pain arises, I will pause, drop into the body, notice the sensations of the pain, and accept what is happening in the moment. With curiosity I will explore my experience of pain as it unfolds moment by moment (physical sensations, emotional feelings, mental thoughts). With kindness to myself, I remember that this pain is mind body syndrome and that I am okay. As I notice the old story and habits that arise with the pain, I will let go of them as best I can. With persistence and patience, I will continue to practice the exercises and writing as I orbit around the root cause of this pain, discovering new insights and realizations about myself as I move forward moment by moment, day by day. As I see, recognize, and work with these core issues, I will choose to move in healthy and joyful directions. I will continue to declare who and what I really am and how I want to live my life. By doing this work I am able re-create the story of my life and chart a new course starting with this moment now. I promise to say, write, and do those things that nourish me and make me feel happy and good about myself, starting by stepping out of a pain-focused reality and into a gratitude-focused life. I will remember that I already have all the inner resources, wisdom, and power I’ll ever need, and I recognize that I must allow the inner healer to rise up and guide me. I will surround myself with people, places, and events that are nurturing and supportive to my highest good as best I can. I will create a sanctuary of respite for myself in any moment or situation by being mindful of my breath and caring well for myself. I am reminded that I deserve to be happy, peaceful, and well because I am a human being. I acknowledge that I am worthy of love, acceptance, and respect—period!”

Your Signature and Date



STEP 7: FINAL WRITING EXERCISES & REFLECTIONS

SUGGESTIONS FOR MAKING REAL CHANGE

1. ERASE DOUBT. Recognize that your true diagnosis is MBS and that the symptoms you are experiencing are completely due to the interaction between the mind and the body. If you begin to doubt you have MBS or you begin to wonder if some other purely physical condition is present, please contact Dr. Schubiner or your regular doctor to discuss this. If you are going to succeed in this program, it is essential to maintain an unwavering commitment to the understanding that your diagnosis is MBS and that by working in this way, you will succeed in getting rid of your symptoms.

2. BE PATIENT. Your symptoms have probably been present for a fairly long time. Therefore they may take some time to go away. Don't worry if you aren't seeing immediate results. If you keep working on the program, you will begin to see results. Don't try too hard and don't get more stressed by worrying about doing the program perfectly. The program works very well and you don't need to add more stress by worrying if you will get better. You will.

3. KEEP WORKING. Therefore, just continue to keep working on the program. Don't give up. Trust in this program and trust in yourself. Choose the issues to work on and do the writing, the meditations, and the talking to the mind.

4. KNOW THYSELF. Be willing to look at your life and the things that have happened. Be willing to be honest with yourself. Everyone has done things they wish they hadn't or things they are ashamed of. It's OK to recall these things and deal with them through the writing and meditating exercises. Remember to be kind to yourself. The more you are able to be honest with yourself and be kind to yourself, you will be able to accept yourself and let go of some of the stressful emotions that cause MBS symptoms. Practice being honest and kind with others as well.

5. FIND CONTENTMENT. Find ways of learning to be content or happy. Add things to the gratitude list. Do things that you like and that give you pleasure. Do things for others. Seek help from friends, family, co-workers, and counselors to gain support and understanding. Listen to others and see if they will listen to you. Connecting to others in a deep way leads to an improved sense of self. Spend at least a few hours each week doing things that are just for you and that make you happy.

6. DO SOMETHING. Become more active. Complete your lists of things you would like to do and include some things that you can start doing immediately. The more active you are, the less time you will have to be ill and the quicker you will get better.



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Step 7 (cont.): Creating the New You

“Seize the very first possible opportunity to act on every resolution you make, and on every emotional prompting you may experience in the direction of habits you aspire to gain.”

--William James, *Principles of Psychology*, 1890.

Think about how you feel and how you feel about yourself. If you're like most people, you have a multitude of thoughts about yourself: some of them complimentary, some of them not-so complimentary; some of them encouraging, some of them discouraging; some of them friendly, some of them mean; some of them kind, some unkind. The way that you think about yourself and the way that you talk to yourself (the internal “talk” that goes on all the time in your mind) can have great effects on how you are and what you do. Since there is a great amount of diversity within your mind in how you see yourself, you can make choices about which parts of yourself to emphasize. Once you begin to act in ways that emphasize the qualities you admire in yourself, you gain experience with the new you and those actions become habits that are easier to perform and occur more regularly. In addition, as you act more often in ways you'd like to be, you begin to see yourself in these ways and your self-image changes so that you see the new you as who you really are. For example, if you want to be kinder to yourself or to your family, you just need to practice being kinder in small ways on a regular basis. If you want to be more generous or more outgoing, you can practice these things. If you want to be healthier, more active, or more fit, you can begin to do things that make you this way and you will gradually see yourself as a healthier, more active and more fit person.

A good first step in this process is to look inward to discover some positive things about yourself that you may not pay attention to on a regular basis. There is an old story about a Native American elder who is telling his grandson that he notes within him two creatures who are at war: the wild dog is mean, vicious and lies, while the eagle is kind, just and honest. They often fight for supremacy within his heart and mind. The small boy's eyes widen and he asks his grandfather who will win this war. The elder statesman answers: Whichever one I feed. (Or as I might describe it, whichever one I nourish, pay attention to and act on.)

It is up to you to notice this “war” that occurs in you just as it occurs in all of us. You can choose to “feed” or pay attention to those qualities that move you in the direction you would like to travel. For example, you can live in anger, fear and sadness or you can live in love, hope, and joy. These are choices you make on a daily basis and the more often you choose to live in love, hope, and joy, the more that will be who you are. In fact, however you would like to be, you actually already are. In other words, you have those characteristics within you and you can nourish them and make them more a part of your everyday life.



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Step 7 (cont.): Write Your Life Story In A New Way

Everyone has a narrative or a story that they tell themselves about their lives. These stories are very powerful because they remind us of our past and they also predict our future, since we tend to be controlled to a large degree in what we think we can do by what happened in our past. However, there are many ways to view the past and many opportunities to alter our futures. Therefore, this exercise gives you the opportunity to create a new life story.

Your Old Story:

First, write a synopsis or short version of your old story: the one where you tend to emphasize the negative things that have happened in your life and how you tend to be limited in your choices and in the things you can do by this somewhat negative view of yourself. Keep this relatively short, maybe a half page to a full page.



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Your New Story:

Now, write a new story for yourself. You can take the facts that have occurred, but try to put a new twist on them. What you have learned from them, how you have overcome several significant stressors or barriers. Emphasize the positive things that have happened to you and your positive reactions to life events. Emphasize your successes and things you have accomplished. Create the person you would like to be. Create the person who you really are now: able to make new choices, able to overcome past problems, able to accomplish the things that you would like to accomplish. You can begin to view your life as a hero, rather than as a victim. A hero has many obstacles, but finds a way to learn from them and overcome them. It is a journey, sometimes a long one, but a journey that shows your ability to grow, change, and succeed.



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Step 7 (cont.): Activities & Things I Make a Commitment to Doing

Activities and/or things for myself:

This week:

In the next month:

In the next 6 months to one year:

Activities and/or things for others:

This week:

In the next month:

In the next 6 months to one year:

Repeat it!

Repeat the previous writing exercise at least one more time. Feel free to repeat this process a few more times.



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

End this session by speaking these wishes out loud three times:

May I be happy and peaceful.
May I be safe and protected.
May I be free from inner and outer harm.
May I be healthy and strong.

Next step: Think of others (friends, loved ones, AND difficult people) in your life who might benefit from these wishes or others to whom you would like to send these wishes. Repeat these wishes out loud three times for these people:

May you be happy and peaceful.
May you be safe and protected.
May you be free from inner and outer harm.
May you be healthy and strong.

Next step: Think of your family, friends, “enemies,” co-workers and colleagues, neighbors, community, society, the whole human race, all life on the Earth and repeat these wishes out loud three times:

May we be happy and peaceful.
May we be safe and protected.
May we be free from inner and outer harm.
May we be healthy and strong.



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

Next step: Reflect on the following “Things To Do”

*Notice what has been hidden;
Understand what has been a mystery.*

*Speak what has been unspoken;
Confront what has been avoided.*

*Accept what needs to be accepted;
Forgive what needs to be forgiven.*

Change what needs to be changed.

By Howard Schubiner MD and Mark Lumley Ph.D.

Final Recommendations and Suggestions:

***Above all, be kind to yourself.**

***Be persistent and patient with positive change.**

***Practice some form of self-reflection every day.**

***Keep writing and journaling in positive & creative ways!**



Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises

The Journey

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice --
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.

"Mend my life!"

each voice cried.

But you didn't stop.

You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.

It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.

But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do --
determined to save
the only life you could save.

~ *Mary Oliver* ~