

introduction

Hello Internet Friends!

I'm so excited to share these journal prompts with you!

Journaling is one of my favorite tools for calming anxiety (my clients' and my own), because it forces me to slow the heck down and examine words one at a time. Anxiety loves to act big and tough by **going fast** and **staying vague**. Reducing speed and increasing specificity makes a huge difference in taking away Anxiety's power.

As you read the list of prompts, you might be tempted to think, "This won't work for me, I'm too {fill in the blank}". And you might be right! I never promised that all of the coping strategies I suggest work for every person in every situation. I'm not a wizard! I do promise, however, that 100% of the strategies that you **DON'T** try will fail. My suggestion is to suspend your judgment, save this list where you can find it, and give it an honest try when life gets tough. Most people do one journal prompt at a time (as opposed to the whole list), so they can really flesh out the details.

How will you know if it's working? You might experience a reduction in anxiety, but you also might stay at the same level of anxiety and instead find clarity about how to solve the solvable and live with the unsolvable. Keep in mind that a mild degree of anxiety is necessary to stay motivated and care about your life. Rather than asking, "How can I make this anxiety go away?", try asking, "How can I calm it to a manageable level so I can live my life?" or "What is this anxiety trying to teach me?" The answers to those questions will determine which coping strategies you try first.

If you're having typical daily stress, these journal prompts might be enough to get you through. However, if you're experiencing chronic and impairing anxiety, seeking out a doctor and/or mental health professional in your area might be necessary. Remember that I'm **a** therapist, but I'm not **your** therapist. ☺



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Dr. Kersti Spjut's

stop ten journal prompts for anxiety

1. What is the worst-case scenario? What am I most afraid will happen, and why is that a problem?
 - a. **Keep going** until you get to the bottom of it (i.e., ask yourself "And why does that matter?" or "And what's wrong with that?" over and over until you hit something that feels central or especially sensitive).
2. When have I faced a **similar** situation in the past? How did I handle it that time? What can I learn from that experience?
3. What do I have control of in this situation? What do I **not** have control of?
 - a. List both categories in as much detail as possible, and then make an action plan based on what you **can** control.
4. Who else has faced a similar problem to mine? Include people both past and present, both known and never previously met (celebrities, authors, historical figures, etc.). Write everything you know about how they experienced the situation.
 - a. Then answer these questions: How does it feel to know others have faced this issue? What can I **learn** from their experiences (for better or worse)? How am I the same and different from them?
5. What would I tell a good friend or loved one in this situation? What tone of voice and volume would I use as a spoke to them? What would I **do** for them (give them a hug, bake some muffins, offer to watch their kids, etc.)?
 - a. Then adapt those words and actions and give them to **yourself**.

6. What is the **funniest**-case scenario? For real, what is the absolutely-most-hilarious way this situation could resolve itself? (You are not limited to real-world possible outcomes; vampire-werewolf-love-triangles are completely on the table.) Describe it in as much detail as you can.
7. Use free association writing: Write **everything** that pops into your head. Set a timer and force yourself to keep writing without stopping for five minutes, even if it sounds like nonsense.
 - a. Then look at your writing and consider, "How much of what popped into my head was useful? How much was true? What **patterns** do I notice?"
8. Using your non-dominant hand, write the best and most beautiful outcome to the stressful situation you can imagine. Really try to visualize it as you write. You don't have to believe it **will** happen, just try to picture it.
 - a. Then use your dominant hand to write down any reactions you had to the ideal outcome scenario. What was it like writing with your non-dominant hand? What emotions came up for you as you visualized your ideal outcome?
9. Have I heard this story **before**? Was my anxiety right the last time it predicted this outcome? Write down as many instances where your worries have told a similar story. Compare and contrast those experiences. Come up with a **name** for the story, like The Nobody Loves Me Story or The Failure Story.
10. What is my anxiety asking me to **do**? Will acting on those urges bring me closer to or further from the life I want? How has acting on those urges worked in the past?