

Journaling Prompts for Anxiety & Rumination

For when your thoughts keep looping and you can't seem to put them down.

Writing a worry down moves it from a loop in your head to something you can look at. Pick one or two prompts, set a timer for 10 to 15 minutes, and close the notebook when it rings. You don't need to answer every question, and spelling doesn't matter.

1 Get it out of your head

- What's on my mind right now? (Write it all down without editing.)
- What am I most afraid will happen?
- Where do I feel this worry in my body?

2 Check the thought

- What facts support this worry? What facts don't?
- What would I say to a friend who had this exact worry?
- What's the most likely outcome, not the worst or the best?
- Will this matter in a week? In a year?

3 Swap "why" for "how"

- Instead of "Why does this always happen to me?", ask: how did this unfold, step by step?
- How have I handled something like this before?
- How could I respond differently next time?

4 Problem or loop?

- Can I do something about this today? If yes, what's one small next step, and when will I do it?
- If not, what would help me let it sit for now?

5 Close the page gently

- What do I need right now?
- Three things that went okay today, however small.
- What can wait until tomorrow?

Need help right now? If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 911 or go to your nearest emergency department. Call or text 9-8-8 (Suicide Crisis Helpline, 24/7). Under 18? Call Kids Help Phone at 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868.

This is an educational self-help tool. It is not a diagnosis, and it is not a substitute for care from a regulated health professional.

Where this comes from: Worry time: Dippel, Brosschot & Verkuil (2024), *International Journal of Cognitive Therapy*, 17, 160–178 (meta-analysis of worry postponement). "How" rather than "why": Watkins (2008), *Psychological Bulletin*, 134(2), 163–206. Thought-checking questions draw on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Prompts are original to Clover Counselling.

Try a daily “worry time”

Postponing worry to a set time each day is a simple technique from cognitive behavioural therapy. Studies suggest it can cut down how much of the day worry takes up. It feels odd at first, and that’s normal.

1

Pick a time and place

15 minutes, same time every day. Not right before bed.

2

Jot and postpone

When a worry shows up during the day, write a word or two and tell yourself, “I’ll think about this at worry time.”

3

Worry on purpose

At worry time, go through your list using the prompts. When the timer ends, stop.

4

Notice what’s left

Some worries will have faded by then. That’s useful information too.

My worry time: _____ Where: _____

Worry log

The worry	Can I act on it?	Next step, or how I’ll let it sit
	☐ Yes ☐ No	
	☐ Yes ☐ No	
	☐ Yes ☐ No	
	☐ Yes ☐ No	
	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Go gently. Writing about hard things can stir up strong feelings for a while. If it leaves you more upset, stop, try the 60-Second Grounding Exercise, and bring it to a therapist if you’re working with one. If worry is taking over your days or your sleep, that’s a good reason to talk to a professional.

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