

Alleviating the Weight of the Mind

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Introduction

Written for WRS 101, the following piece is a narrative description of an experience with writing, presented as a spoken audio and transcript. Exploring the unique effect of journaling on an unsuspecting individual shows how doubt can be overshadowed by relieving feelings without complex intervention. Beginning with a quiet moment alone, listing the many thoughts crowding one's brain leads to the discovery of how stressful thoughts can be displaced, leading to a feeling of weightlifting off one's shoulders, opening space to welcome positive, mindless perspectives of the day. Surprise and happy confusion describe the individual's emotions as they work through the activity, rifling through incoming thoughts and dispensing those that preceded them.

Keywords: anxiety, calm, journaling, narrative, writing for personal development



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² *Writing across the University of Alberta* (WAUA) publishes undergraduate student writing from writing studies courses and courses focused on writing studies practices and scholarship at the University of Alberta. You can find WAUA online at <https://writingacrossuofa.ca/>.

A quiet moment in my day prompted me to pick up a book I had received as a gift and had never opened. It wasn't a fictional book that I normally would indulge myself in right away or some self-help solve-your-problems type of book. The cover read "52 Lists for Calm". It was one of those wellness journal-type things, full of prompts and questions I should probably be asking myself but never do.

I always wanted to get into journaling but never found myself able to set aside the time for it. I felt an obligation to at least try it out; the book was a gift, after all, and if it sat unopened on my bookshelf for the rest of the year, *c'est la vie*.

I sat cross-legged on my bed, which was freshly made, in an attempt to do everything possible to procrastinate this endeavour. The book was closed in my lap; my favourite pen was in my hand, waiting for me to take the cap off. I often found journaling to be more stressful than relaxing. Was I getting all my points across in my writing? Did I miss something significant from the day or something I felt so strongly about that was now further from my mind? My brain always ran faster than my hand could write, leaving me to get frustrated and turn the encounter into something extremely unenjoyable rather than the relieving experience I had been told by so many it would be. I took a deep breath to try and rid these thoughts from my brain, the anticipatory dislike already tainting the activity.

I read the enlarged and bolded sentence at the top of the page, "List everything you are thinking about *right now*," the *right now* italicized for emphasis. It invoked a feeling of overwhelm within me; there were so many things on my mind in that moment that I couldn't organize them enough to put them on the page.

Then, I forced my mind to slow down like slamming brakes on a trailer and really asked myself: what is on my mind right now? So many times, I'm stressed about something, but I can't pinpoint what it is, even if someone were to ask me.

I slowed my brain down and jotted exactly what I was thinking about onto the page. I have an assignment due at the end of the week, but tomorrow is my only free day, so I have to get it done then. I forgot to empty the dishwasher. Should I book a nail appointment now or wait until the weekend? I began to separate each thought and catch it like a butterfly in a net as it zoomed past my head, writing it on the page before I could think too hard about it.

Too many times, I have found myself caught up in making my first sentence perfect so that I end up writing nothing at all in fear that it isn't good enough. Now, with the time and space sitting before me, I looked past my mind, moving faster than my hand and allowed the thoughts to come out, rushed and imperfect. They were just thoughts, after all, for me to experience and for no one else to have an opinion on.

When I had emptied my thoughts onto the paper, I felt physically lighter. It boggled me that such a simple exercise as writing down in point form what I was thinking about could relieve me of so much stress. It wasn't as if I had solved anything on the list; I just transferred it somewhere else so my mind had more room. I could sense that my face probably looked as if I had seen something no one wanted to see. I was genuinely confused about how I felt such a physical reaction to something that I felt was almost going to be a chore.

At the bottom of the page was an additional clarifying exercise: cross off anything you can't do in this exact moment and choose one thing you are capable of doing and want to do. I found myself scratching points off one-by-one, until barely any were left untouched. Things I was so worried about but couldn't do anything about at that moment, taking up space, taking up energy, and taking away from solace.

I was allowing these things to maximize my anxiety when they were completely out of my control. By slowing my mind and separating my thoughts, I was able to decipher what was actually causing me stress. Simply sitting on my bed, I felt as if I made less of a dent in the mattress, the top of my head was closer to the ceiling, my face and muscles weren't as tense, and I was almost able to float. The simple acknowledgement of the things that were happening and making me nervous or anxious was all my body needed to release those feelings.

It was the action of physically writing these thoughts down that allowed my brain to work slow enough to understand and acknowledge them, something that didn't happen when I tried to organize them in my brain alone. Something I found to be such a chore ended up being so relieving and helpful; I wanted to bathe in that feeling for the rest of the day.

I closed the book, capped my pen, and stuck them away next to my bed. A small smile sat effortlessly on my face as I glanced out the window and noticed the bright sky and glowing sun for the first time that day; how refreshing it was to allow in a thought that required no exercise.

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