

The background features abstract, overlapping shapes in shades of purple and blue. A prominent, dark blue, teardrop-shaped element is centered behind the text. Below the main title, there are several horizontal, wavy lines in a medium purple color, resembling a stylized pattern or a decorative border.

# Writing a Way Through

A Positive Journal® Companion  
for Times of Struggle

# Writing a Way Through

A Positive Journal® Companion  
for Times of Struggle

© Dr Megan C Hayes

Visit [www.positivejournal.org](http://www.positivejournal.org) for more

## **Life is not always easy.**

It would be nice if it were, but there are times when we simply cannot feel joy, or levity, or gratitude.

## **At these times, what we can do is trust.**

Trust is a deeply positive, yet gentle, emotion. It asks only that we surrender to the *current* of things. It is the emotional equivalent of the Buddhist saying: 'do not try to steer the river'. It is the emotion of getting *through* not of getting *over*.



**The prompts that follow are not designed to go against, or beyond, or around your circumstances.**

These are ten gentle invitations, each crafted to direct you in writing a way through whatever you're experiencing just now. There are no right or wrong answers - just a soft inquisitive journey within.

**This companion invites you to write with trust.**

This is a soothing reminder that, no matter how bad things feel right now, *this too shall pass*.

However, a journal is *not* a cure-all. If you feel you might be experiencing depression, anxiety or intrusive thoughts then please **see the end of the guide for information on support services.**

If you feel you are already supported and ready for some kind self-explorative writing then let's continue...

**As well as trust, this gentle journey also draws upon some of our other, tender-yet-positive, emotions: *compassion, serenity and hope.***

These might all feel rather abstract in a moment of crisis, but the exercises in this guide invite you to explore them a little more deeply. The aim is to feel you can gain a sincere sense of these emotions (even if this takes a little time). There is no 'faking it til you make it' needed.


A basic principle of a Positive Journal is that **we do not need to perform positivity, we just need to notice what's there.**

Use this guide as an invitation to notice. If negative thoughts or feelings arise for you, please do not feel you have to suppress these. Notice everything that arises with tender-heartedness and respect for what you are going through. Gently guide yourself back to the prompt in whatever way feels right and, importantly, kind.



1. Reflect, with **compassion**, on past experiences of struggle (big or small).


To begin, use this space to write about (or simply list) struggles you've *already* survived. Use the prompt 'I offer myself compassion for...'. This might be from the faraway past, e.g. 'my parents separating when I was nine'; or the more recent past, e.g. 'not getting that job'.






## 2. Write a compassionate letter to self.


Here, choose one of the past selves from the previous prompt. Use this space to write that past self a letter in *the second person* ('you' rather than 'I'). What would you like to say to that past self? Try to offer them some kindness and understanding, e.g. 'I know you need compassion right now and so I would like to tell you that...'





### 3. Write a compassionate account of what happened next.


Here, use *the third person* (she/he/they) to write a short narrative about what happened next to that past self after this particular struggle, or series of struggles.






#### 4. Reflect, with **serenity**, on where you are.

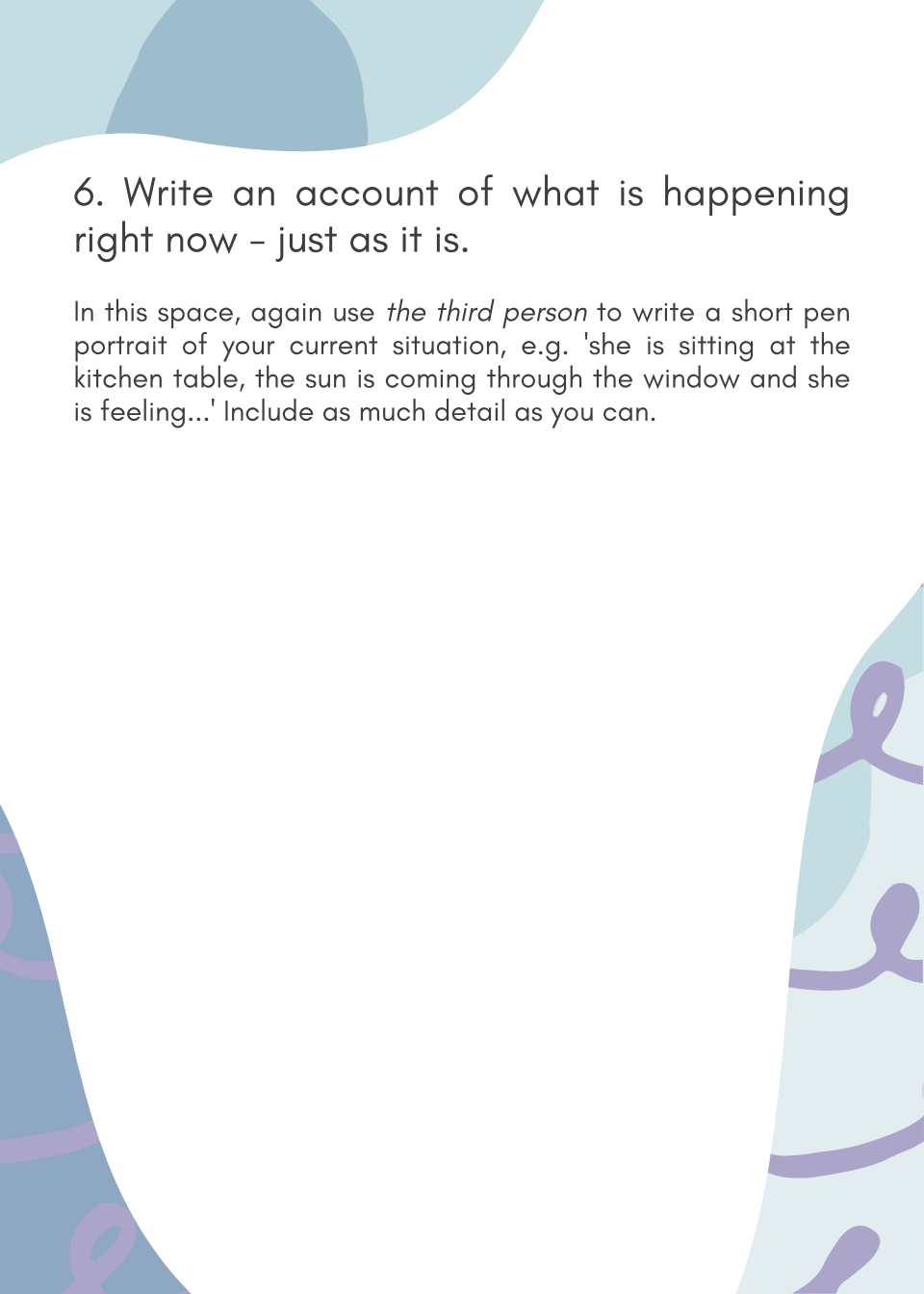
Now, use this space to write about (or simply list) some things that are true about your *present* situation. This might include any feelings of grief or anxiety, but also list things you can see, hear, touch, taste and smell in your immediate physical surroundings. Remember: just notice what is there (inside and out) attentively and, as far as possible, without judgement.



5. Write a letter to self that offers some words of calm or serenity.


Here, you are invited to once again use *the second person*, this time to write your present self a letter. In the letter, kindly address yourself right now. As you write, you might imagine the kinds of things you would want to say to a very beloved friend if they were facing hardship, e.g. 'what you are facing is really tough, but you will be okay; you can survive this'.






6. Write an account of what is happening right now – just as it is.


In this space, again use *the third person* to write a short pen portrait of your current situation, e.g. 'she is sitting at the kitchen table, the sun is coming through the window and she is feeling...' Include as much detail as you can.



7. Thinking about the future, list some things you are **hopeful** for, or looking forward to.


This might be as simple as 'I am looking forward to warmer summer weather', or something deeper such as 'I hope I can find a way to be brave'. Fill the page with lots of these big and small things. There is no need to explain or justify them.





8. Write a letter to your future self in which you imagine things are different.


Once more, use *the second person* to write your future self a letter. In the letter, express hope that things are better for this future version of you, even in a very small way. What else might you say to them?





## 9. Write a new, hopeful, story for yourself.

Here you are invited to again use *the third person*. Describe a future version of yourself for whom things are much better. You don't have to justify, defend, or even believe this story. This person may not even quite be you. You might give them different attributes, or create an entirely different character, as long as they have at one time experienced a similar struggle to that which you are facing now.



## 10. 'This is how I will trust...'

The prompts in this companion have guided you on a journey through your **past**, inquisitively into the **present** moment, and helped you look hopefully to the **future**.

Looking at life as a 'journey' in this way is perhaps one of our greatest shared metaphors. It crosses cultures and provides a helpfully unifying shared narrative for the human experience.

Most of us can relate to the feeling of life being a bit like an uncertain, sometimes perilous, path we must follow. There are always peaks and troughs; there are always monsters and magic helpers.

### On the following page...

Use the space to write about (or simply list) how you will trust in your own on-going journey from here on out. As you write, you might look back and draw together any important insights that arose for you in the previous prompts.

You might also want to (very gently) remind yourself that where you're headed might just be somewhere a little bit better.



*This is how I will trust...*



## Sources

Johnson, E. A., & O'Brien, K. A. (2013). Self-compassion soothes the savage ego-threat system: Effects on negative affect, shame, rumination, and depressive symptoms. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 32*(9), 939-963.

Seih, Y. T., Lin, Y. C., Huang, C. L., Peng, C. W., & Huang, S. P. (2008). The benefits of psychological displacement in diary writing when using different pronouns. *British Journal of Health Psychology, 13*(1), 39-41.

## Research

Hayes, M. (2018). *Write Yourself Happy: The Art of Positive Journalling*. Gaia.

Hayes, M. C., & Hefferon, K. (2015). 'Not like rose-tinted glasses... like taking a pair of dirty glasses off': A pilot intervention using positive emotions in expressive writing. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 5(4): 78-95.

Hayes, M. C., & Van Zyl, L. E. (2019). Positive Journal Writing Across Multicultural Contexts: A Protocol for Practice. In *Positive Psychological Intervention Design and Protocols for Multicultural Contexts* (pp. 415-433). Springer.

## Support

If you need further support, or just someone to talk to, you can contact the following services.

### **Mind Infoline**

Tel. 0300 123 3393 | Text: 86463

Email: [info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk)

Web: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

Post: Mind Infoline, PO Box 75225,  
London, E15 9FS

### **Samaritans**

Tel. 116 123

Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

Web: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

Post: Chris, Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK,  
PO Box 9090, Stirling, FK8 2SA

*Other services you might contact:*

**SANE** (for anyone affected by mental illness):

[www.sane.org.uk](http://www.sane.org.uk)

**CALM** (Campaign Against Living Miserably, for men aged 15 to 35): [www.thecalmzone.net](http://www.thecalmzone.net)

**Papyrus** (for the prevention of young suicide): [papyrus-uk.org](http://papyrus-uk.org)

**Victim Support:** [www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

For support for specific mental health challenges like anxiety, depression, or bipolar, see this helpful list of mental health helplines from the NHS:

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines)

# About

I am Dr Megan C Hayes, author of *Write Yourself Happy: The Art of Positive Journalling* (Gaia, 2018). I help individuals and groups use writing and story to promote happy wellbeing.

My Positive Journal® approach to personal writing puts the science of positive psychology onto the page and wellbeing into words.

Visit [www.positivejournal.org](http://www.positivejournal.org) to  
#writeyourselfhappy with more guides  
and prompts.