



# Scleroderma Foundation Michigan Chapter's Guide to Journaling for Caregivers and Patients

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**No Known Cause.  
No Known CURE.  
Together, WE CAN Change That!  
It All Begins With You!**

# Learning How to Journal

## Keeping It Simple!



In life when we find ourselves struggling to understand the changes we are experiencing, the emotions we are feeling and how it is affecting our daily lives, we can find ourselves being overwhelmed.

**One good way to express those emotions in a constructive manner is to journal.**

For some of you, this may be an old concept, much like the days when you sat privately in your bedroom huddled with your pink and white diary that had a tiny key to keep your intimate thoughts and experiences safely locked away from your parents and siblings. For others, this may be the first opportunity you have had to write down your thoughts and you might be apprehensive about doing it.

No matter if you are a novice writer or a seasoned writer of journals, fear not, the process is easy and actually very rewarding.

The nice part about journaling is it also does not come with much cost and requires little equipment. These are two things that make it the perfect solution for channeling your day to day feelings in one neat location.

As with anything, it may take you time to feel comfortable with writing down your thoughts and feelings since for many this can be taboo. Depending on your upbringing and values and beliefs, you may feel that doing this shows weakness or is a waste of time. In fact, that could not be farther from the truth. Journaling is an excellent way to place your emotions and daily experiences down on paper or on the computer depending on which method you feel most comfortable using. By doing this you have a record and log that you can reflect back on at a later date as needed.

The goal of this manual is to help you determine how to journal, what to journal and when to journal. Since there is no right or wrong way to journal, this is only a guide for you to use. You will be the one in control of your own journal!

The medical information in this manual is provided as an informational resource only, and is not to be used or relied on for any diagnostic or treatment purposes. Please consult your health care provider, or contact a licensed therapist if you have any specific questions regarding your feelings, concerns toward your loved one, or if you think you are having trouble coping.

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# Why Do People Journal?

# What Are The Benefits?

It is important to understand the benefits of journaling before you began the process so you will be more invested in it. Journaling has many benefits and this list is not all encompassing. Once you have been journaling for a few months, you will certainly be able to add to this list.

## Benefits of Journaling

- Excellent form of stress relief.
- Documenting your life in one place.
- Placing all of your emotions down on paper helps you to express them and not build them up.
- Feelings of accomplishment when you look back and review your journal.
- Helps to keep track of emotional trends so you can alert your physician if you see that you are getting depressed.
- Good way to identify patterns in your life.
- Keep track of medical history in one place.



## What Type of Journal Should I Get?

The first step to the process of journaling is to select a notebook or binder that you will be using to journal in. Your selection can range from as simple as notebook paper and a binder to a more expensive option of a formal journaling notebook. Before you make the choice consider whether you want your journal to be portable and something that goes with you in a purse, briefcase or computer bag, or do you want to keep it at home in a secured place.

If you are looking for a portable option, there are many on the market and they can be purchased on-line or at any office supply store. These come in various sizes, shapes and colors. You can even choose to use a simple black and white composition notebook if you like that type of paper. Your choices are vast in the office supply stores. Some come with leather covers while others come with plastic or even paper covers.

If you would like to use lined or unlined paper and a binder, this can also be purchased at a drug store, office supply store or some grocery chains. The only thing to consider is size of the binder that would best meet your needs.

When purchasing a journal consider how much space is offered per page. Does the journal have wide lines or are they smaller, making it more difficult for some patients with constricted hands to write in that area? Also consider if the journal easily opens and shuts. The book type can sometimes be more difficult for patients because you have to hold the journal open with one hand as you are writing and this can cause extra stress on your hands. Since journaling should be a relaxing experience, it is best to select a journal that will work best with your specific needs. The goal is to make journaling a positive and encouraging time and not one that causes you any pain or discomfort on any part of your body.

No matter what type of journal you choose, make the selection process fun and enjoyable!



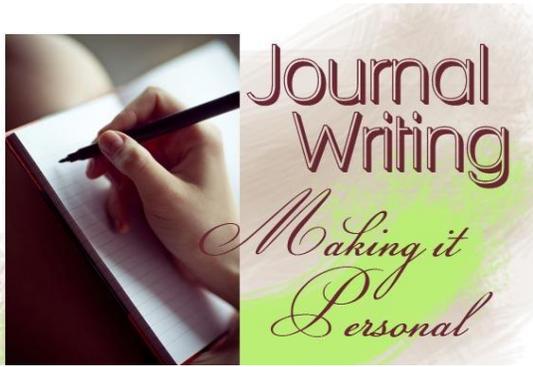
## Deciding Where To Journal The Perfect Location

Location, location, location, where to write your journal is the next question you need to answer for yourself. Writing in a journal is a personal experience, very intimate and private so when you are writing you will want to select a location that reflects a sense of that environment. Hence, you will not want to be in the middle of the kitchen right before dinner is being served and your family is busily gathering around you asking questions, grabbing food out of the refrigerator and interrupting your thoughts. These distractions could interfere with your journaling and being able to securely put down your thoughts in an accurate and honest method.

The nice thing about journaling is it is portable and can be done at a moment's notice so if you are feeling the urgency to journal while you are waiting to pick up your children, grandchildren or sitting and waiting at the doctor's office, you can easily open your purse, take out your journal and write down some thoughts.

Some people who journal like to have one location, a special spot where they journal in their home. This is considered to be a safe zone for them where they know they can have privacy and they will be void of the chaos of the rest of the household. If this sounds like something you think will work for you, great, then look around your home and seek out such a location. Find somewhere comfortable, a couch, a cozy chair, a deck overlooking a scenic view or even a window seat where nature is close by. All of these settings will enhance the peacefulness of journaling and help to make it easier for you to channel out the noise and confusion of the world around you.

For some people who like to journal, they find that location is not important to them, they can enjoy it anywhere and at anytime so remember that this experience is your own and there are no rules. Whatever works for you will become your journaling experience. Don't stress and worry if you are doing it right or wrong because as long as you are doing it, you are doing it right!



## How Do I Journal? I Am Not Sure How To Start!

You have your journal book, you have selected the perfect location, you even have the perfect writing utensil and now you sit staring at the blank pages wondering silently to yourself, “What the heck do I do now?”

Don’t feel bad, everyone does the same thing! Starting to journal is the hardest part of the process. It is difficult to begin to write down personal thoughts and feelings, even if they are overflowing inside of you just waiting to come out on those pages of that beautiful journal book you carefully purchased.

Here are some tips to make that first day easier and more enjoyable.

- Make a pact with yourself to write in your journal every day.
- Do not set any expectations on yourself as to how much you will write each day.
- Take your journal with you so that if you feel like adding to it while you are waiting at the doctor’s office or you have time while you get stuck somewhere, you can journal.
- Don’t feel as if you can only write in a specific amount of pages per day, give your permission to write as much or as little as you desire.
- Be honest when you write and do not write fictitiously.
- Do not worry about being creative in your writing style.
- Do not worry about grammar when journaling, this is only for you and your 4<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher will not be giving you a grade on it!
- The sky is the limit when journaling so write about whatever you want to; let your mind be your guide.

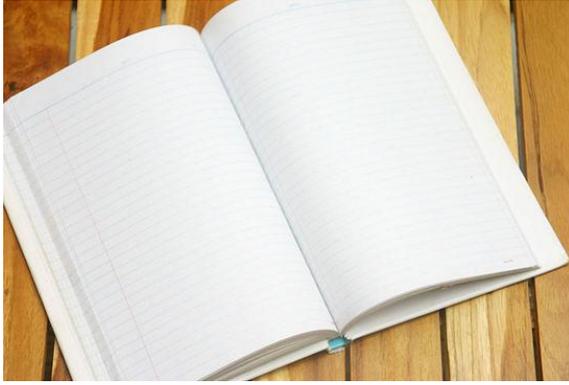


## My Mind Is Blank! What Can I Write About Today?

Some days writing in your journal is going to be easy and so quick, and other days, it is going to be a more difficult process. Expect this and understand that when you journal your thoughts and feelings will not always flow at the same level or depth. One day you may write half a page and the next, you may fill up three pages. Remember, there are NO RULES to how you journal. You do not get a grade on this and it is not a school project. This is something you are doing for yourself, to help yourself as a caregiver or a scleroderma patient better cope with the changes in your life. You are journaling because you want to remain emotionally strong and allow your emotions to not get stuck inside of you. As your life changes and situations change in your world, the one thing that will remain constant will be the fact that you can always sit down and safely and securely vent out your feelings in your journal.

Now having said all of that, there will be days when your mind is a total blank, you sit down and stare at those pages and you cannot think of a single thing to write about. You maybe went to the doctor's that day but writing about the experience does not seem relevant to you. Possibly, you took your loved one to the grocery store and the trip exhausted you making you wish you had just gone alone and left him or her home with a family member. Writing about those feelings of guilt seems hard as you stare at those pages and that is totally fine, don't! Write about something else, something that YOU want to write about. You are in control, this is your journal and you get to make all the choices as to what goes into it on what day.

Some days it will be harder than others, based on your energy level, negative experiences you may have had, pressures you are under or even if you are in pain. If you do not feel well on a given day, it will be incredibly difficult to write happy thoughts down in your journal. Again, that is one hundred percent acceptable. Go with whatever your emotions are telling you to do. They will guide you in the direction you need to be writing in your journal.



## Topics for Difficult Days

For those days when the blank pages are staring back at you and you just cannot seem to think of anything to journal about consider one of these suggestions:

- Favorite food
- Favorite vacation spot
- First pet you had
- Favorite childhood memory
- Favorite outfit you wore as a child
- Your first bike that you can remember getting when you were young
- Your childhood friend
- Your first love
- What makes you smile in life?
- What makes you laugh in life?
- Make a list of everything you are thankful for in your life
- Make a list of all the things you would like to change in your life-then write about what it would take to make those changes
- The most beautiful place you can remember visiting and why you liked it so much
- A special memory you had with your mom
- Your favorite time you spent with your father
- What makes your family special and different than others?
- Why are you unique and different than your best friend?
- When you look in the mirror what are the top three best features you see?
- When you think about yourself what five positive qualities come to mind?
- If you could go anywhere else today where would you be and why?
- If you could have a picnic with anyone in the world who is alive who would that be and why?
- Describe the most perfect day in detail
- What do you think is your biggest accomplishment in life to date?



## Topics for Difficult Days

- What would you like people to remember you for?
- What makes you special?
- When you close your eyes, what do you see?
- If you could take a one hour walk with anyone who has passed away, who would that be and why?
- What unique pet would you most like to have?
- What one thing do people not know about you?
- What one thing would surprise people to find out about you?
- What are funny things to you?
- What one food could you not give up?
- If you had a blank piece of paper and a crayon, what would you draw?
- What is your favorite part of your body and why?
- If you had two hours of free time to do whatever you wanted, what would you do?
- If you could be given any superpower which one would you want and what would you use it for?
- If you were given one million dollars to spend in one day, how would you spend the money?
- What is your favorite hour of the day and why?
- Who would you most like to spend six free hours with and what would you do?
- What is your favorite song and why do you like listening to it?

These are just an example of topics you can write about on the days when your mind goes blank. The most important thing is to remember that you want to try and keep your thoughts positive and uplifting on these days to keep you thinking positively.



## Final Thoughts It Is Time To Start Writing!

With your journal in hand and the perfect secured location for writing in it selected, you are ready to begin journaling.

Soon you will find it is second nature to pick up your journal and pour out your emotions and feelings onto those blank pages, leaving them as you close your notebook every day. It will become part of your routine and something you grow to treasure and enjoy. You will find you have a void on the days when you are unable to journal due to a busy schedule.

Journaling will become a normal part of your daily routine and once you establish a time that you enjoy sitting down to journal, it can be incorporated into your normal routine with ease.

Remember there are NO RULES, you decide what works best for you and most of all enjoy every minute of the time you spend writing in your journal. Writing can be therapeutic and comforting but if at any time you are finding it is becoming overwhelming or something you no longer enjoy, take a break from it for a couple weeks and then try it again later. Do not stress about the time you are not writing, it is fine. When you are ready, you will return to your journal with a happier frame of mind ready once again to put your feelings and emotions down on paper.

The Scleroderma Foundation Michigan Chapter is here for you if you have questions about the process of writing in a journal. If you would like to talk to someone about this or about your role as a caregiver or about scleroderma, please contact the Michigan Chapter at (800) 716-6554 or via e-mail at [MIchapter@scleroderma.org](mailto:MIchapter@scleroderma.org). You are not alone in this journey and we are here for you every step of the way.

Happy Journaling!  
The Scleroderma Foundation Michigan Chapter