

Ideas! *Ideas!* *Ideas!*
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Jog Your JOURNALING MEMORY

Pre-journaling your thoughts throughout your day can provide for more productive journaling sessions beyond the chaos.

By Brette McWhorter Sember

As you move through each day, often ideas, situations, thoughts and moments of clarity—all perfect fodder for your journal—fly by. When you finally make the time to sit down with your journal, many of them are lost forever. It can be frustrating to experience this loss of material and insights. Pre-journaling can help you

capture brilliant ideas and insights, or at least fleeting pieces of them, that you want to include in your journal. Learning to hold on to these building blocks of ideas will help you create a more comprehensive and meaningful journal, one that will be truly reflective of your daily thoughts, ideas and emotions.

Etching Ideas in Your Mind

Training yourself to use memory techniques to recall things to include in your journal is one of the best ways to pre-journal. When an event happens or when you have a thought or idea that would be perfect for your journal, you need to have a way to remember. Telling yourself, "I need to remember this" often isn't enough.

• **Visualization:** Attach a picture or image in your mind to the thing you want to remember. For example, say you wanted to remember to write about: how an antique vase brought back memories of your grandmother; your son's comment about Halloween; and the way a book you read affected you. You would picture a fence or a ladder in your mind and line up images associated with the things you want to remember. In this case, you would picture a fence or ladder with a vase, a jack-o'-lantern and a book lined up on it. When you are ready to write in your journal, visualize the fence or ladder with the items on it, and you should be able to recall the thoughts associated with those items.

• **Enumeration:** In your mind, list things you want to include in your journal. Number the items in your mind: 1) antique vase, 2) Halloween and 3) book. See this as a visual list on a piece of paper. Remember you wanted to write about three things. When you sit down to write, you should be able to see the list in your mind and recall the item associated with each number.

• **Memory cues:** Choose an object, landmark, or part of your home or office, and tie it to the thing you want to remember. Tell yourself, "When I look at my toothbrush, I will remember the story Susan told me about her daughter's first tooth," or "When I see the water tower out my window, I will remember to write about the waterfall I pictured today."

Keeping Tabs on Inspiration

If you find you simply have a terrible memory, or if you just feel safer physically recording something to help recall the journaling inspiration, try some of these tips for saving ideas.

• **Jot it down:** Carry a small pre-journaling notebook with you. When inspiration strikes, jot down some key words or a few sentences or thought fragments. You might also carry index cards or use a PDA (personal digital assistant) for this reason. Avoid using scraps of paper—they aren't an effective system because they can be lost or misplaced. At home, keep a magnetic

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notepad on the refrigerator and scribble ideas there as you are chasing your kids or tossing dinner together.

• **Get it on tape:** Purchase a hand-held micro cassette recorder for dictating quick thoughts and ideas. For this method of pre-journaling, you need to be disciplined enough to listen to and/or transcribe the tapes when you sit down to write in your journal. Otherwise, locating specific thoughts you have recorded can be difficult.

• **Phone home:** Simply pick up the phone and leave yourself a message on your answering machine. When you get home, the blinking red light won't let you forget the idea, and all the details you need will be on tape. If you have a cell phone, leave yourself a voicemail.

• **Send e-reminders:** Sending yourself e-mails is another way to record ideas. You also can set up a journal file on your computer at work or at home and type in key words or thought fragments as they occur to you.

Prompting Recall When You Write

When you sit down and write in your journal, you can help yourself recall significant moments if you follow some journaling strategies that help prompt recall.

• **Loaded questions:** Begin your journaling process by questioning yourself. What has happened since I last wrote an entry? What situations affected me in the last day or two? Was I struck with any important ideas or insights? Mentally reviewing these questions as you

begin to write can bring back forgotten thoughts.

• **Mental review:** Take a moment to sit quietly and review the events and emotions that have made up the past few days. As you recall your recent passing thoughts, you should be able to reflect upon how the happenings affected you. You also will rediscover insights that have flashed briefly through your mind.

• **Journal sections:** Setting up specific sections to complete for each journal entry can be helpful. Create one section to record important events or happenings that occurred since you last wrote. Set aside another to recall and examine your recent emotions. Describe them, then dissect them. Dedicate another to ideas, creative thoughts or dreams. These journal sections can be clear delineated areas, or you can simply adopt a process where you address these topics each time you write.

Pre-journaling is an effective way to harness the creative energy that flows throughout your day and capture it for use in your journal. These simple steps can help you preserve your thoughts and insights so that you later can record and analyze them in your journal. Don't waste your thoughts—save them! ~

Brette McWhorter Sember is the author of eight nonfiction books. Her work has appeared in more than 120 publications. Visit her Web site at www.mooseinthebirdbath.com.

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