



Exploring 4-H at Home

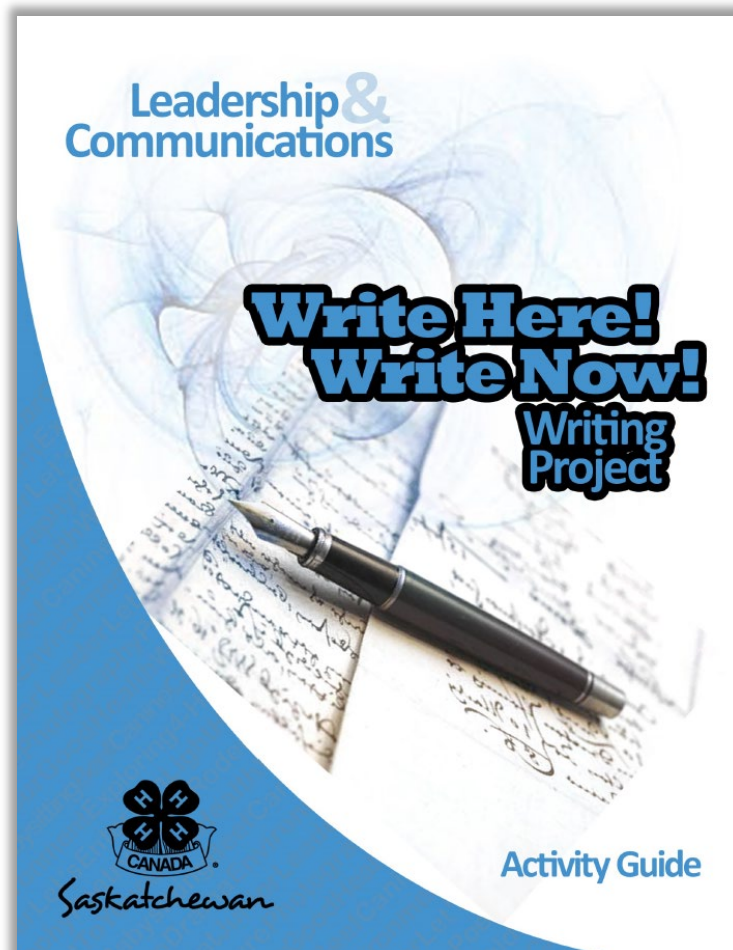


Community Engagement
and Communications

Pillar: Community Engagement and Communications

Project: Writing Skills: A to Z

Activity: Keeping a Journal



Why journaling is beneficial, especially to a writer

A journal or diary is a personal record of events, experiences and reflections kept on a regular basis over a period of time.

A journal can help you in many ways and it can also make you a better writer.

You can write a journal on a computer, a smart phone or on any blank piece of paper. You probably want it to be private so it's a good idea to put a password on your file, or if you're using paper, make sure you have a secure place to stash your journal.

It's a bit difficult to be completely open in your writing if you're even a little bit concerned that your words might be read by someone else.

Okay, you've got the paper, computer screen, whatever – write down the date and start writing. Include the date so that when you read this over in a week, month or year you'll know when you wrote it. “Wow! Did I really do that? I guess I am pretty smart,” you'll say to yourself, or “Wow! I can't believe I thought that was so important, last week/month/year.”

What to write?

Hey, it's your journal. That means you get to write whatever you want. If you're blanking out, you might try chatting to yourself/your journal about what you did during the day, or perhaps something you learned lately. As you write you might find that other thoughts are triggered and you want to write those down too.

Journaling is rather like thinking on paper. Don't be surprised if you find that as you write about say, a problem you're having at school that possible solutions come to mind, or that the problem doesn't seem quite as big as you thought it was. Or maybe, it still seems pretty big but just writing it down somehow makes you feel a bit better.

Many writers are also journalers. Recently one writer said, “I don't know what I think until I write it down.”

Imagine being faced with a situation that is totally new to you. Someone says, “Well, what do you think?” Writing out your feelings, maybe listing the facts you know, writing pros and cons of a situation, all can help you to figure out what you think.

Not only can journaling help you figure out stuff, it can also be a good place to write down your goals. It helps you to remember and stay focused and it can be a place to record your progress.

Don't worry about using the correct grammar and punctuation, and don't worry about what other people think. This is your journal and no one else ever has to see it.

Feel free to incorporate different styles of writing. Maybe you can fiddle around with a poem, or maybe you could try adding some artwork. This is your journal. You can do whatever you want, but even though your journal won't be marked on neatness, it's a good idea to keep it legible so that when you read it again in a few days, weeks or months you won't be puzzling over what you wrote.

So, how can a journal make you a better writer?

A journal can supply ideas for great stories. Feeling bummed because you flunked that test or your best friend is moving away? Can't stop talking/writing/thinking about that goal you made in soccer or maybe that cool guy you're crushing on? Could that be the beginning of a great short story, poem or ballad?

A journal can help you learn the art of storytelling.

A journal, especially if you write in it every day, can help build your writing confidence. Writing is like everything else – playing a musical instrument, playing a sport, doing a craft – the more you practice, the better you are at it.

Secret from a writer

More than a little of the fiction that you love to read was based on either the writer's own experience or the experience of people the writer knows. Sure, there was stuff deleted and stuff added that came from the writer's imagination.

Names, places, situations have been changed or tweaked, but most writers, if they're honest, will tell you that some of the best writing comes from real life; from stuff that really happened.

Activity: Journal Prompt

Use one of the following prompts to write a journal entry:

1. Pick an object in your house, which is important to you. Write about why it is important to you.
2. Write about the scariest thing to have happened to you.
3. Write about your favourite place in the world and why it is your favourite.
4. Write about your favourite hobby and why you like it.
5. Check what the weather is outside. Write about how it makes you feel and what you enjoy doing in this type of weather.

Example Journal Entry:

I wrote this Journal Entry as a writing assignment from one of my editors when I was a reporter. It was to help us learn to be creative with our writing, even when writing non-fiction:

The Painting

By Jodi Schellenberg

It's only a small 11x14 painting, framed and hanging on the wall, but to me it is a collection of great memories.

A girl floating in half a barrel in the middle of a pond - - mom told me not to do it, that I would get stuck in the middle of the pond. I didn't believe her.

Of course she was right. There I was with no paddles, trying to figure out a way back to my brother standing on the shore.

When he went to the house to ask for her help, mom brought her camera. Instead of throwing me a branch or a rope, she took a picture, laughed and said, "You got yourself into it -- get yourself out."

The story became a legend on the farm, with me being the brave and foolish girl who had to swim out of a cold pond in the spring, prompting my sister to paint it for my parents.

Years later, when my sister died, my brother-in-law made me a copy of the painting to hang on my wall -- giving me not only a great memory but a reminder of

