

## 1 **Tool: Writing and Journaling**

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3 Writing can be used in many different ways in our journey of healing and recovery. We do not  
4 have to consider ourselves a writer to benefit from using this tool to record our thoughts and  
5 experiences. We come to COSA having been affected by compulsive sexual behavior. Our  
6 experiences of living with addiction can be fraught with confusion and pain. Writing helps us  
7 make sense of our lives and experiences and find clarity. We start where we are comfortable,  
8 and the way we use writing in our recovery journey may change and evolve over time. What we  
9 choose to write about may differ from person to person and even day to day.

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11 When we first come to COSA, we may feel emotionally and physically drained. Many of us have  
12 experienced trauma, and starting our recovery work can seem overwhelming. We remember to  
13 take things one day at a time. Writing out lists helps us clarify what we have control over and  
14 what we do not. For example, to cope and manage our day-to-day responsibilities, we can use  
15 lists of what we want to accomplish for the day. When thinking through changes in our lives, lists  
16 of pros and cons help us sort through situations. We discover that making lists also helps us  
17 focus directly on what's in front of us. It helps us to process what is actually going on and  
18 reassures us that our experiences are real and valid, especially for those of us that have  
19 experienced manipulating behaviors by others.

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21 As we work through our Steps, we realize that our recovery benefits from a significant amount of  
22 writing. Step Four, for example, asks us to create a moral inventory of ourselves. Step Eight  
23 asks us to write a list of all persons we have harmed. In Step Ten, many use written lists as a  
24 way to take daily personal inventories. Writing regularly is a practical way of putting our Step  
25 work into action. It helps us work toward clarity around what has happened, how we feel about  
26 it, and what our part has been in any given situation. We look deep within ourselves, become  
27 aware of our patterns, and thus are prepared for later Steps, such as amends work. Our writing  
28 may even gently point us in the direction where we have additional recovery work yet to do.

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30 As we grow in self-awareness on our recovery journeys, there may still be times when we aren't  
31 sure what we need or how we feel. All we know is that something is bothering us and we need  
32 an outlet. Expressive writing, such as poems, stories, or stream-of-consciousness writing, is  
33 another form of writing that can help us get through confusion. It doesn't need to have an end  
34 goal, and (change "but" to "and") it may feel like airing out our grievances or cleansing the built-  
35 up hurt and resentment we are feeling. It is a way of expressing ourselves without having to  
36 directly confront another person when we aren't ready, or if that is not the right move.  
37 Expressive writing isn't limited to negative feelings but may include joyful expression as well.  
38 We may write poems, stories, or simply jot down stream-of-conscious thoughts and feelings.  
39 With expressive writing, we find our authentic voice as we process our thoughts and feelings in  
40 a safe space. Ultimately, this can help us remove blocks in our healing process.

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42 Another form of recovery writing is recording things for which we are grateful. This is both  
43 energizing and transforming. With so much going on, we may find ourselves occasionally  
44 slipping into a victim mentality. This can blind us from acknowledging our true power over our  
45 situation and seeing the good things in our lives. We may end up in a downward spiral that can  
46 harm our mental and physical health, as well as our relationships with others. Gratitude writing  
47 can be as simple as a list we carry in our pocket to pull out when we need a positive reminder of  
48 all the great things going on, or it can be a daily practice of journaling or meditating on what we  
49 appreciate in our lives. We may even choose to share these gratitudes with our fellow COSA  
50 members to bring a hopeful message to our meetings.

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52 Some of us write letters to others, with no intention of sending them, as a way of working  
53 through our feelings and confusion. We may even write letters to our future or past selves,  
54 acting as a loving best friend. We are reminded of how we respond when our friends reach out  
55 to us for help, as we offer as much comfort and encouragement as we can. By acting as our  
56 own best friend, we can get in touch with some parts of ourselves that need healing the most.  
57 We are able to make more sense of past traumas, develop self-compassion, and gain clarity.  
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59 "In Step work, letter writing helps us address situations in which we cannot directly make  
60 amends, such as when a person has passed away or when a direct amends would be unsafe or  
61 otherwise inappropriate. Our intention is to write from a genuine and authentic place, even  
62 though we cannot actually send it to them. This provides a form of cleansing, as well.  
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64 Reflective writing, such as journaling, not only gives us the opportunity to write out our thoughts  
65 and feelings, but also allows us to examine our experiences with more depth and inquiry. We  
66 take these discoveries about ourselves as keys to opening new doors in our recovery. For  
67 example, once we know where we are struggling, whether that be with fear of abandonment or  
68 neglect, resentment or bitterness, self-will, or maybe even denial and dishonesty, writing helps  
69 us gain the clarity needed to move forward. Many of us find that a daily journal entry is a  
70 beneficial start or end to our day, or a great way to take our Step Ten inventory. We find the  
71 most healing and empowerment when we keep our focus on ourselves, our sobriety and sanity,  
72 and when we abstain from obsessing over what others are doing.  
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74 Sometimes, we run into challenges with writing our experiences, especially if our boundaries  
75 have been violated in the past. We may fear having our writing seen or feel shame in what  
76 we've been through. If we have been betrayed in the past, or if our privacy and confidentiality  
77 have been breached, we may fear writing down our thoughts. One way to overcome this is to  
78 find a place or technique of writing that makes us feel comfortable and safe, such as writing on  
79 a password-protected personal electronic device or through an application on our phone. We  
80 may find a private, safe space to keep paper journals. Sometimes writing and then shredding or  
81 burning the document can symbolize surrender and promote healing.  
82

83 In early recovery, our thoughts may be scattered. We've got so much on our mind. Being new to  
84 the program, we may worry so much about "doing it right" that we end up saying and doing  
85 things that feel inauthentic or that are not right for us. Writing is one way of working through the  
86 confusion. We connect and get to know the truth about who we really are, rather than who we  
87 think we have to be or how we want people to perceive us. Healing begins when we can show  
88 up authentically. We know healthy relationships are based on honesty and authenticity in getting  
89 to know someone as they really are. So we must take the time to get to know ourselves well.  
90 The more we get to know ourselves through writing, the more clarity will come.  
91

92 While we want to see others around us doing well in their lives and making healthy choices, we  
93 cannot work their programs for them, nor force them into one. What we put into our own  
94 recovery is exactly what we will get out of it, and that remains true for others. We are careful  
95 that we don't use our writing in a way that could be harmful to our recovery, such as focusing on  
96 another person's behaviors. That form of writing is not a tool for recovery but a form of control,  
97 taking us further away from our own sobriety and sanity.  
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99 There may be times when we aren't inspired to write or feel we have nothing to write about. The  
100 focus of our writing depends on what we want to accomplish at that moment. We may seek  
101 inspiration and guidance from reciting the Serenity Prayer or reading recovery literature that  
102 asks us to reflect on specific topics.

103

104 Through writing, we learn about ourselves. We overcome denial and face difficult truths in our  
105 lives or relationships that we didn't wish to see before. Writing helps us work through confusing  
106 thoughts and feelings and brings us clarity.

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108 Writing serves as a way of tracking our progress. We look back at the ways in which we  
109 approached conflicts or challenges in the past, and we can observe how far we've come.

110 Patterns emerge and we can address the defects or have gratitude for the assets. We no longer  
111 need to rely on our old toolbox of broken coping skills. Our lives transform as writing enables us  
112 to not only communicate what's going on inside ourselves, but to learn how to communicate  
113 with others and connect to them authentically, as well. Writing brings us a courageous and  
114 rewarding journey inside our mind and hearts.

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