

# journaling matters

Love scrapbooking but wish you were a better writer? Follow these tips for capturing the details in your journals, then translating them to your scrapbook pages.

By Sandy Grason

A n eloquent journal entry can turn a beautifully designed layout into a priceless family heirloom. Or it can serve as a source of inspiration for designing a new page in your album. Journaling brings your pages to life, allowing viewers to fully experience the people and events you've captured. Keeping a journal sparks creativity and inspires your scrapbooking projects. It also puts you in touch with your artistic side.

But how do you create meaningful journal entries and translate them to your scrapbook pages? Read on, as we provide practical tips for creating inspiring, expressive, poetic, and—yes—grammatically correct journal entries. Look out, Emily Dickinson.

## Why Write?

A picture is worth a thousand words ... so why should scrapbookers bother with words at all? It's a rhetorical question, of course. Our point is to get you thinking about why you include journaling on your scrapbook pages in the first place.

If a photograph is a window looking onto a brief moment in time, journaling is a door that opens onto unseen details, the mood and feelings of the time, and much more. A few well-chosen words can imbue your scrapbook pages with much greater meaning and power. In short: Journaling captures the memories that your photos might miss. It reveals the story behind



Illustrations: Rachel Pearson

the photo. It documents for all time your thoughts, feelings, hopes, and dreams.

Years from now, you may not remember all the details from your son's first birthday party, or the idiosyncrasies of the first apartment you and your husband shared. You may not have time to create scrapbook pages when your daughter is a newborn, but if you keep notes about her first few weeks in a journal, you can surely use those observations on pages you create later. Keeping journals separate from your scrapbooks is one of the best ways to record important details so they're available to you when you get

around to scrapbooking events long past.

## Get Started Now

As we all know, in scrapbooking we call on a range of talents: design, photography, papercrafts, and writing. If you feel unsure of yourself as a writer, though, adding journaling to your pages can be a bit daunting. You may even find yourself leaving it out altogether.

But to get started on a path to journaling, you must write, even if you don't think of yourself as a writer. Start small. Write in short increments. (You can always keep going if you get into it.)

Embrace the motto "No rules. Just write." Then try one (or all) of the following practical approaches, which can also be used to break writer's block:

\* Grab a sheet of blank paper or open a new word processing file. Write or type "I remember" at the top. If you want to focus on a specific event, trip, or person, spread photos all around you. For the next 10 minutes, engage in what I call a "free-write," where you just write or type whatever comes to mind. If for some reason you get stuck thinking of things you *do* remember from the event, try starting again with "I don't remember" at the top of the page. Oddly enough, coming at the exercise from this perspective can often jog memories you didn't know you had. And, if nothing else, it will give you a list of things to research about past events or ancestors.

\* Another way to document an event is to begin with the basics and elaborate. Write the date, time, location, and purpose of the event at the top of the page. Referring to your photos for inspiration, describe the location in detail. What was special about the place? Why were you there? What was the weather like? What about the time in which the photo was taken is significant? If it's a childhood photo, how old were you? What was taking place in the lives of the people in the photos?

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\* If you don't have a specific occasion to journal about, try what I call "a date with nothingness." For 10 minutes, drop whatever you are doing, stare out a window, rock in a rocking chair with your eyes closed, or lie down in your backyard, breathing deeply. Imagine that your creativity is buried just beneath the surface of your skin. As you breathe in and out, bubbles of creativity rise to the surface. Try one of these journaling prompts:

- + My creativity is expressed in ...
- + I am / I am not (or replace "I" with another person's name) ...
- + Dear ... (write a letter to the subject of your photos or scrapbook page)
- + Things that make me happy
- + This is my perfect day
- + Describe a favorite (or least favorite)

- birthday, meal, vacation, or other occasion
- + (Person's name) is my hero because ...
- + I wish (for myself, my children, my family, my friends) ...

## From Journal to Journaling Block

After you've emptied your mind of details from an event or about a person by recording them in your journal, how do you choose which details to include on your scrapbook pages? Read your journal entries aloud to see if certain words or phrases jump out at you. Perhaps several lines feel very poignant or sum up the exact feeling or mood you are trying to express on a certain page.

When drafting journaling blocks, be as descriptive as possible. Instead of "flower," say "tulip." Instead of "blue," use specific language to describe the color of the sky. Instead of saying something was "very small," say it was "minute" or "tiny" or even "Lilliputian." (In fact, resist the urge to use "very" at all—use a more descriptive adjective instead! For more writing tips, see "Grammar Girl to the Rescue," on the next page.)

Imagine a movie is being made from your pages, and your subjects are the stars. To tell your story, you have to provide the details that make the set, plot, and characters stand out.

## SANDY'S TOP 5 JOURNALING TIPS

1. **NO RULES—JUST WRITE!** Don't censor yourself. Don't set limits or rules about when, where, how much, or why you journal. Just do it.
2. **TURN OFF YOUR INNER CRITIC.** Your journaling doesn't have to be perfect. Let it flow out of you unedited. Later, you can choose the best parts to add to your scrapbook.
3. **USE PROMPTS.** A prompt is anything that encourages you to write: a line from a poem, song, or even a billboard. Jot prompts on the inside cover of your journal.
4. **JOURNAL IN GROUPS.** If you have fellow scrapbookers interested in improving their writing, or friends who want to make journaling a part of their lives, get together! Share journaling prompts and, where appropriate, share what you've written.
5. **RECORD YOUR GRATITUDE.** Write down five things you are grateful for. Chances are, you won't stop at five—and those things are likely to spur other thoughts you want to record.



**about the author**  
Sandy Grason is the author of *Journalation: Journaling to Awaken Your Inner Voice, Heal Your Life and Manifest Your Dreams* (New World Library, 2005). Visit [www.journalation.com](http://www.journalation.com) for more tips and journaling prompts.