

39 Journal Prompts, Organized by What You Need

39 original prompts, organized by where you are with the habit and what you need right now. Use one prompt per sitting, not the whole list, and set a short timer: two to five minutes spoken, or five to ten minutes written, is enough.

When you have not started

Self-discovery

1. What is a small thing about you that has not changed since childhood?
2. What do you do differently when nobody is watching?
3. Which of your habits would surprise someone who just met you?
4. What part of your day do you look forward to without ever admitting it out loud?

Gratitude, without the cliché

1. What is something ordinary from today you would miss if it disappeared?
2. Who did something small for you this week that you never thanked them for?
3. What is a comfort you have gotten so used to that you stopped noticing it?
4. What went right today that you almost overlooked?

Fun, low-stakes hypotheticals

1. If you had to hand your current week to someone else to live, what would you warn them about first?
2. What rule would you break if nobody would ever find out?
3. If your mood right now were a weather forecast, what would it say?
4. What would you do with a free afternoon and zero obligations?

When journaling has gone stale

Emotional processing

1. What feeling have you been pushing to the back of the day instead of naming it?
2. What is something you are angry about that you have not said out loud yet?
3. When did you last cry, and what was actually underneath it?
4. What feeling do you avoid in other people because it is hard to sit with in yourself?

Reframing and self-compassion

1. What is a mistake you are still punishing yourself for long after it stopped mattering to anyone else?
2. What would you tell a friend who made the exact choice you are judging yourself for?
3. What is something you deserve credit for that you never gave yourself?
4. Which regret would loosen its grip if you told the whole story instead of just the worst part?

Boundaries and hard questions

1. What is a boundary you keep meaning to set and keep not setting?
2. What question about your own life are you avoiding answering?
3. Where are you saying yes lately when you actually mean no?

4. What are you tolerating right now that you would tell someone else to leave?

Restarting after a lapse

Deciding something

1. What decision have you been circling without landing on?
2. What would you do next if you already knew you would not fail?
3. What is the smallest next step on the thing you have been avoiding?

Values

1. What do you complain about that is actually a value being stepped on?
2. What would you refuse to do even if it paid well?
3. What is something you believe now that you did not believe five years ago?

Relationships

1. Who in your life makes you feel most like yourself, and why?
2. What is a conversation you keep rehearsing but have not had yet?
3. What is something you appreciate about someone you argue with often?

Letters (sending is optional; the point is saying it, not delivering it)

1. Write a letter to yourself one year from now.
2. Write a letter to the version of you who got through last year's hardest month.
3. Write a thank-you letter to someone who will never know you wrote it.

Morning and evening

1. Morning: what does today need from you, not the other way around?
2. Evening: what is the one moment from today you want to remember?
3. Evening: what did you carry today that you can set down before sleep?

Prefer to answer out loud? InstantOwl turns a spoken answer into an organized, readable entry. instantowl.com