

**A report  
for helping  
professionals**



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Nathan Ohren and  
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The  
**30-Day  
Digital  
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# The 30-Day Digital Journaling Challenge

## A Report for Helping Professionals

Kathleen Adams LPC, Nathan Ohren, and Brenda Hudson Ph.D.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

It is reasonably well-established among therapists, coaches, and classroom and community educators that journal writing can be a swift, reliable means to insight and awareness, often leading to positive shifts in perception, cognition, emotion, and/or behavior. Through three decades of evidence-based research and applied clinical practice, the personal process journal has earned its place as a valuable resource in the quest for healing, growth, and change (Pennebaker 2013; Adams 1998, 2013, 2014; Thompson and Adams 2015).

Over that same three decades, technology has provided unimagined opportunities for ease, accessibility, and reach through digital journaling (writing that is keyboarded to an electronic device rather than penned to paper). Blogging, e-mail blasts, and social media have made available the choice to publish one's personal thoughts, feelings, opinions, experiences, and reflections to an audience selected by the writer or elected by the reader. For those who prefer an audience of one—the self now or in the future—digital journaling apps and cloud-based journaling software offer passworded or even encrypted protection.

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Thirty years ago, most self-reporting journal writers were female, and nearly all journals were handwritten. Then—and continuing into the present—facilitators of journal writing groups consistently report that about 85% of self-selecting participants are women and only about 15% men<sup>2</sup>. This is despite the evidence that journal writing in general is much more widely known and broadly utilized, and 20<sup>th</sup>-century gender-based assumptions about journal writing (predominantly, that journal writing was an activity primarily for women) have largely diminished.

The 30-Day Digital Journaling Challenge is a virtual event created by Nathan Ohren, owner of the EasyJournaling.com and Write4Life.com websites. It launched October 1, 2014 and has been ongoing since. The first 30 days of the Challenge (October 1-30, 2014) provided an opportunity to gather information about how participants use journal writing, whether they prefer “paper or plastic” (handwritten or digital) journals (Ohren 2014a), how long they have been writing, and whether they experience digital journaling as an effective means to get and stay in touch with themselves and their lives. This exploratory, non-academic pilot study gathered demographic and psychographic information about participants, their handwritten and digital journaling experience, preferences, and practices, and, at the end of the experience, feedback on the effectiveness of the 30-Day Challenge.

These study questions were also formulated:

- Can digital journaling offer equivalent expression and release as writing by hand?
- Are there gender differences in how men and women approach or respond to digital journaling? If so, what can we notice?
- What is there to be learned and shared with therapists, coaches, facilitators, educators, and supervisors that will support them in offering journal writing to clients, students, trainees, and supervisees?

## Literature Review

In 1986, when the first research findings were published about the efficacy of expressive writing for physiological wellness (Pennebaker and Beall 1986), there were fewer than ten viable books on journal writing on the market, including five still-

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<sup>2</sup> This anecdotal data has been informally gathered over the past 30 years by author Adams.

classics: Progoff's *At a Journal Workshop* (1977), Rainer's *The New Diary* (1978), Baldwin's *One to One: Self-Understanding through Journal Writing* (1978), Capacchione's *The Creative Journal* (1978), and Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones* (1986). A current search of "journal writing" now locates more than 1,500 books on Amazon.com.

Each of these early books offered a unique perspective on writing for personal development. Progoff's method was oriented in his training as a depth psychologist who studied with Carl Jung in Zurich as a post-graduate fellow. His interpretation of Jung's concepts through the lens of a masterfully crafted writing experience was the beginning of the journal therapy movement. Rainer, who taught with the legendary diarist Anaïs Nin, offered a sophisticated explication of the journal as a tool for personal development. Baldwin focused on intimacy with self through creating deepened self-understanding. Capacchione's training as an art therapist combined free-form art and free-style (yet simultaneously structured) writing. Goldberg, a Jewish Buddhist, recommended a bold "writing practice" as a pathway for creative expression as well as spiritual enlightenment.

Although none of the early books were specifically targeted to women, later entries into the field focused on the women's experience, most notably the feminist perspective (Hagan 1990, 1992) or the academic women's studies perspective (Schiwy 1996).

### **The Male Journal Experience**

The men's journal writing experience was mostly unacknowledged until 1990, when Adams included a chapter, "For Men Only," in her inaugural book:

Although the personal process journal is popularly thought of as a women's instrument for reflection and self-discovery, there are plenty of men writing in plenty of notebooks. Here, four of them share with you what it is like to be a man and write a journal. (Adams 1990, 61)

Adams later conducted a two-year study to explore what men might want and need in an expressive journal writing program. Her all-male, all self-selected groups (no one was mandated to attend) were conducted 1992-93 and were populated with men from organizations (churches, hospitals, agencies) with established men's groups; men in recovery from alcoholism or other substance abuse; HIV+/AIDS-diagnosed men; affiliates of the mythopoetic men's movement of the late 1980s-early 1990s; and men

referred individually by psychotherapists. The groups gathered in several U.S. cities and Toronto. They took the form either of weekend workshops or weekly writing groups that met at least six times. A cohort of about twenty men also participated in a distance program by fax. In all, more than 300 men contributed to the study.

Adams cites the most remarkable finding as the lack of difference between the journal writing processes of men and women:

Once they found their writing voices, the men wrote on and on.... Although I initially approached this project with ideas and schemata about gender differences in reflective writing, I found that the more I worked with men, the more I realized we're all dealing with the same [desires, insecurities, and difficulties]. (5)

...While it is true that some men avoid the mirror of the journal because it is painful to see their own reflections, there are others who dare to glimpse their own interiors. For them, the question is not, *Can I bear to see?* The questions instead are, *How can I learn to look? What questions do I ask myself? What do I do with the answers?....* These are the stories of ordinary men living ordinary lives. What makes them so remarkable is that they are each so extraordinary. Uncap your pen, and your life tumbles out before you. (Adams 1994, 15-16)

As indicated, men did have some difficulty "finding their writing voices." The intervention of the Journal Ladder (Adams 1998), a theoretical model originally developed to build structure, pacing, and containment into the writing practices of trauma survivors, worked for the men as well:

When I applied [the Journal Ladder] to men's work, I realized that it organically fits with areas of natural mastery associated with the Masculine principle, such as structure, order, sequencing, discernment, and decisiveness. (Adams 1994, 6)

The Journal Ladder moves from short, structured, concrete writing techniques and methods through insight-oriented, creative, relational techniques and ends with abstract, intuitive, free-form techniques. The model allows a user to choose a manageable, accessible entry into the journal, one that meets the writer where the writer is at. When men were taught journal writing using the Journal Ladder, they quickly found the techniques that best expressed their writing voices, and they were able to rapidly increase both their comfort and outcomes with their journals.

## The Pennebaker Paradigm

The body of research introduced by psychologist James W. Pennebaker is rooted in a particular expressive writing paradigm, originally designed to alleviate stress and assist in trauma recovery through a three- or four-day writing intervention (Griffith 2014).

Research subjects are asked to write about a particular life event, often “the most stressful experience of your life” (Smyth et al. 1999) or “your deepest thoughts and feelings about the most traumatic event of your life” (Pennebaker 2013).

Writers are usually given structure on how to approach the writing each day; typically the first and second days are spent exploring the topic. “Include both facts and feelings” and “try to link this to other aspects of your life” are standard instructions for the first two days of narrative storytelling. On the third day the instruction is to write about how this event has shaped the writer’s life and identity. The fourth day is a synthesis: “What have you learned, lost, and gained as a result of this upheaval in your life? How will these events from your past guide your thoughts and actions in the future?” (Pennebaker 2013).

This paradigm has been the structure of hundreds of studies that have correlated expressive writing to everything from physician-ranked symptom reduction in asthma and rheumatoid arthritis sufferers (Smyth et al. 1999) to quality of life in early breast cancer survivors (Craft, Davis, and Paulson 2013).

Although there is an aggregate of data using the Pennebaker paradigm, Range and Jenkins (2010) note the absence of all but demographic gender data in most expressive writing studies:

Few studies and no meta-analyses directly examined gender differences in benefits from writing, though knowing whether, and how, gender differences occur could help in devising trauma interventions.... Smyth [1998]<sup>3</sup> did not directly test gender differences in benefits, but projects involving relatively more men had larger effects than those with relatively more women, indirect evidence of gender difference benefiting men. (149-150)

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<sup>3</sup> The referenced 1998 study by Smyth is a meta-analysis of expressive writing studies. Smyth is also the lead author of a well-known 1999 study cited herein.

## Methodology and Process

The 30-Day Digital Journaling Challenge was the creation of Nathan Ohren, a journal writing teacher/facilitator, podcaster, author, and owner of Write4Life.com. A journaler since adolescence, Ohren had “storage tubs filled with my handwritten journals, detailing the processing of my thoughts, beliefs, feelings and goals.” In 2014, he took over content and operations at EasyJournaling.com, a website devoted to digital journaling resources and product reviews.<sup>4</sup> In so doing:

...I accepted a friend’s challenge to put down my pens and pencils, and give the keyboards and touchscreens a chance to record my personal journals. What I discovered was that my journaling didn’t change much, because I stayed true to some guiding principles, such as maintaining an honest and curious inquiry into myself. But journaling digitally (instead of analog), I saw the process become so much more efficient and enjoyable. Especially since I wanted my writings to have the ability to survive beyond me. How else could my personal stories (such as my high school crush, and the twists of my spiritual odyssey) be shared with family generations I will never meet? (Ohren 2014b)

Ohren launched a free online community and content delivery system to present a 30-Day Digital Journal Challenge to the public. He prepared and coordinated a collection of offerings for those who agreed to try digital journaling for part or all of thirty days. Volunteer sponsors, each a writing group facilitator, author, or other presence in the journal community, were recruited to provide writing prompts distributed in a daily e-newsletter. The newsletter also featured digital journaling apps and software, writing tips and techniques, and resources such as the books and websites of the sponsors. Additionally, a private Facebook group was created for Challenge participants who shared writing, support, ideas, suggestions, and resources with each other. The active Facebook group enjoyed benefits such as prizes of books or complimentary consultations donated by the sponsors.

Promotion for the 30-Day Challenge was predominantly word-of-mouth through social media and internet media. Ohren writes:

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<sup>4</sup> Appendix 2, prepared by author Ohren, offers helpful resources for digital journaling.

It's tough to say how people came to the 30-Day Challenge. There was such a wide variety of sources. I sent out an email blast to both of my own lists. There were invitations placed on Facebook, Diaro, Writr, and a very nice write-up on Day One's<sup>5</sup> website. Plus, many sponsors posted announcements on their blog, website, Facebook and Twitter feeds. Not to mention several podcast interviews that I gave. There were Twitter posts every day for over a month. Between retweets and reposts, the many blog articles that were written [by sponsors], it reached audiences that I could never estimate in size or gender ratios. (Ohren, personal correspondence, 2015).

More than 1500 participants signed up for the 30-Day Digital Journaling Challenge during the month of October 2014 alone. Of that group, 471 opted in for data collection and completed the psychographic and demographic pre-questionnaire by the data cutoff date. 177 of the 471 completed the follow-up questionnaire.

Because of a data collection error, there was gender matching for only 86<sup>6</sup> of the 177 post-questionnaire respondents. The pre-questionnaire asked for a four-digit number to represent the respondent so that pre- and post- data could be matched. The instructions suggested the use of the last four digits of the respondent's social security number or cell phone number but stated that the number could be any four-digit number that would be easy to remember.

On post-questionnaire, however, 49% of respondents did not include any four-digit number, or several participants had the same number, such as "1111" or "1234." Since none of these could be specifically matched, this group could not be identified by gender.

Appendix 1 is a comparison chart that demonstrates the parallel responses between the full group of 177 and the subgroup of 86. It would appear that there is reasonable parallelism between the groups, and that the subgroup may represent, in general, the larger group with respect to gender.

Aggregate findings reported in this study came from the 471 individuals who opted in for data collection (pre-Challenge) and the 177 from this group who completed

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<sup>5</sup> Diaro, Writr, and Day One are popular digital journaling apps.

<sup>6</sup> The subgroup of 86 was 29.1% men and 69.9% women, compared to 34.4% men and 65.6% women in the pre-Challenge questionnaire group of 471.



the post-Challenge questionnaire. Specific gender data in the pre-Challenge comes from the group of 471 and in the post-Challenge section comes from the subgroup of 86.

Data was adjusted to remove duplicates, individuals under the age of eighteen, and other list errors. There was neither a control group nor a group of writers similarly engaged for an equivalent time and with equivalent services who were using handwritten journals.

The 30-Day Challenge was international in scope; however, the sample set was almost exclusively writers from the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

## Pre-Challenge Findings

### Demographics

In any given face-to-face journal experience, typically no more than 15% of self-selected participants would be male. However, the 30-Day Digital Journaling Challenge participants more than doubled that ratio: 34.4% were male and 65.6% female<sup>7</sup>.

Although the men were much less experienced with journal writing than the women (see “Length of Time as Journal Writer,” below), the ages of participants were reasonably parallel, with men, on balance, somewhat younger than women. Nearly half the men (47%) were in their 30s and 40s, compared to 54% of the women who were in their 40s or 50s. All participants had, on average, 15.4 years of education. Seventy-eight percent had a bachelors or higher degree. Two-thirds (67%) were in business or professional practice.

### Length of Time as Journal Writer

Nearly 40% of women (but only 7% of men) report starting their journal writing experience in childhood. Almost 80% of women had begun writing by early adulthood, compared to 34% of men. Over half (52%) of the men report starting their journal writing experience within the last two years (31%) or with the 30-Day Challenge (21%). Only 17% of women began journaling in the last two years (8%) or with the 30-Day Challenge (9%).

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<sup>7</sup> A category of “transgendered/other” was offered and was chosen by 0.003% of all participants.

## Frequency of Writing

Nine percent of women and 21% of men stated they were “new to keeping a journal” as of the start of the Challenge. One-third of men and 41% of women report writing “frequently,” at least once a week. Men and women write “occasionally” (at least once a month) at the rate of 16% each, while 25% of women and 22% of men describe their journal pattern as “infrequent” (less than once a month).

## Usefulness of Journal

Participants were asked, “Have you found journaling of any kind to provide helpful outcomes for you?”

Two-thirds of women (67%) and one-half of men (49%) responded, “Yes, I have experienced outcomes that I value or find helpful.” The others are “not sure” (21% women, 29% men) or do not report receiving value or help (11% women, 21% men).

## Typing vs. Handwriting

Participants were asked, “Do you believe typing is an effective way to journal?”

Men were more likely—59%—to experience typing as having the same or similar outcomes to handwriting. In contrast, only 48% of women reported the same or similar outcomes whether writing by hand or typing.

When asked, “How comfortable are you typing?” and “How comfortable are you writing by hand?” participants overwhelmingly—74% of men and 73% of women—responded that they were comfortable or very comfortable typing. This contrasts to 76% of women but only 56% of men who say they are comfortable or very comfortable writing by hand. The discrepancy in men’s comfort level with handwriting suggests that there may be a set of men for whom writing a journal digitally would be considered, while writing by hand would not be.

## Post-Challenge Findings

### “Surprising and Unexpected” Results

What did the participants think of the 30-Day Challenge? The response was quite positive; 72% overall (88% of men and 63% of women) stated that they experienced “surprising and unexpected” results from digital journaling over the past thirty days. Nearly half (49%) of all participants (40% of men and 48% of women) agreed or

strongly agreed that they were more comfortable with digital journaling than before the Challenge, and 72% (men) and 69% (women) felt that their typewritten entries during the past thirty days “expressed my innermost thoughts and feelings.” Eighty percent of women and 84% of men stated they intended to continue writing a digital journal.

### **Frequency of Digital Journaling**

A remarkable 72% of men and 60% of women reported that they wrote daily or near-daily. Most of the rest (20% men, 23% women) said they wrote “sporadically a few times” during the Challenge. The rest reported writing about once a week.

### **Balance of Content and Affect**

One of the key predictors of success in the Pennebaker research paradigm is the extent to which the writer can include both facts and feelings, both content and affect, into the writing experience. The post-Challenge questionnaire asked about the balance between writing “factual” and “emotional” (feeling) content.

More women (51%) than men (32%) reported their writing as “mostly emotional content” or “a mixture, more emotional than factual.” Interestingly, however, men chose “equal parts factual and emotional” 36% of the time, compared to 18% of women. On the factual side, 28% of men stated they wrote “a mixture of content, more factual than emotional,” although none said they wrote “mostly factual content,” while 30% of women wrote “more” or “mostly” factual. A woman commented:

I have always been a factual writer, and I hope to get into being more emotional. I found out that when I start doing emotional writing it takes much longer, and I think that’s why I don’t want to get into it more. After this month I’m going to try to take at least one day a week to cover an emotional topic.

A man commented:

Digital journal writing is most certainly faster and is quick and easy to quickly exhale those moments that I need captured. I found it inadequate when I really wanted to express emotions (nothing beats deep angry pen strokes to emphasize how angry you are on paper.)

## Features, Benefits, Added Values

Which of the Challenge features, benefits, and added values most enhanced the experience? For men, it was journal prompts (36%) and the daily emailed newsletters (32%). Women reversed the order: most important for them (52%) were the daily emailed newsletter, followed by journal prompts (23%).

Both genders place “journaling tips” in third place, followed by “journal resources” (including digital app recommendations and product reviews) and the Facebook group.

The Facebook group had a relatively small cadre of regular participants, but those who participated felt strongly about the “community” aspect that kept alive the “connection and camaraderie with others on a similar journey.” “Knowing that dialogue was going on” and “reading other people’s responses to the prompts, or sharing my own” were considered key benefits of the Facebook community.

## Journaling Prompts

Two journal prompts were offered in each daily newsletter. For the first few days and several times thereafter, the newsletter noted that prompts were offered as options, and that other writing options were to choose one’s own prompt, to write spontaneously, or to write without regard for prompt.

Although the journal prompts were the most popular benefit for 36% of the men, they were listed as the least valuable benefit for another 32% of the men in the Challenge. The writing prompts were provided by Challenge sponsors, most of whom were women authors, facilitators or/and leaders in the field. The prompts tended to be psychologically themed with insight orientation as a primary focus. Day 25’s randomly chosen newsletter included these two prompts:

**First Prompt:** Have you ever been lost, either literally or figuratively? As a child, did you ever get lost in the crowd or at a store? If so, how did this impact you then, and did it have any lasting effects? Now that you are an adult, do you ever feel lost? And if so, how do you find your way back to a place of comfort?  
(Hernandez 2014)

**Second Prompt:** Do you consider yourself a leader or a follower? Or is there a third option, a loner? Write about the times when you exhibited characteristics of a leader, follower or a loner. (Garland 2014)

Of those who did not care for the prompts, the women tended to have milder reactions (“a lot of the prompts were a little too focused on self-improvement or self-discovery”) than the men:

- I was disappointed with the prompts provided. They all seemed very similar. Too abstract or not applicable to my life. Or perhaps too psychologically taxing.
- I journaled every day but didn't follow the prompts. I didn't like them at all. I'm not saying they're bad prompts; they're probably fine for some. Just not my style.
- Some of the prompts were very helpful, but most didn't 'catch' me. I know it's hard to cater to all audiences, but I'd make sure the two prompts were very different. After a while they all blended together.
- I wasn't keen on the journaling prompts.
- I was disappointed with the prompts. It seems I approach journaling in a very different way.
- For me, the daily prompts mostly got in the way. It was too much “happy happy joy joy.” I understand there are people this works for, but I'm definitely not one of them.

More observations about the offered prompts will be noted in the Discussion section.

### **Digital Journal-Keeping Methods**

88% of men and 79% of women kept their digital journals on journaling software, either saved in the cloud or online (80% men, 54% women) or saved on hard drive. The remainder used a word processing program, other software (e.g., Evernote) not specific to journal writing, sent themselves emails, or used blog pages.

The most popular digital apps included:

- Day One<sup>8</sup>. Popular features included ease of use, accessibility and syncing across platforms, simple layout, and capacity to add a photo to illustrate journal entries (although users wished they could use more than one photo per entry).
- Diaro<sup>9</sup>. Features include easy syncing across platforms, option to write in folders, “sends me reminders to write every day.”
- Penzu<sup>10</sup>. Sends prompts to write, clean format, customizable covers/fonts/looks for different journals.
- Writr.<sup>11</sup> Offers journal questions as prompts (“What is your most unjustified pet peeve? Who do you idolize, and why?”), clean and attractive.

### Benefits Received from Digital Journaling

Participants were asked to rate the benefits they received from digital journaling over the thirty days of the challenge. Table 1 shows the responses indicating strong or very strong achievement of benefits through the 30-Day Challenge.

The clear preponderance of both men (68%) and women (69%) is “Clarity and insight on difficult issues.” The use of the digital journal for stress management (52% men, 57% women) is also notable<sup>12</sup>; research abounds that correlates writing to increased levels of healthy stress responses (Pennebaker 2013).

### Overall Satisfaction

Participants were asked, “To what extent has digital journaling met your expectations?”

Four-fifths (81%) responded that digital journaling had met or exceeded their expectations. Asked if they would recommend the digital journaling challenge to a

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<sup>8</sup> [www.dayoneapp.com](http://www.dayoneapp.com)

<sup>9</sup> [www.diaroapp.com](http://www.diaroapp.com)

<sup>10</sup> [www.penzu.com](http://www.penzu.com)

<sup>11</sup> [www.getwitr.com](http://www.getwitr.com)

<sup>12</sup> Between 2006 and 2012, author Adams collected more than 6000 psychotherapist responses to the sentence stem, “When my clients write journals---.” The most frequent response names the capacity of the client to gain clarity and insight about thoughts, feelings, behaviors, patterns, beliefs, expectations, and other therapeutic issues. The second most frequent response specifically mentions emotional management, catharsis, or/and regulation. While the concomitant benefit of client’s relief of stress is seldom specifically mentioned, it is often imbedded or implied.

friend, 92% of women and 80% of men said they would. Eighty-four percent of men and 80% of women planned to continue digital journaling after the 30-Day Challenge.

**Table 1: Benefits of Thirty Days of Digital Journal Writing**

Benefit (% represents “strong” or “very strong” achievement of this benefit)	Total % N=177	Total% N=86	Men% N=25	Women% N=61
Clarity and insight on difficult issues	66.3	68.6	68.0	68.9
Reducing stress	58.3	55.9	52.0	57.4
Knowing myself better	56.0	52.3	48.0	54.1
Aligning priorities with higher goals/purposes	52.3	53.5	44.0	57.4
Writing is easier than ever before	52.3	52.3	48.0	52.1
Uncovering passions, goals, or creativity	51.4	51.2	52.0	50.8
Gaining consistency in my life routines	49.4	44.2	48.0	42.6
Meditating or spiritual reflection	46.0	46.5	44.0	47.3
Increasing productivity	44.0	44.2	44.0	44.3
Dealing with physical health issues	30.9	30.2	24.0	32.8

## Discussion

Let us begin our discussion of the findings with a return to the study questions.

### *Can digital journaling offer equivalent expression and release as writing by hand?*

Apparently, yes. Two-thirds (66%) of respondents, including 69% of women, agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “My typewritten entries this month expressed my innermost thought and feelings.” Compare this to the 52% of women who did not agree, at the beginning of the Challenge, that keyboarding a journal was at least as effective as writing by hand. It may be that digital journaling is an easier adaptation for women that they may initially believe.

There is fluency with keyboarding; 73% are comfortable or very comfortable typing. Women are even more comfortable writing by hand (76%), but men are not; their comfort level drops to 56%, and 32% of men state they are uncomfortable or very uncomfortable with handwriting. This opens an opportunity for men who might not otherwise journal if digital journaling were not available to them.

Digital journaling seems to be able to offer equivalent expression and release as writing by hand, and it is perceived by most in this study—four out of five plan to continue digital journaling—to be a valid option.

Thus, it appears that digital journaling is a viable alternative to handwritten journaling, and there does not seem to be any reported sacrifice of emotional expression. On the contrary, digital journaling is perceived as a valued tool and resource from which life management benefits can be quickly derived.

*Are there gender differences in how men and women approach or respond to digital journaling? If so, what can we notice?*

The most relevant gender difference wasn't sourced in the way that men and women responded to digital journaling. It was more generational. The women in this study had, in most cases, decades more experience than their male cohorts. The women have grown up with journals; four out of five had begun her journal journey by early adulthood. In contrast, one out of two men has started in the last two years.

Most women and men who have been writing journals for a many years are accustomed to doing self-reflective work on the pages. They are accustomed to the deep inquiry that comes from, as the poet Rilke (1993) said, "loving the questions like locked rooms...." Most of the prompts offered by sponsors for this Challenge were internally focused and designed to elicit such inquiry. Yet deep inquiry by its nature falls in the intuitive/abstract realm of the Journal Ladder, in the upper, untethered rungs, familiar and known to seasoned writers, but often too airy for those just starting out—as 21% of men were doing with the Challenge, and as another 30% had done within the prior two years.

All journal writers need to discover that they have something to say, and a voice with which to say it. The navigation of this relationship, the writer and the voice, is enhanced with writing prompts and techniques that help the writer build a strong foundation—prompts and techniques that are short, structured, concrete, and accessible, the lower rungs of the Journal Ladder (Adams 2013). This may have been the source of the men's comments that the prompts were "psychologically taxing" or "just not my style."

Another interesting observation on gender is the alignment that men and women experienced at the end of the study. The 1994 Adams study was first to note that men



and women do not write in significantly different ways, or about significantly different topics, once the journal relationship has been established, and this study continues that theme. The remarkable similarity in the post-Challenge scores of men and women demonstrate that the process of satisfying digital journaling can be quickly learned and that once learned, both men and women can benefit from both emotional and cognitive expression.

Furthermore, digital journaling equalizes itself; women and men report receiving the same benefits, such as developing clarity and insight on difficult issues or uncovering passions, goals, or creativity, and there is regular spontaneous engagement—daily (40%) or several times a week (29%). The more habituated the journal becomes, the more consistently it is utilized as a primary tool for healing, growth, and change. This study suggests that thirty days of applied practice is sufficient for habituation and results, regardless of gender.

A final gender observation is over half (52%) of the women who have been writing journals since childhood or adolescence have arrived at or are approaching the stage of life when arthritis, vision difficulties, reduced fine motor skills, and other physical changes may make it more challenging to enjoy long-standing pleasures such as writing by hand. The next wave of digital journalers may very well be women in their 60s and beyond.

*What is there to be learned and shared with therapists, coaches, facilitators, educators, and supervisors that will support them in offering journal writing to clients, students, trainees, and supervisees?*

In an editorial commenting on an expressive writing study with particularly dramatic outcomes (Smyth et al. 1999), psychiatrist David Spiegel stated, “If the authors had released similar outcome evidence about a new drug, it would likely be in widespread use within a short time” (1999, 1329).

Imagine that seemingly overnight, a holistic, very low-cost, nearly universally accessible therapeutic tool becomes available to clients. Better still, this is a tool that clients actually like; compliance is voluntary and consistent. Let’s say this tool offers clients immediate feedback and experiential learning in self-regulation, problem-solving and insight-orientation. It is equally fluent in supporting cognitive and

emotional process. As a bonus, imagine that this tool keeps its own paper trail so that results can be shared, reviewed, and charted.

Would we want that for our clients? Would we want that for *ourselves*? Would we want that to be in widespread use within a short time?

This tool may well be digital journaling.

Those of us who are old-school journal writers and therapists who encourage our clients to write journals must release our biases (not our preferences, mind you) that the magic only happens on paper, that the mind-body connection is more organic when our words travel from head to heart to hand, that there's something irrevocably intimate about being alone with ourselves and our journals. We must also be willing to debunk the old stories. It's an old story that only women write journals, it's an old story that journals are secretly better if they are actual rather than virtual, and it's an old story that only the young can master digital apps.

We must embrace the brilliant democracy of technology, the way it makes us more alike than different, the humanizing way we can tell a short-short story about our lives in the space of a minute, and then carry it in our pockets.

We must advocate for our clients, working side by side, helping them locate and encouraging them to play with the digital journaling resources that could open the door to healing, growth, and change. To this end, we must experiment ourselves with our own digital journals, noticing surprises, differences, and outcomes. We must have the appended resource list (see Appendix 2) at hand so that we can steer our clients toward the tools that will help them engage. We must have conversations with our clients about how to protect privacy and confidentiality in digital journaling.

The participants in this challenge were well-educated, well-employed, and in possession of smart phones, tablets, computers, and software. We must help less affluent and technologically oriented clients who may benefit from digital journaling to find the ways and means.

And we must talk with each other about these matters; we must write and speak and share and listen. This paper is an imperfect beginning. We hope to continue the conversation.

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## Appendix 1: Comparison of N=177 to N=86 Score

Question – POST TEST N=177: Opted-in who completed post-Challenge Q N=86: Opted-in participants for whom gender data available (Men N=25; Women N= 61)	% of Total N=177	% of Total N=86	Difference between Totals	% of Men N=25	% of Women N=61
<b>BENEFITS: Agree or strongly agree achieved</b>					
Clarity and insight	66.3	68.6	2.3	68.0	68.9
Reduce stress	58.3	55.9	2.4	52.0	57.4
Know myself better	56.0	52.3	3.7	48.0	54.1
Writing is easier than ever before	52.3	52.3	0.0	48.0	54.1
Align priorities with purpose and goals	52.3	53.5	1.2	44.0	57.4
Uncovering passion, goals, creativity	51.4	51.2	0.2	52.0	50.8
Consistency in life routines	49.4	44.2	5.2	48.0	42.6
Meditating/spiritual reflection	46.0	46.5	0.5	44.0	47.5
Increased productivity	44.0	44.2	0.2	44.0	44.3
Dealing with physical health issues	30.9	30.2	0.7	24.0	32.8
Average of all benefits	50.7	49.9	0.8	47.2	51.0
<b>AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE:</b>					
Would refer others to 30-Day Challenge	91.5	88.4	3.1	80.0	91.8
Overall satisfaction	84.8	82.3	2.5	88.0	80.1
Plan to continue digital journaling (DJ) post-Challenge	84.7	81.4	3.3	84.0	80.3
The DJ Challenge met or exceeded expectations	80.8	79.1	1.7	80.0	77.9
Experienced surprising/unexpected results	71.8	70.1	1.7	88.0	62.6
The way I wrote (apps software) supported me	65.6	69.8	4.2	88.0	62.3
Typewritten entries expressed inner thoughts/feelings	65.5	69.0	3.5	72.0	68.9
More comfortable w/DJ than before Challenge	48.7	45.3	3.4	40.0	47.5
Frequency of writing last 30 days: Daily/near daily	67.8	67.4	0.4	72.0	60.0
Freq. of writing last 30 days: A few times, sporadically	22.7	22.4	0.3	20.0	23.3
Freq. of writing last 30 days: At least weekly	6.8	4.7	2.1	8.0	7.8
<b>MOST/LEAST VALUABLE FEATURE OF CHALLENGE:</b>					
Most: Daily email newsletters w/prompts, tips, etc.	41.2	37.2	4.0	32.0	52.5
Most: Writing prompts offered	27.6	26.7	0.9	36.0	23.0
Least: Writing prompts offered	20.3	22.9	2.6	31.8	19.2
<b>MIXTURE OF CONTENT IN 30-DAY CHALLENGE:</b>					
Mostly emotional content with some factual	42.1	46.5	4.4	36.0	50.8
Approximately equal emotional and factual content	29.9	23.3	6.6	36.0	18.1
Mostly factual content with some emotional	26.0	29.1	3.1	28.0	29.5
<b>HOW KEPT DIGITAL JOURNAL:</b>					
Apps or software stored in cloud/online	56.6	61.6	5.0	80.0	54.1
Word processor (Word, Pages)	15.8	10.5	5.3	8.0	14.8
Software stored on my hard drive (e.g. LifeJournal, Evernote)	22.2	18.6	3.6	8.0	24.6

## Appendix 2: Digital Journaling Resources

by: Nathan Ohren at [Write4Life.com](http://Write4Life.com)

Date: September 1, 2015

### EasyJournaling.com

1. **Find the best journaling app for your needs** at [www.BestJournalApp.com](http://www.BestJournalApp.com). Updated at least twice per year with new apps, upgrades, and links.
2. **[Modern Journaling: The Complete Digital Journaling Guide](#)** (our most popular book choice) also available on Amazon.com. (<http://amzn.to/1L9mOld>)
3. The **[Digital Journaling bundle](#)** contains:
  - a. [101 Reasons to Write a Journal](#)
  - b. [101 Ways to Capture Life](#) (Using Technology)
  - c. [Modern Journaling: The Complete Digital Journaling Guide](#) (both the eBook and the audio book are included in this bundle)
  - d. [The 5 Levels of Digital Journaling](#)
  - e. a listing of over 70 apps to compare



[www.easyjournaling.com/digital-journaling-bundle](http://www.easyjournaling.com/digital-journaling-bundle)

### The 30-Day Digital Journaling Challenge (updated)

Newly revised and updated! Go to [www.EasyJournaling.com/30DayChallenge](http://www.EasyJournaling.com/30DayChallenge) for tools, tips and daily inspiration for thirty days. Receive new and revised prompts by email, from 15 of the leading experts in expressive writing.

### Favorite Android Journaling Apps

1. **Journey** - simple, easy, secure, full-featured app that syncs and backs up using Google.  
<http://2appstudio.com/journey>
2. **Diaro** - Very popular, full-featured journaling app with calendar and search.  
<http://diaroapp.com>

## Favorite iPhone Journaling Apps

1. **Day One** - Award-winning, secure, simple, full-featured app for beginners or advanced journaling. <http://dayoneapp.com>
2. **Diaro** - Very popular, full-featured journaling app with calendar and search. <http://diaroapp.com>

## Other Favorite Journaling Apps

1. **Writr** - Beautiful, clean interface with thought-provoking prompts. [GetWritr.com](http://GetWritr.com)
2. **iFeelio** - Easy, private, simple recording of feelings in the moment, and thoughts about what's happening in 140 characters per entry. <http://www.ifeelio.com>
3. **Penzu** - Secure and customizable journal environment for beginners to advanced journaling. <https://penzu.com>

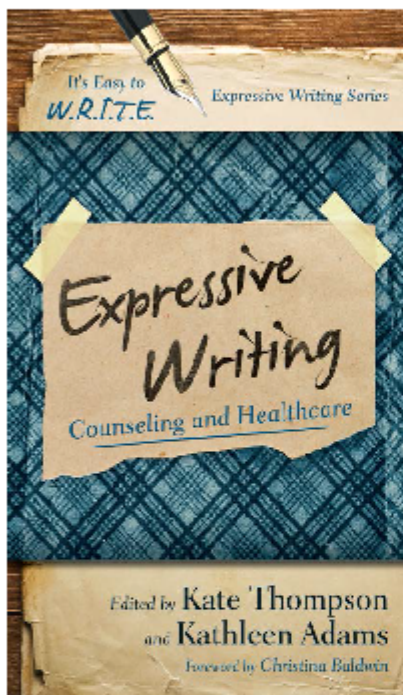
## Capturing Life Through Technology (Podcast)

[www.EasyJournaling.com/podcast](http://www.EasyJournaling.com/podcast) - Updated reviews of modern journaling apps, including guest interviews with app developers, and tips on choosing the best journaling app for your situation. Also available on [iTunes](#) and [Stitcher](#).

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## Expressive Writing: Counseling and Healthcare

Edited by Kate Thompson and Kathleen Adams  
Foreword by Christina Baldwin



*"Expressive Writing: Counseling and Healthcare provides a bridge in the much-needed world of psychological healing. It reminds us that creative approaches can provide breakthrough methods for clients to find their way to health. Spanning the diverse fields of poetry, journal therapy, spirituality, brain science, theories of self and much more, this book gives proof that expressive writing addresses a full spectrum of mental health challenges."*— Deborah Bowman, PhD, dean of the graduate school of psychology, Naropa University; author, *The Female Buddha: Discovering the Heart of Liberation and Love*

*"An exciting read that had me writing creatively even during the theory section; an inspiration to be more "playful, spontaneous and generous" with expressing ourselves and supporting others to do the same. This is a book that encompasses social, neurological and practical ways of employing expressive writing. It is ideal for students, practitioners, and academic courses. I particularly liked the idea of writing with the focus on re-wiring, reviving and healing neural pathways and the chapter on the significance and role of silence. I will definitely be adding Expressive Writing: Counseling and Healthcare to our reading list!"*  
— Claire Williamson, MA, program leader for M.Sc., Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes, Metatonia Institute, Bristol and London; author, *The Souhwater Pool and Ride On*

*"Thompson and Adams have gathered a rare collection of experts in the field who will bring this work to new audiences. The publication of original research material gives depth to the broadening field of expressive writing as a therapeutic modality. This book straddles the Atlantic with leaders in the field from the UK and the US, making it truly international in scope. This is an inspiring collection of chapters, edited into a coherent volume from the broad overview in the introduction to the existential epilogue."*— Betty Cannon, PhD, president, Boulder Psychotherapy Institute; author, *Sartre and Psychoanalysis*

Expressive writing is life-based writing that focuses on authentic expression of lived experience, with resultant insight, growth, and skill-building. Therapists, coaches, healthcare professionals, and educators have known for decades that expressive writing is a powerful tool for better living, learning, and healing. But until now, few have had access to practical applications that have proven successful.

**Kate Thompson, MA, CJT**, is an existential counselor, journal therapist and writer. She pioneered the use of therapeutic writing in counseling and supervision in the UK. She now lives in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado.

**Kathleen Adams, MA, LPC**, is psychotherapist, journal therapist, and international thought leader in the field of expressive/therapeutic writing. She is the director of the Center for Journal Therapy and its online professional training division, the Therapeutic Writing Institute, in Denver. This is her eleventh book.

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