

Mood Journaling: A New Year's Journey to Track Emotions

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Mood journaling is a relatively new terminology that tracks the emotions, feelings, and patterns related to particular mindsets and environmental contexts with or without triggering factors. It is considered a powerful tool for raising self-awareness, coping with negative and unexpected emotions, and healthily living a life. Mood journaling helps us to learn stress-handling techniques, break down the barriers of emotions, shift perspectives, and improve concentration. Mood journaling is a reflective practice where one can document emotions, thoughts, and experiences to understand oneself better. It can help you recognize patterns, triggers, and ways to improve your emotional well-being. Mood journaling involves regularly recording the emotional state, what influenced it, and any insights one gains. It encourages self-awareness and can be therapeutic for managing stress, anxiety, or other emotional challenges.¹

The practice of mood journaling, though modern in its formalization, has roots in historical traditions of self-reflection and emotional exploration. Philosophers like Marcus Aurelius (Roman emperor, AD 121–180) in his meditations wrote daily reflections on thoughts and emotions, practicing what we now call stoic journaling. With the rise of Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis, journaling was recognized as a way to access the subconscious mind, helping individuals understand their deeper emotions and motivations. In the early 20th century, psychologists began recommending writing as a therapeutic tool for managing emotions and reducing anxiety. Dr James Pennebaker in the 1980s demonstrated that writing about emotions and traumatic experiences could improve mental and physical health.²

Mood tracking became integrated into mental health therapies like cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT), helping patients monitor emotions, identify triggers, and develop coping mechanisms. The digital age introduced mood-tracking and journaling apps, making it easier for individuals to record their feelings consistently. Apps like Daylio, Moodpath, and Reflectly use artificial intelligence (AI) and user input to help individuals log and analyze their emotions.³

Mood journaling today combines ancient practices of introspection with modern psychology and technology, offering a versatile tool for self-care and emotional well-being. To start mood journaling, one has to choose a format like, a notebook or journal, digital apps or mood-tracking apps, simple templates (e.g., bullet points, charts, or paragraphs), etc. Thereafter, one has to pick a consistent daily routine (e.g., morning or evening) to reflect and write. The writing must be without fear of judgment. There are different moods journaling techniques like–

- Daily mood logging which records mood using a likert scale (1–10) with emojis or descriptive words with triggers and reflections

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- Highs and lows which denote the best and most challenging parts of the day and reflect what went well and how to handle the difficulties
- Gratitude sections ending with each entry with 2–3 things that the individual is grateful for
- Emotional wheel which identifies nuanced feelings (e.g., overwhelmed, content, hopeful)
- Trigger analysis which reflects moments and asks what happened and how did that happen
- Visualization create mood graphs and track emotional trends over weeks or months
- Themed prompts with self-compassion statements and creative expressions⁴

There are many benefits of mood journaling, e.g. (i) identifies emotional triggers and patterns, (ii) encourages mindfulness and self-compassion, (iii) enhances emotional regulation skills, and (iv) helps clarify thoughts and feelings. Mood journaling has many benefits, but it's also important to consider potential risks and drawbacks to ensure a balanced approach. Here are some of the possible challenges: (1) over-focus on negative emotions, (2) emotional overwhelm, (3) perfectionism, (4) triggers for anxiety or trauma, (5) potential for rumination, (6) privacy concerns, (7) dependency on journaling, (8) time commitment, (9) self-criticism, (10) lack of structure.

While mood journaling can be a valuable tool for self-reflection, it's important to approach it mindfully. Balance honesty with self-compassion, set boundaries to avoid overwhelm, and seek professional support if challenging emotions arise.

Mood journaling applications are digital tools designed to help individuals track their emotions, reflect on their experiences, and gain insights into their mental health.⁵ Here are some of the best mood journaling apps available, along with their features and benefits, as shown in [Table 1](#).

Table 1: Different apps of mood journaling

Name of the app	Purpose	Features	Best for
Daylio	Combines mood tracking with habit journaling.	Using emojis or scales, track activities and generate mood pattern.	Visualizing mood trends over time and linking emotions to daily habits.
Moodpath	Focusing on emotional well-being and depression screening.	Mood tracker and daily questions to reflect on emotional health include mindfulness and CBT techniques that generate reports within two weeks.	Gaining insights into emotional health and accessing therapeutic resources.
Reflectly	A personal journaling app powered by AI.	Daily guided prompts for self-reflection.	Beginners looking for guided journaling with a focus on
Grid Diary	A journal with a structured, customizable grid format.	Own prompts for daily reflection.	Synchronizes across devices.
Woebot	A chatbot-based app providing emotional support and CBT exercises.	Engages users in conversations to reflect on moods and thoughts.	Immediate, conversational support for mood tracking and management.

Mood journaling can be a powerful tool for self-reflection and emotional growth. Here are some techniques to help you get started and make the most of the process:

- **Daily mood tracker:** By using simple emojis in a likert scale (1–10) or using color codes to log mood daily. Reflecting the feelings and finding the correlation with specific events, interactions and thoughts.
- **Freewriting:** Setting 5–10 minutes to write emotions and experiences without being concerned about grammar or structure.
- **Prompts for reflection:** Using different prompts for specific emotions or situations.
- **Mood mapping:** Creating mood maps and charting highs and lows over time and different triggers or patterns (energy dips, social interactions lifting the mood).
- **The five whys:** For a specific mood or reaction, ask “why?” five times to uncover its root cause.
- **Emotion wheel:** Using ‘emotion wheel’ (available online) to identify specific feelings beyond general labels like “happy” or “sad.”
- **Gratitude journaling:** End each entry with 2–3 things you’re grateful for, even on challenging days, which can shift focus from negatives to positives and help cultivate resilience.
- **Reflective questions:** At the end of each week or month.
- **Creative expression:** Incorporate drawings, doodles, or collages to visually express your mood.
- **Letter to yourself:** Write a letter to your past or future self, reflecting on your current emotional state and any advice or encouragement you’d offer.

Tips for success

- **Consistency:** Set a specific time each day to journal, like before bed or after breakfast.
- **Nonjudgment:** Be honest and compassionate with yourself; this is your safe space.
- **Review regularly:** Look back on past entries to observe growth and patterns over time.

Mood journaling is a self-awareness tool that helps individuals track patterns in their moods, identify triggers, and develop strategies to improve emotional well-being.⁶

Key concepts of mood journaling:

- **Tracking emotions**
 - Regularly documenting your mood, often using a scale (e.g., 1–10), emojis, or descriptive words.
 - Helps you identify trends and fluctuations in your emotional state over days, weeks, or months.
- **Self-reflection**
 - Reflect on the reasons behind your mood.
 - Analyzing triggers, such as events, interactions, or environmental factors, that influence how you feel.
- **Developing emotional awareness**
 - Naming and labeling emotions fosters a better understanding of your emotional landscape.
 - Differentiating between similar feelings, like stress versus anxiety, improves self-awareness.
- **Promoting positive coping mechanisms**
 - Identifying activities or thoughts that improve your mood.
 - Recognizing negative patterns and finding ways to address them.
- **Facilitating growth and insight**
 - Over time, mood journaling provides insights into your mental health and personal growth.
 - Helps you notice progress, resilience, and changes in emotional responses.

The mood journaling may be beneficial to–

- **Individuals seeking self-awareness:** To understand their emotions and reactions better.
- **People managing mental health:** Useful in therapy or self-care for tracking symptoms and progress.
- **Those experiencing stress or burnout:** Helps identify stressors and prioritize well-being.
- **Anyone interested in personal growth:** Offers a reflective practice for mindfulness and self-improvement.⁷

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