

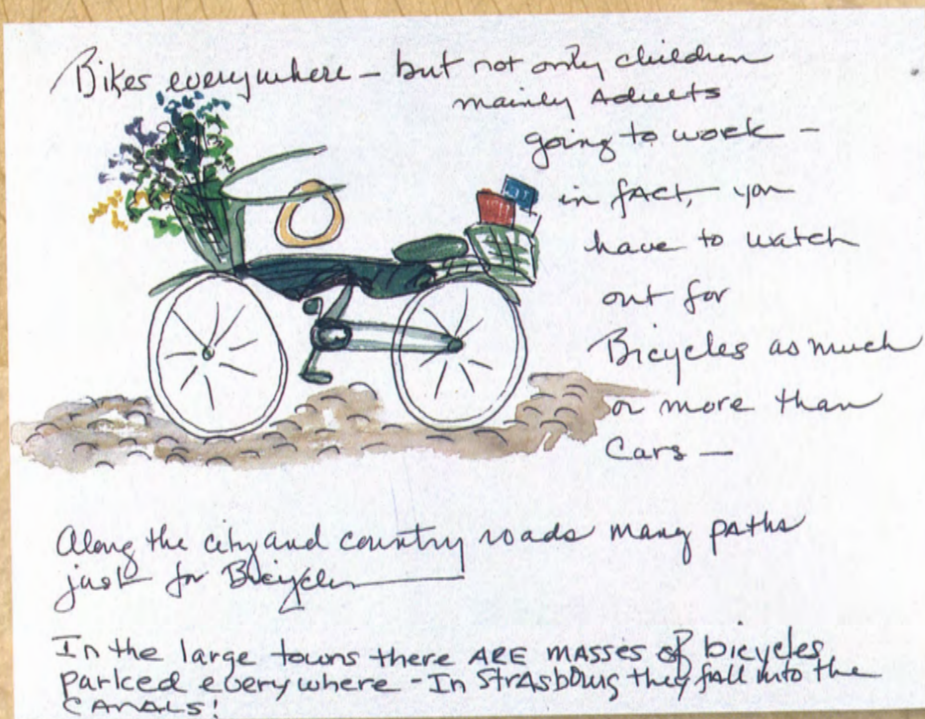
# WRITING SMALL

by Ann Turkle

Writing in a journal when you are considering page design may present some challenges, but it also introduces many opportunities. The decorated or visually defined page may invite words the way the stark white of an untouched page never would. If you aren't sure where to begin or what to write in your journal, start small. One of the most common complaints about journal-keeping of any kind is that it takes too much time. The verbal collecting you may do for a journal can fit so neatly into moments of available time that this objection will fall away, and, as it does, the value of the writing may become so apparent that making time for it is easier. Here are a few suggestions for approaching the written aspect of your journal.

## WORK SMALL

There is no denying we have many small openings of time in our day. We wait at the stop-light, in the checkout line at the supermarket, for our e-mail connection to come online, or for a return phone call. These "in between" moments can leave us tapping our toes in impatience, but they can also allow us to turn with pen in hand to a small notebook or 3 x 5-inch (7.6 x 12.7 cm) card kept close at hand. It may seem a little tedious or obsessive to get into the habit of making observations or brief reflections throughout your day, but gradually this practice can yield great results: you'll learn to pay attention and be aware of what is going on around you, not just what is going on in your head.



Dorothy Herbert,  
*Untitled Journal*  
Page, 2000.  
Watercolor, pen  
and ink. PHOTO BY  
ELYSE WEINGARTEN



Kelcey Loomer,  
 Untitled Journal  
 Page, 2000.  
 Watercolor, pen  
 and ink. PHOTO BY  
 ELYSE WEINGARTEN

Choose a convenient method for collecting your observations. Plain-paper notepads come as small as business cards, and range in size from 2 x 3½ inches (5.1 x 8.9 cm) to 6 x 4 inches (15.2 x 10.2 cm) to 7 x 5½ inches (17.8 x 14 cm), the same size as a daily planner. You can easily carry a few 3 x 5-inch (7.6 x 12.7 cm) cards or a tiny notebook with many pages. Since any of these options are small and easy to buy or make, you may want several so they are available in the places those openings of time happen—in the car, at the telephone or the computer, in your handbag or briefcase, or, best of all, in your pocket. Your collector notebook may go many places your larger journal would not easily fit, so you don't need to be quite so obvious about using it if you are at first a little shy about working on your journal in public. If someone asks what you are doing, you can always respond by saying "Oh, just making a list," because you may be doing precisely that.

### STARTING A COLLECTION OF THOUGHTS

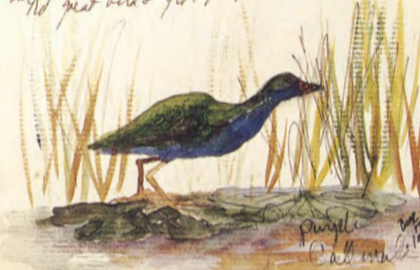
Writing exercises can bear a close resemblance to drawing exercises. The goal is to focus and to record the object of your attention. Although part of your aim may be to be more present or more aware in your surroundings, you don't want to ignore what you are thinking. In a sense, you may be opening a door to allow flashes of connection to come to you.

"Nonwriters" may perceive "writerly" creativity as something that happens in a writer's studio, or at least at the keyboard, but the beginnings of works (poems, verbal sketches, memoirs) are the quick apprehensions you will lose if you do not write them down: the perfect pattern of the cups and glasses stacked on the waiter's tray as he sets the café tables for dinner;

Elizabeth  
Ellison, *Untitled*  
Journal Page,  
2000.  
Watercolor,  
pen and ink.

How nice really nice  
Got to camp about 6 & fixed pre-chops  
from a small grocery store in Moon's for dinner.

1/10/01 It is 4:30 to 5 AM at camp at  
Scottsboro and it is cold! The Sun is coming  
up! Much warmer & easier to get to go today  
The 3:30 pm flight. Geo is still in bed but have  
made copies of the check-in & taken up 2  
to go which they were grateful at an store.  
No great birds yet.



It is 9:30 & we are off to go living -  
We are in a Lake House near Scottsboro.  
The plan is to go to a white park  
Reserve - but had to cancel there but  
they do not allow dogs.  
The place we are staying is pretty  
terrible.

It is 10:30 AM and we are in Moon's, FL -  
at a Bayfront where Geo is taking some business  
related phone calls. I soon took morning up drive -  
I feel really rough - the shower in 2:15 they 3-700  
Cold. Go the Campground Bath House. The bathroom has  
not been cleaned since we have been there - I will  
no heat at all. I plan to look for an RV Site (there  
is post a woman who has a RV site.)

The texture of  
Flora's here. More noticeable  
since not as many as  
in - my. The sunlight through  
the water's surface.  
There are many things in this part of the -  
1000 of things. I have not seen any as pretty as  
Soekenget.



3:35 @ moon - a grocery store  
good for our next trip. No residential street  
the house. Got a few wild birds in getting  
with looking the at house.  
Plan at this point to take a shower - can't  
call, feed dogs & get take than out house -  
cleaning. It has gotten pretty cold & raining -  
I had seeing the fall & what would be

the almost conversational tone of the crows' exchange outside your window at daybreak; or the delighted smile of a six-year-old picking out a box of crayons as part of her back-to-school shopping. Tiny things may provide images and associations to build upon.

## MAKE LISTS

Lists are liberating. They are much easier to generate than carefully constructed sentences, and they give us an opportunity to discover patterns, similarities, and differences. List every flower you have seen blooming today. Record the names of the tree species in your yard. Look over your lists and try to determine patterns which may evolve from similar sounds or a visual memory of color.

## DESCRIBE

Try using very descriptive language to record your observations. For example: One morning I came upon a pretty box turtle about the size of a large coffee cup, as she sat between the broccoli and the tomato plants in my garden. She looked up at me with gold eyes, perfectly coordinated with the gold and greenish brown of her shell.

## WITNESS

As you people-watch, try to record the actions of those you observe. Sitting on a park bench, I observed four children running through a puddle left by a recent rainstorm. First, they ran keeping their feet low to create a wake, then took huge steps, stomping up the biggest splash possible, and finally they ran and slid. They took turns initiating the action, almost the way members of a jazz ensemble take turns improvising.

## LISTEN

Eavesdrop, record dialogue, and listen to what your surroundings tell you. I lived for two years on a corner in a residential neighborhood in Tallahassee, Florida. Gradually, I realized that I could describe that neighborhood, the time of day, the season, and the weather just by listening. The bus service to my corner started at about 7:00 a.m. and ended in the early evening, each pass punctuated by the distinctive squeal of brakes. The magnolia tree outside my bedroom window dropped its leaves with a sound almost as decisive as smashing plates. And as the direction of the wind changed, so did the approach that planes took toward the local airport, adding the rush of jet engines overhead. How would you describe the distinctive qualities of your neighborhood by sound? Can those sounds be made visible?

Once, sitting in a booth in a restaurant waiting for my meal to be served, I overheard a conversation between two couples, retirees. Without turning to look, I visualized them, making notes and a small sketch on a notecard, entirely on the strength of their voices and their way of speaking.

## COLLECTING AND PLEASURE

An unintended payoff of paying attention is that we simply begin to take pleasure in our noticing, and suddenly, the collecting notebook becomes a "pleasure journal," the repository for unexpected moments of delight. Whereas you once fumed over the moments wasted on the price check for the patron in front of you in line, there is now the opportunity to quickly observe the precarious efforts of the five-year-old unloading the shopping cart, one item at a time, into the hands of the checker who is dutifully saying "thank you" at each handoff.

Colleen Stanton, *Untitled Journal*  
Page, 2000. Collage and pen.

Wednesday, January 4, 1978  
Keery  
peaceful evening on Pleasant Street. I sit and  
my room while IS WHAT seasons in the kitchen  
I find myself very much at peace, content  
into the seasons of school - trying to make it  
like or sun every day. Its hard to believe that  
Sunday - it seems like its been a lot longer  
I guess I got used to egg being around.  
Let egg know how happy I am that  
at month together. I feel so very much



the date  
real  
5 break is free. I don't have  
now, but that would be  
was before you went to  
it is and if its  
you, I think that  
he to come down  
nd spend some time  
Maybe even soccer  
the  
ahead?



Bobbe Needham, Page from  
*Grandmother's Journal*, 2000. Pen  
and ink, colored pencil, crayon.  
Journal by Coral Jensen

## FROM PATTERN TO METAPHOR

Collecting material in notebooks before transferring it into your journal allows you a lot of options. You may transfer material into the journal in many different ways, adding layers not only to the physical presentation, but to your appreciation and understanding of what you have collected. You may simply paste in a page of observations, or recopy it, then elaborate, reflect, or comment on the article you've added.

The interplay between the visual and the verbal elements of a journal often provides opportunities to explore metaphors. The kinship of images and words can suggest themes or motifs. Figures of speech that you remember from English class can come alive when words and images meet and influence each other. As you pay attention to your emerging metaphors, they may define an agenda, a plan, or projects for you to develop over many journals to come.

Try a visual representation of the feeling of a journal entry. Start with a small, rich idea plopped in the middle of a page, and spiral it out to the margins in a gyre of color and text. The lists you create may suggest linear patterns of design or ornamentation. If it suits your style, record moments in the color that you associate with an experience or narrative. You can even express an experience with one large, dark word or image on each page.

# The Decorated Page

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