



A Winter's Journal

30 days to pause,
reflect and write

by
Claire Wong

Welcome to the Winter Journal

Winter can be beautiful. Frost on rooftops, candlelit homes, and the cries of migratory geese landing on the icy lake: there are so many moments in this season that feel much warmer and brighter than the weather outside. It's a time to celebrate simple delights like hearty food, books read from under a knitted blanket, more time spent indoors and therefore, perhaps, more time spent writing.

However, if I'm honest, I find winter hard as well. I struggle with the scant hours of daylight, the months of dull grey, the feeling that every pair of shoes and socks I own is caked in mud or soaked with rain water. Unless I very deliberately change my thinking and behaviour during winter, it can feel like a long, uphill trudge.

That's why I created this winter journal. I wanted to set aside time to reflect on the things that bring joy and hope in this season, to give space to shape my thoughts clearly, and to make the most of what has the potential to be a restful and deeply reflective time.

And then of course there's the fact that I've written this in 2020. You don't need me to tell you this has been a hard year. We're all tired, and we've all been through a lot of unexpected change and trouble this year. I believe that journalling can be a helpful, creative way to respond well. As you read through the daily prompts, you'll see I've leaned towards gentleness and rest, because I believe that is what a lot of people need right now, myself included.

How does this journal work?

There are 30 prompts to get you thinking and writing. I've not included dates on any of these pages, because the idea is to take it at your own pace. You could complete a page every day for a month, or you could spread them out over the whole of winter. The choice is yours.

I've also tried, wherever possible, to make sure these exercises are achievable no matter what state of lockdown, quarantine, or isolation you find yourself in.

My hope is that you will find a creative, reflective outlet through the 30 pages that follow. May this journal support you to write with depth and heart this winter.



DAY ONE

Taking Stock

One of the great benefits of journalling is that you make time to stop, sit down, and take stock of what's going on. As you begin, simply write down how you feel about the season ahead. What are you eagerly looking forward to, and what do you hope to get out of the process of journalling?

I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO:

I'M WORRIED ABOUT:

THE REASON I'M JOURNALLING IS:



DAY TWO

Values

Winter has the potential to be a busy season, with endless lists of ideas to fill your time. But amid conflicting demands and expectations, how do you keep from becoming overwhelmed? One key to this is knowing your values. What are the things that are centrally, uncompromisingly important to you for this season, and what are the things that, if overlooked, won't cause the world to end? Maybe you want to prioritise time to rest, or checking in on your friends, but don't mind if the house isn't spotless or you don't make it to a party this year (which, let's face it, may not be an option for a lot of us anyway).

THINGS I VALUE THIS WINTER:

THINGS I CAN LET GO OF:



DAY THREE

Stop and Sense

If your head is abuzz with thoughts of the past and the future, whirling to-do lists and worrying worst case scenarios, then take a moment to stop. Set those things aside for a little while, and notice your surroundings.

Writers often advise using all five senses to bring your prose to life. Therapists recommend paying attention to our senses as a way of bringing calm to our busy minds. When you stop and sit, what do you see, hear, smell, taste and touch?

SEE

HEAR

TOUCH

TASTE

SMELL



DAY FOUR

Gifts

Make a list of all the gifts you can remember receiving in the last year. Don't just include physical, gift-wrapped objects though. What about a meal someone invited you to, or a kind word of encouragement that brightened your day?

Now go back through that list. Which are the ones that meant the most at the time? Which have had the most lasting impact? It's interesting to see what gifts actually hold the most value in our lives.



A sheet of cream-colored lined paper with a torn top edge. The paper has ten sets of horizontal lines, each consisting of a solid top line, a dashed middle line, and a solid bottom line. Two blue polka-dot sticky tabs are attached to the right side of the paper.



DAY FIVE

Traditions Old

Every season brings with it certain traditions. One family may visit the same picnic spot every summer, go conker-collecting in the autumn, and then have a snowball fight in winter. What are your favourite winter traditions you've inherited from your childhood?

TRADITIONS I WANT TO CONTINUE THIS YEAR



DAY SIX

Traditions New

As we get older, we get to create our own new traditions. This might be your own spin on celebrating Christmas, or resolving to read a good book with a hot chocolate in arm's reach. What new rituals can you introduce, to celebrate the season? And how do they match up with the values you wrote about on day two?

NEW TRADITIONS I WANT TO BEGIN THIS YEAR



DAY SEVEN

Recipe

The kitchen can be a site of important sentimental meaning at this time of year. A traditional dish reminds us of family, a delicious treat gets you in the mood for a party, or something hearty and comforting warms you on a cold dark night. In my house, curried chicken in flaky pastry goes head to head with a fruit-filled Christmas pudding.

Choose a favourite dish or recipe. Write about it. You could start by listing the recipe itself. What does this mean to you? What are your memories of making it?

THIS RECIPE IS CALLED:

--

IT REMINDS ME OF:

--

INGREDIENTS:

--

HOW YOU MAKE IT:

--



DAY EIGHT

Light and Dark

Now you've had some questions and prompts to get you thinking and writing, it's time for a more open-ended challenge.

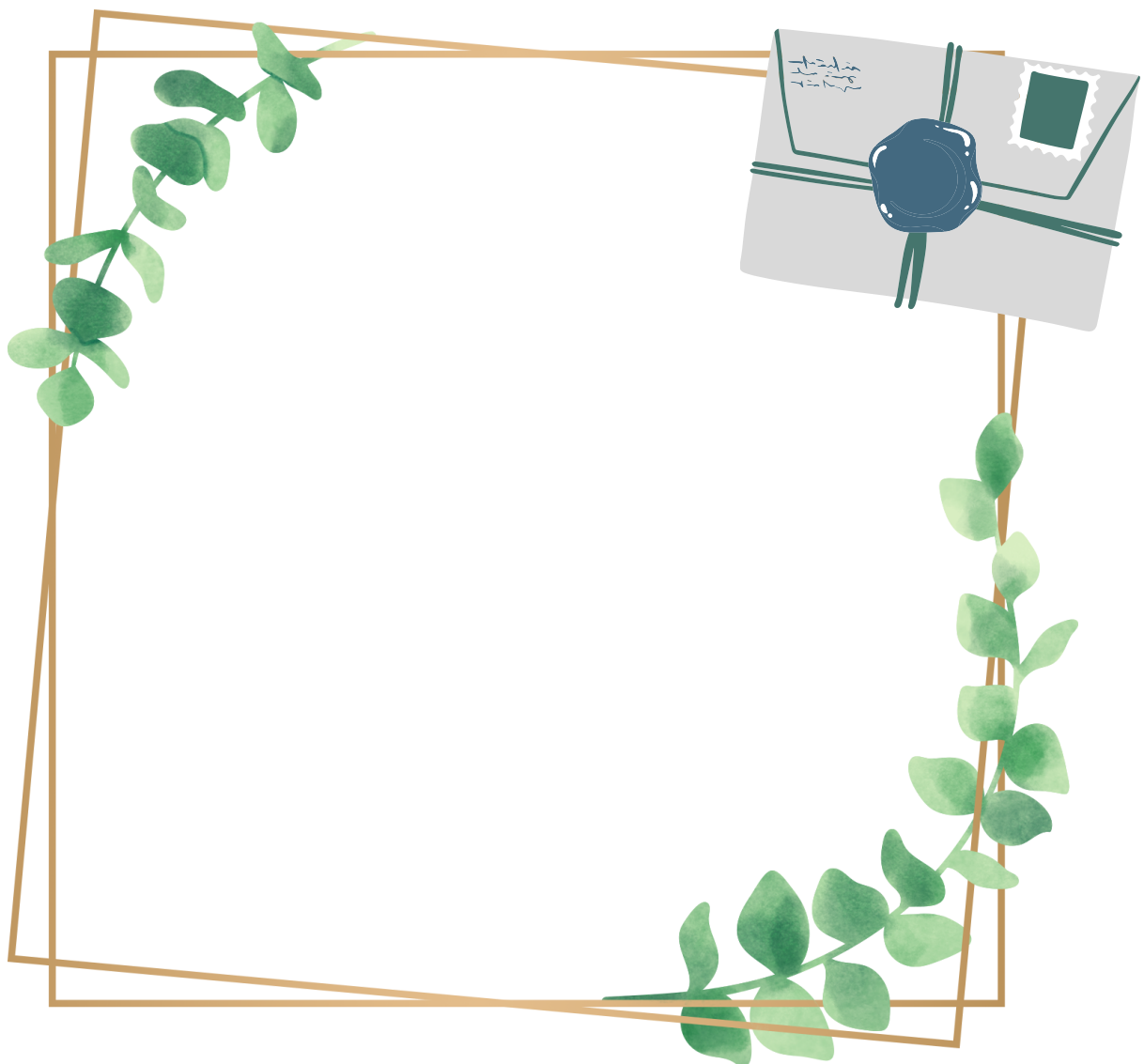
Today's theme is Light and Dark, but there are limitless directions you could take this prompt. You could consider what the long nights of winter mean to you, or write about a time you went star-gazing. Or maybe it's the symbolic image of light in the darkness that grabs your imagination today. Just pick up a pen and start writing!



DAY NINE

Letters

Letter-writing. It's an age-old practice that is increasingly neglected now that faster, more efficient methods of communication have arisen. And yet there is something timeless, elegant and personal about receiving a hand-written letter. Today, it's time to brush off your correspondence skills (bureau and quill are not essential) and write a letter to someone you won't be able to see in person this year. What would you like to tell them? How would you like them to feel when they read your letter?





DAY TEN

Looking Back

As one year ends and another begins, it's a good time to look back over the past twelve months and reflect on the good, the bad, the lessons learned, and the hopes you are carrying forward into the new year.

MY HAPPIEST MEMORIES OF THIS YEAR

THE HARDEST PARTS OF THIS YEAR

SOMETHING NEW I LEARNED

SOMETHING THAT CHANGED

THE BEST THING I READ/WATCHED

A FAVOURITE SONG FROM THIS YEAR



DAY ELEVEN

Songs

Is there a line from a song that catches you every time, and makes you stop what you were doing, to really listen? For me, it's the first verse of O Holy Night, and the lyric '...He appeared, and the soul felt its worth'. There's something beautiful about the thought of a soul suddenly understanding how much it is worth, for the first time, don't you think?

Pick a song with words that you love. It doesn't have to be a Christmas carol: any song that fills you with hope or wonder. Can you put into words what's so special about this song?



DAY TWELVE

Joy

What brings you joy? Joy is like the grown up older sister to happiness: it's deeper and less fleeting. It's less bothered by external events, less shaken by surprises. Sometimes joy dances around the house, other days it sits calm and content by the window and admires the beauty outside.

Write about your own experiences of joy. What sounds, smells or sights remind you of joy? How do you express and celebrate it?



DAY THIRTEEN

Word Art

I love calligraphy. I'm not very good at it, admittedly, but I find that doesn't bother me too much. There's something very soothing about slowing down the way you write, and making the words look beautiful on the page. It helps me focus more closely on the meaning of what I'm writing. It can even be a prompt for meditation.

You don't need an expensive calligraphy pen to get started (although if you have one then go ahead and use it!) - any ink pen will do. Below is a modern calligraphy alphabet for you to use as reference if you need it. A helpful tip is to focus on the downward pen strokes being heavier to get that modern calligraphy effect.

Why not pick a phrase you love and write it out? If you're stuck for inspiration, you could use a line from the song you wrote about on day eleven!

.....
.....
.....
.....

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo
Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz



DAY FOURTEEN

Gratitude

Do you celebrate Thanksgiving where you live? Despite having never lived in a country that does, I've adopted this tradition into my calendar. I love the idea of celebrating the things we are thankful for (and especially over a feast!) so every winter in my house we cook a roast dinner and remember to be grateful.

The benefits of gratitude are attested in terms of our health, well-being and happiness. So today's exercise is to write some lists of things you are thankful for. Mine would include autumn sunlight, my family, coffee and wellington boots.

PEOPLE I'M THANKFUL FOR

POSSESSIONS I'M THANKFUL FOR

EXPERIENCES I'M THANKFUL FOR

GIFTS I'M THANKFUL FOR



DAY SIXTEEN

Winter

Congratulations, you've passed the halfway mark in this winter journal! What has this season been like for you so far?

Winter is when the ground freezes, the sky barely lights up most days, and the trees are bare. And yet, if you could see under the earth, there's lots going on. Seeds and bulbs are putting down roots, unseen. They're getting ready to burst into colour and life when springtime arrives.

Winter is a time of preparation, of paring back, resting and giving your energy to the most important things. How are you putting down roots this winter? And what new life are you hoping to see in the spring?



DAY SEVENTEEN

Choose

When our lives feel dominated by events outside our control, it can be easy to believe we are powerless to do anything helpful, useful or good. We cannot fix the world's problems, after all!

However, no matter the scale and size of the troubles we see, there is one thing we always have power over: our choices. Stop, think, choose. Even in the seemingly small choices we make daily, of how to spend our time or money, we have the power to make a choice that will do good.

Maybe for you that could be giving a friend your undivided attention for a while, and in doing so, choosing to show that you value them. Maybe it's choosing to support your community by buying from local independent businesses. Maybe it's choosing to say or write something that will give another person hope.





DAY EIGHTEEN

Together

Together. For many of us, it's a word that reminds us of all we're missing this year. We need to grieve that loss, of not being all together. And then we need to get creative in imagining what being together might look like this year. Is it video calls with the grandparents or hand-baked treats dropped off with a note on the doorstep? Is it putting more thought into the words of your Christmas cards this year, since you can't say them face to face? Or is it making plans for what we can do together in the future?

THINGS I WILL MISS THIS YEAR ABOUT NOT BEING TOGETHER

WAYS I CAN CREATE A SENSE OF TOGETHERNESS, SO OTHERS FEEL INCLUDED AND LOVED



DAY TWENTY

Simplicity

This is a season often characterised by frenetic pace, packed social calendars, and pressure to spend money. No wonder we're usually exhausted by the end of it!

What would a simpler approach mean? A certain amount of the hustle and bustle may well have been taken away this year due to pandemic restrictions. And even though we'll miss some of those things, there's a challenge to turn it into an opportunity for calm and rest.

For me, simplicity this year means less rushing around, less shopping, and less worrying. What does it mean for you? What can you cut back on or cut out altogether?

THINGS I CHOOSE NOT TO DO

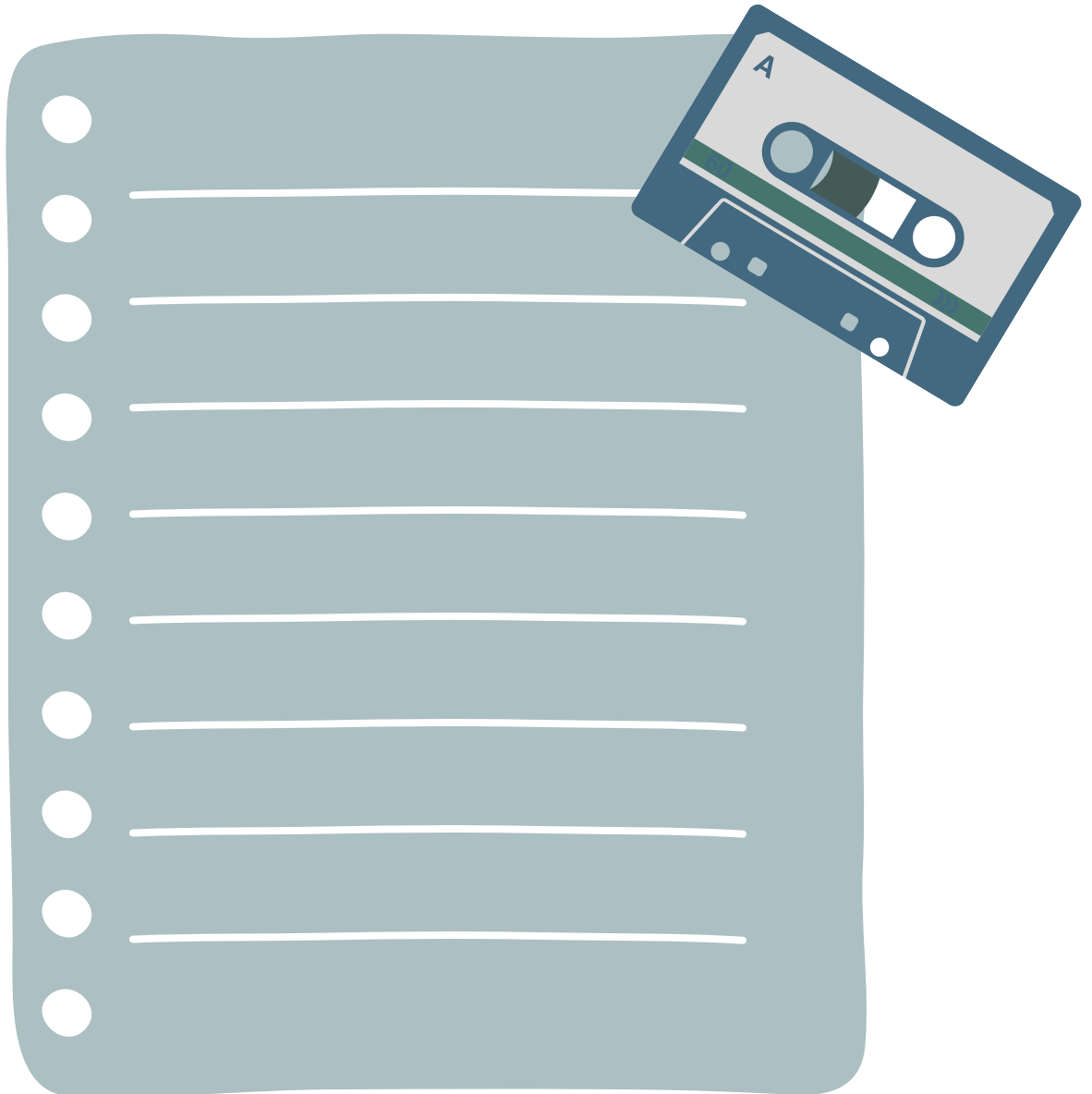
THINGS I CAN REDUCE



DAY TWENTY ONE

Music

We've had a few serious reflections in a row, so today it's time for something fun. Create your perfect winter playlist! What music captures this season perfectly for you? It could be cheesy songs to dance around the house to, or Christmas carols from King's College. What music captures your mood for this time of year? You've got space for your eight top tracks, but feel free to add more!



A light blue rounded rectangle containing a list of eight horizontal lines for writing, with a cassette tape illustration on the right side.



DAY TWENTY THREE

Outdoors

You might have noticed the design of this journal includes a lot of botanical themes. In winter, we often spend less time outside our homes, and yet there are many advantages to coming into contact with nature and the outdoor world. That's not to say that a long hike over the moors and mountains is necessary to experience these benefits: something as simple as opening a window to breathe fresh air, or putting out food to attract birds to your garden can help you to slow down and relax.

WHAT'S AN OUTDOOR SPACE WHERE YOU FEEL AT HOME?

HOW DOES BEING IN NATURE MAKE YOU FEEL? CALM, INSPIRED, REFLECTIVE, ENERGISED?

HOW CAN YOU BRING MORE OF THE OUTDOORS INTO YOUR HOME AND DAILY LIFE?



DAY TWENTY FOUR

Content

In Iceland, there's a tradition of giving books to friends and family in December. What could be cosier than a Christmas Eve spent by the fire, immersed in a good story? But I imagine the experience changes depending on what you read. A harrowing thriller or heavy political treatise would have quite a different impact to a heartwarming romance, for example.

What we choose to read and consume affects how we feel and think. That's not to say we should never engage with words we find difficult or stressful to comprehend, but it's worth taking stock of what we're feeding our minds, to ensure it's doing us more good than harm.

What's the best thing you've read this year? What has impacted you the most? What do you give your time to? How does the content you read on social media compare to the books you read?



DAY TWENTY FIVE

Celebrate

For many of us, 'celebration' conjures up an image of a big party, with large groups gathered together over food and drink in honour of some occasion or milestone. Champagne flutes and elaborate cakes also spring to mind!

But celebration doesn't have to look like this. It can be a practice, a mindset, even a discipline. Instead of always looking ahead to the next task on the to do list, the next success we want to unlock, what if we stopped to celebrate? By looking for things to celebrate, we become more attentive to the good: we start to notice what we have along with what qualities other people bring. We become more able to recognise the good that's there.

WHO OR WHAT IN YOUR LIFE DESERVES TO BE CELEBRATED? IMAGINE YOU ARE GIVING A SPEECH IN RECOGNITION, AND WRITE WHAT YOU'D SAY.



DAY TWENTY SIX

Rest

It's time for another one-word prompt with free choice to write whatever inspires you. Today, take 'rest' as your starting point. You can write poetry, prose, profound or light-hearted. It's up to you!

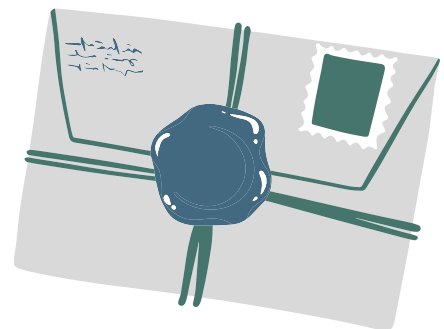


DAY TWENTY SEVEN

Dear Me

Write a letter to your future self, one year from now. What do you want to remind yourself of, that you don't want to have forgotten? What are your hopes for this time next year?

Dear future me,





DAY TWENTY EIGHT

Story Time

All stories start in real life. Next time you sit by your window or go for a walk, keep an eye out for some story inspiration. An easy way to find it is to ask yourself questions about everything. What secret past might the driver in the black car be escaping? What treasure could be buried in that field, and who hid it?

Write down what you saw and what inspiration it sparked. Now all you have to do is answer the question and you've got yourself a story! Maybe the driver is turning his back on a life of crime, and the buried treasure was looted during a family feud that got out of hand...



DAY TWENTY NINE

Wishes

What are your wish lists for the new season? Rather than make yourself a lengthy list of aspirations, make things a little easier by choosing just one focus in each area.

ONE PLACE I'D LIKE TO GO

ONE PERSON I'D LIKE TO SEE MORE

ONE BOOK I'D LIKE TO READ

ONE THING THAT'S WORTH MY TIME

ONE THING I'D LIKE TO LEARN

ONE DREAM FOR THE NEXT YEAR



DAY THIRTY

Looking Forward

As you come to the end of this journal, it's a good time to turn your focus ahead. What are you looking forward to? When the hibernation season of winter is over, spring comes with new beginnings and sunlight breaking through the clouds. What moments in the calendar are you awaiting eagerly? It might be a family birthday or the first daffodils of the season. Make a list of these anticipated moments: the hopes you carry beyond winter's end.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

the end



Tell me about your journalling reflections and find more of my writing:

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