

## The writing practice in TTT Circles

By Donna Jenson

Our practice involves writing, reading that writing aloud, plus witnessing, and affirming each other's writing. If you are physically able, I strongly recommend writing in longhand with a pen that feels good to you, with the right tip and color of ink. For me, that's a Pentel Roller, black with a medium tip. When writing longhand, you feel the words coming out of your body and delivering them into the page; is a physical experience with a tactile quality. Sequential finger movements activate multiple regions of the brain associated with processing and remembering information.

Writing by hand engages a part of the brain called the 'reticular activating system,' offering unique benefits. The RAS is a bundle of nerves at our brainstem that filters out unnecessary information so the important stuff gets through.

Psychological scientific research by Daniel Oppenheimer at the University of California shows that handwriting helps with memory and recall. His study showed that areas of the brain associated with remembering and comprehension are more engaged when one writes with a pen and paper. Your mind can replay questions and worries in an endless stream of consciousness. But when you're writing, you're not likely to write down the same thoughts over and over.

Writing by hand pushes your mind forward toward new observations and conclusions. It forces you to slow down and fish out those crystals of insight from your stream of consciousness. In one study, children assigned to write essays by hand expressed more ideas than those writing on a keyboard.

Researchers say a physical activity like writing by hand uses nerves and muscles in a complex way, sending sensory feedback to our brains. The more complex the input, the easier our brain retains memories. Tapping on a keyboard or dictating into a device doesn't give our brains as much feedback as the complex sequences in handwriting. Writing by hand slows down your thoughts, boosts mindfulness, and increases calm. The act of writing activates the parts of the brain, similar to meditation.

A lot of our frustrations and sadness come from muddled and unexpressed thoughts, which often repeat in a loop in our minds. A comprehensive study by Professor James Pennebaker at the University of Texas found that writing about a stressful experience had more therapeutic benefits than typing about the incident, which led to greater and more honest self-disclosure.

When you write regularly by hand, you gain confidence in your ability to express yourself. It's easier to talk about your feelings when you've become experienced in methodical writing.

The more you write, the more you get to know yourself, which leads me to another part of our practice – reading our writing aloud. Hearing one's own voice recite one's words has power. I am constantly reminded of this: when I read aloud, emotions I didn't realize were attached to my words can rise up – be that grief, fear, or joy – underscoring the strength of my expression. Plus, the ear can see places for more articulation the eyes don't always catch.

And then there's the extra added benefit of having everyone in the circle witness our words, expressions, and declarations. To have our writing accepted without judgment, without scrutiny, but

with welcoming acceptance is a potent affirmation and contradiction to the damaging silencing we survivors have experienced.

At some point, it dawned on me that the phrase 'authorial voice' comes from 'author,' which comes from 'authority.' I've been writing longhand in journals and writing groups since 1979, initially not understanding all this "science" and the potential positive outcomes. All I knew was that I felt better and stronger as I recognized the authority of my own experience.

Using the four elements of our process: writing, reading aloud, hearing our own voice, and having it witnessed and affirmed, all lead to greater self-confidence, not to mention a juicy dose of healing!!

Thanks for reading,

DJ

P.S. There are three other elements – but they happen outside the Circle. First, transcribing your writing into a computer document: date it, title it and save it. Often additional writing happens in the act of transcription. One week after each Circle session you will receive a prompt and a collage created by the tech moderator from the writing in the session. Use either or both as jumping off points to write on your own in between sessions.