

The Self-Elicitation Guide

How to locate your center



This is simply guided journaling. There's no judgment, no right or wrong answers. Think of this part like walking along the beach with a metal detector. As you write your answers, make a note when you feel a reaction or emotion. It means you found something, that you struck a nerve. It could be a memory, dream, hope, or fear. But it's something. And that feeling tells you it's authentic. This is where your best ideas will come from.

Biography

"Biography – a system in which the contradictions of human life are unified."

Jose Ortega y Gasset, Philosopher

Life is long. You've experienced many people, places, and situations. Here we are just collecting the basics.

- Where are you from?
- What do you remember most about your childhood home?
- Who were the key people in your life? How did you feel about them? How did they make you feel?
- Was your childhood happy, troubled, or mixed?
- Where have you worked or spent the majority of your time?
- Where do you live now? What is the vibe of your home? Neighborhood?
- Who are the most important people in your life? How do you feel about them? How do they make you feel?
- Is life, or fate, good to you, hard on you, or mixed?

Defining Experience

"Experience is not what happens to a man. It is what a man does with what happens to him."

Aldous Huxley, Writer/Philosopher

We all have intense experiences that shape who we are. Some are dark and sad: the death of loved ones, moving far away when you're little, getting sick, injured, betrayed. Some are incredible: getting company-wide recognition at work, hitting



the home run in a big game or winning a major award. These experiences shape us deep inside. They may impact us for better and worse in ways we never realized.

- What are the experiences that have most defined you?
- Has anybody ever done or said something to you that you still think about often? What was it?
- What is the most emotionally intense thing that ever happened to you? Which was the best, most glorious, greatest, or most sublime moment? And which was the worst?
- How did you change as a result of these experiences?
- Can you recall how you felt before and after the experience?
- If you can recall this moment, can you remember what you expected to happen, what actually happened, and how your expectation clashed with reality?
- If you noted multiple items, do they have similarities, follow the same patterns, or share themes? Does it ever feel as if fate, a higher power, or the universe is trying to tell you something? If so, what is it?

Knowledge

"It is far better to grasp the universe as it really is than to persist in delusion, however satisfying and reassuring."

Carl Sagan, Astronomer

Deep knowledge of a subject makes your writing feel more alive, organic, inspired, and authentic. What do you know really well? Or, if you don't already consider yourself an expert on a subject, what would you like to know more about? What subjects are so interesting to you that sitting down with a textbook feels exciting, like entertainment, not work?

- What subjects have you studied?
- What skills do you have?
- In what areas do you have deep expertise?
- What jobs have you held? What exactly did you do and learn from them?



- Are you psychologically sophisticated? Do you understand how the human mind works, how personalities are formed, what truly motivates people?
- What do you know?

Personality

"Always be yourself, express yourself, have faith in yourself, do not go out and look for a successful personality and duplicate it."

Bruce Lee, Martial Artist

Here we're going to look at the way you move through the world when you feel most like your authentic self, when you're free.

- How do you describe your personality?
- What word comes to mind when others describe your personality?
- What signals do you think your clothes, friends, habits, house, car, and personal style send to other people?
- Does your life, as it is, accurately reflect your personality? Is there a strong alignment between who you are, how you feel, and what you do?
- Do people perceive you correctly?
- What do you most want to change about the way you behave?
- Is there something about your personality you value most?
- What do you *dislike* most about your personality?
- Do you like being you? If you do, what do you enjoy most about your personality? If not, what can you do to make peace with—and love—yourself?
- Did anyone ever do or say anything to stifle and repress your personality, to insult, bully, or convince you to behave in a way that doesn't feel like you? Do you, right now, go about your business with the vibe, flair, demeanor, countenance that feels the way you want to feel? Do you feel seen in the way you wish to be seen?



Conflicts

"The harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph."

Thomas Paine, Revolutionary, American Founding Father

You might know the expression, "Be kind to everyone you meet for they are fighting a great battle." It's hard to be an individual human being. We have conflicts within ourselves, with our family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, with big institutions (religion, government, economic systems), and with our environments. Knowing where you feel conflict most intensely can help you find subjects worth writing about.

- What conflicts do you have with yourself, those close to you, society at large?
- What kind of environment do you feel most uncomfortable in?
- What keeps you up at night?
- What makes you angry or enraged?
- How do you behave when you're at your worst?
- Have you ever had your heart broken?
- Have you been betrayed by someone close?
- Have you ever been humiliated?
- Do you have dark secrets that no one knows?
- What are your most interesting contradictions?



Beliefs

"One life is all we have and we live it as we believe in living it. But to sacrifice what you are and to live without belief, that is a fate more terrible than dying."

Joan of Arc, French Visionary, Roman Catholic Saint

What we believe affects our writing. But our beliefs were largely instilled by parents, communities, religious and political organizations, influential friends, and life experience. These may or may not serve us well. The goal here is to discover what you truly believe, through thoughtful analysis and honest reflection. If there is a gap between what you believe and what you *want to* believe, you might have valuable information to mine.

- Who has had the greatest influence on your beliefs? How do you feel about this person and these beliefs?
- Are you religious? And if so, how do you define your faith?
- What are your politics? Where do they come from?
- Is there a cause you are invested in? One you would sacrifice or even die for?
- Is your worldview negative, positive, or indifferent? Why?
- Do you feel humankind's future is bleak or bright?
- What do you think of people in general?
- Do you believe that stories have an impact on people? Have any made one on you?
- Do you believe in yourself and your inherent right to express yourself?

Inspiration

"Don't loaf and invite inspiration: light out after with a club."

Jack London, Author

This whole course is designed to inspire you. Here let's just identify some of the most obvious things and look for connections that spark your flames.

- Which storytellers inspire you?
- Do you have a favorite piece of visual art?
- What music do you listen to most often?



- Which activities stir your soul?
- Have you ever fought for a cause?
- Describe a place that puts you in a heightened state.
- Which people – in popular culture, history, or through direct experience inspire you?
- Do you have a tendency to connect dots in unique ways? Ever notice connections between things that no one else seems to notice?

Fantasy

"This is love: to fly toward a secret sky, to cause a hundred veils to fall each moment. First to let go of life. Finally, to take a step without feet."

Rumi, Islamic Scholar and Poet

One danger of studying Classic Dramatic Structure is an over-emphasis on logical thought, where cause and effect leads to predictable outcomes and drains mystery. Here we consider the parts of existence – be they fantasy, science fiction, or super-human -- that feel true but don't necessarily hold up to logical thought.

- Do you love to escape into fantastical worlds?
- Have you had dreams you've never forgotten?
- Do you have recurring dreams?
- Ever have what seemed like a supernatural experience?
- Do you read comic books, graphic novels, or science fiction?
- When your mind wanders where does it tend to go?
- Have you ever had an experience that altered your perception of reality? Maybe it was a high fever, a shock, a mental health episode, or drugs. If so, what did it feel like? What did you learn? How did it affect your perception of our traditional notion of reality?
- Does it inspire you to transcend everyday reality?
- Do you believe that we live in what some refer to as "base" reality? In other words, is reality as you, or we, perceive it true?



The Cocktail Party Test

"The great solution to all human problems is individual inner transformation."

Vernon Howard, Author

If you find yourself struggling a bit to find something you're passionate about or just want to try a little hack to help find a subject to write about, try this little test.

You're at a cocktail party. You don't know anyone. You're having a miserable time. As each grueling second passes, you plot your exit. Before you can make your escape, two people drift nearby. They're talking about something intense and you can't help but eavesdrop. The conversation's getting heated and you overhear something that gets your blood pumping. You're tracking every point each person makes like you're watching a tennis match. Some things you passionately agree with, some make you angry. You know this subject well and have to fight the urge to join the conversation.

What are they talking about?

Wrap Up:

Ideally you've found things that inspire you to write. Again, each thing that gave you a jolt, or even a tiny spark, is a path to a story. These paths may lead to stories about family, romance, work, politics, religion, your childhood, that thing that happened to you that you never shared with anyone. Whatever it is, you feel it and suspect that telling a story inspired by it would be authentic.

Take your time reflecting on each section. Journal about the issues that move you. Go for long walks and contemplate their impact, meaning, how they've affected the course of your life, your outlook on the world. And remember, *The Self-Elicitation Guide* is a "living" document that will grow and change with you as you revisit it over the years. Someone who never cared about romance novels may be overcome with the urge to write one after falling suddenly and madly in love.



The key thing here is that everything starts with you. We'll discuss again in the principle **Respect your worth**. But for now the point is that we live in difficult times for writers, when everyone else is telling stories. It can make you feel like you're just one of billions. Though we don't want to veer into self-help here the truth is if you don't place a high value on yourself, and the stories you tell, your work will suffer and you'll have no fun writing.

To give you a shot of inspiration there is an idea in Judaism that the value of one person is equal to the value of *all* people. When you think about everything that goes on inside you -- your creative ideas, thoughts, feelings, memories and all the good you do for others, you can better appreciate the ancient wisdom of valuing one life as equal to that of all lives. It's not arrogant or egotistical to consider that one life is your life. When you write with this mindset it dignifies your process and is very likely to improve the quality of your work.