

# The Webscout

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## Does writing make you healthier?

I approached the theme of this issue by simply entering the term 'health writing' into a Google search. I expected to receive a bundle of pages dealing with writing for health magazines, wellness, and sports. And indeed, I got some of those, together with websites of freelancers calling themselves 'health writers'. I also stumbled across interesting medical writing resources, one of which I'd like to share with you:

<http://www.healthwriterhub.com/>

This is an online community for health and medical writers. It offers a lot of content on topics like becoming a successful health writer, starting a career in health writing, and freelancing.

All this stuff I received from the Google search seemed quite helpful and attracted my attention to a great extent. But what then hit me when I looked through the search results was an article from the Huffington Post titled '6 unexpected ways writing can transform your health':

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/12/writing-health-benefits-journal\\_n\\_4242456.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/12/writing-health-benefits-journal_n_4242456.html).

It was about how writing by hand can help you learn things more easily, how writing about your emotions may speed healing and can change your perception of and attitude to your life. I thought this was an excellent reinterpretation of the theme of this issue – health writing in the sense of what writing can do for your health. This perfectly fitted my recently developed interest in psychology. So I went further on with this search.

James Pennebaker is one of the leading scientists in the area of words and psychology. This is his webpage:

<http://homepage.psy.utexas.edu/HomePage/Faculty/Pennebaker/Home2000/JWPhome.htm>.

I came across his name very often during my search. In the scientific literature, the term 'expressive writing' means writing about traumatic or stressful events. It is supposed to help coping with mental and physical injuries. A review article

<http://apt.rcpsych.org/content/11/5/338.full>

summarises evidence on this topic. For some medical conditions, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, chronic pain, or sleep disorders, you can easily imagine that expressing your emotions might help you to adapt to your condition and to change the way you feel. I would not expect it to positively influence lung function in asthma or immune responses in HIV infections. But according to the article, it does. This is amazing. The article also evaluates some of the hypotheses on the underlying mechanisms. Expressive writing is thought to increase cognitive processing and can be used as a therapeutic tool.

But what about writing about your innermost thoughts and sharing them on social media? This might be a bad idea you might think? Well, there obviously is a lot of concern about it. But some research shows that it might be beneficial. Online expressive writing can be helpful; it can even create a feeling of support. In one study

[http://construct.haifa.ac.il/~azy/Boniel-Nissim&Barak\\_2013.pdf](http://construct.haifa.ac.il/~azy/Boniel-Nissim&Barak_2013.pdf)

participants blogged about their distress, and they benefitted from it. And when the blog was open for responses, their benefit was even greater. Although this should not lead you to frankly putting your innermost thoughts on every social media channel imaginable. But maybe 'journaling' – keeping a diary and writing about your thoughts and emotions

<http://stress.about.com/od/generaltechniques/p/profilejournal.htm>

– is something you will now consider? You might want to use it to gain self-knowledge or to analyse problems and find suitable solutions more easily.

Did this Webscout section help you or do you have any questions or suggestions? Please feel free to get in touch and share your thoughts.

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