



Using Writing to Explore Depression in Older Adulthood

Depression can occur at any stage of life, including later years when older adults face changes in relationships, capacities, identity, living situations, and other aspects of life. Personal writing can facilitate exploration of depression in three ways:

1. It offers a means to explore and express the experience of depression.
2. Group settings, like this workshop, encourage sharing and discussion.
3. Convenor Professor Richard Freadman will provide tips to improve writing skills.

The workshops will focus on memoir-style “life writing”, that is, factual, personal accounts rather than fiction.

Richard Freadman, a writer and an expert in ‘life-writing’, is Emeritus Professor of English at La Trobe University, and Adjunct Professor specialising in life-writing in healthcare settings at the Swinburne Wellbeing Clinic for Older adults.

Skills required

You do not need to have done this sort of writing before, and your level of education does not matter. You will need to be able to use a computer, or to have someone (say a family member, friend or professional carer) help you use one.



Attendance

Applicants should aim to attend all seven workshops, but if illness or other issues cause absences, Prof. Freadman will help participants catch up.

Cost: Free of charge

Dates: 24 September – 5 November

Time: Wednesdays 10:30am

Program details

The workshop program will comprise **7 x 90-minute weekly sessions online via Zoom**. Each participant will be invited to write one piece during the workshop series and to read it to the group for discussion. Session one will be a 'meet & greet' and an outline of what's to come. The workshop will be limited to six participants.

Despite our topic, these writing workshops aim to be enjoyable and will mainly be about expressing and sharing the experience of depression, but also:

- Enjoyment of being creative.
- Enjoyment in sharing.
- Enjoyment of better understanding your feelings and responses.
- Relief of getting stuff ‘off your chest’.

Is the group a good fit for you?

The group will include individuals living in Australia, aged 55 or older, who have experienced depression for at least three months and are willing to talk and write about it. The group would best suit those who are not currently experiencing severe symptoms of depression. Do you think that this profile describes you?

Since you may be wondering what 'Life-writing' about depression looks like in practice, the following page has some of the many possible topics that participants might consider writing about:

- Sometimes we speak of 're-scripting our lives': Try writing your personal history in ways that give more emphasis to positive experiences – for instance, achievements, moral behaviour, fulfilling relations with others – than your usual 'story of self' allows for.
 - Think of your experiences as resembling a painter's palette, and try writing various shades and colours of emotion that you've experienced, for instance, dark, bright, neutral, loud, quiet, clashing, anxious etc.
 - Try writing about yourself through the eyes of someone whom you believe really cares about you, perhaps seeing their belief in you as grounds for increased self-esteem and self-forgiveness on your part.
 - We speak of the 'light at the end of the tunnel': if you see such a light, describe what positives it represents; if you don't see one, use your imagination to invent one and describe its positives to the group.
 - Write about the experience of psychological pain, whether of depression, anxiety or both, and describe any effective ways you have found to deal with it – perhaps including writing.
 - We speak of 'going back to the well': apply this to your own life; go back to a time when you were really thriving, 'at the top of your game'. Describe how that felt and what you were doing back then.
 - If you tend to ruminate (unproductive focus on nagging negative thoughts), think back to a moment of unworried calm you experienced, and describe it in some detail.
 - Describe a place or an object which is particularly meaningful to you.
- What impact do you feel that specific aspects of your identity – gender, parenting, professional or class background, sexual orientation, ethnic background – have had on your experience of depression and/or anxiety?
 - Write about the ways in which your current age and stage of life contribute to your depression and/or anxiety.

To find out more about this workshop or to discuss the writing topics, please email Prof. Freadman at r.freadman@latrobe.edu.au, or phone him on 0411332365.

