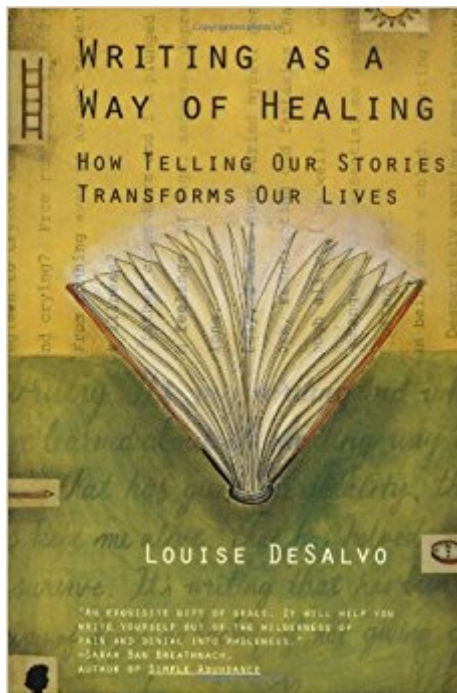


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# Writing As A Way Of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives



## Synopsis

In this inspiring book, based on her twenty years of research, highly acclaimed author and teacher Louise DeSalvo reveals the healing power of writing. DeSalvo shows how anyone can use writing as a way to heal the emotional and physical wounds that are an inevitable part of life. Contrary to what most self-help books claim, just writing won't help you; in fact, there's abundant evidence that the wrong kind of writing can be damaging. DeSalvo's program is based on the best available and most recent scientific studies about the efficacy of using writing as a restorative tool. With insight and wit, she illuminates how writers, from Virginia Woolf to Henry Miller to Audre Lorde to Isabel Allende, have been transformed by the writing process. *Writing as a Way of Healing* includes valuable advice and practical techniques to guide and inspire both experienced and beginning writers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A professor of creative writing at Hunter College and a frequent guest on National Public Radio, DeSalvo (*Vertigo: A Memoir*, LJ 7/96) brings 20 years of writing experience to this work. She recommends writing in spare moments, uncensored, and asks her students to write five pages per week. She advises writing every detail as a reporter to move beyond a trauma. Writing links feelings of pain, grief, and loss to an event and speeds healing. DeSalvo presents seven stages of writing, from preparation/germination to completion/going public. She suggests writing a process journal so the work flows smoothly and warns against self-sabotage in the form of missed deadlines and last-minute scrambling. When the writing is completed, sharing stories in a group with other

empathetic writers will sharpen the narrative. DeSalvos work is similar to Julia Camerons *The Right To Write* (LJ 1/99), though more academic. Camerons work is recommended for public libraries, while DeSalvos is better for higher-level writing classes. Lisa S. Wise, Broome Cty. P.L., Binghamton, NY Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

How writing can be used to recover from trauma and as a tool for personal growth: encouragement and suggestions from a professor of literature and creative writing. DeSalvo (Hunter Coll.) is working here from her own experience: a tumultuous childhood, the loss of her mother and sister in adulthood, and severe health problems left her in turmoil that began to calm when she wrote about her experiences (*Vertigo: A Memoir*, 1996). Years of seeing her students find similar succor has further convinced her of the special value writing holds as a therapeutic tool. It's cheap, doesn't take much time, is self-initiated and flexible, can be private (or public), is easily portable, can be done in sickness or in health; "writing to heal requires no innate talent, though we become more skilled as we write, especially when we pay careful attention to the process." DeSalvo is careful to caution throughout, however, that writing mustn't become a substitute for medical care. DeSalvo refers extensively to James W. Pennebaker's *Opening Up*; he and colleagues studied in depth the relationship between writing about difficult feelings and improving health, and then specifically what kind of writing led to healing after traumatic experiences. DeSalvo especially cites Virginia Woolf, Isabel Allende, and Alice Walker as practitioners of therapeutic writing. She argues strongly that writing "is a very sturdy ladder out of the Pit to reach freedom and safety." Her guide is a reasonable starting point for those who hope she's right. -- Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I have found this book to be a treasure and a turning point in my writing career. It's a book to inspire you but also to help you plan your work at every stage and to look after yourself during work on difficult projects. It does not shy away from dealing with the emotional cost some writing exacts from us: it gives you ways, trustworthy ways, to look after yourself during, and after, writing -- ways to protect, look after and care for ourselves while we write or deal with our own "charged emotional material". The book is well structured in its content. For example Part 2 takes the writer deep into the writing process, identifying six or seven stages in the writing process that help the writer read the signals of intuition and inspiration at the start of the project, and also to read in the work itself as it nears completion. This staging process she outlines helps the writer to know how to push on into

the next stages of the writing process -- on into the stages of deepening, of shaping and re-visioning and of actually completing the project -- stages which are too often skipped (e.g. when a work is rushed to completion, or abandoned before it finds its final form). This section I found particularly helpful. The author draws on her own research, but she also cites a wide range of authors, famous and lesser known, and mixes their short snippets of wisdom with her own. This is definitely not a self-help book: it's a resource for life. Sarah Ban Breathnach, the author of *Simple Abundance*, says of this book that it is "an exquisite gift of grace ...that will help you write yourself out of the wilderness of pain ... into wholeness" and I truly believe this to be so.

I loaned my copy to a friend and he kept it so long and spoke of its impact so often, that I bought him a new one so my original copy could come home. It had a tremendous impact on me when I was struggling to write about a very terrifying event. I appreciated particularly the advice about self-care and a slow pace for any difficult writing. It is helpful too for fiction writers who are discovering how the metaphors of fiction still serve to heal.

I clung to this book during an excruciating phase in life - you know that time when we weep, and wail and become absolutely impervious to reasoning in our anguish. Oh how grateful I am to Ms DeSalvo for this gem of wholesome comfort and deft guidance. It did actually get me to write. When it comes to writing, I do procrastinate, I lose what I write often and I don't feel comfortable sharing what I write either. All that changed and I began writing and reading out to my beloved friend and godmother :) Our conversations morphed from me exhausting her in her attempt to comfort me to beautiful, enlightening and memorable exchanges. I gifted her a copy on mother's day and another to a neighbor in Chicago (when we lived there) who also happens to be a published writer. She also loves and cherishes this book. It traveled with me to so many cities over the course of several months as I battled this tough phase. This gem will stay very close to my heart, that is how profoundly I have been impacted by it.

Louise DeSalvo takes a topic many of us think we know everything about and tells us something new. Reminding us that "telling our stories transforms our lives," she gives us specific examples of people who did just that. By allowing ourselves to tell the whole truth of our experiences and their emotional impact, we arrive at a new view of our life and its meaning. I especially liked her dos and don'ts on page 26-27. I also appreciated her counsel about ways to take care of oneself while dredging up old hurts and painful experiences, seeing our strengths along the way. Every page

shows her sensitivity, consideration, and wisdom in guiding us to heal ourselves. Journal entries provide the seeds for other writing as well as helping us to come to terms with our past. Well done! ~Joan Mazza, author of DREAM BACK YOUR LIFE: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO DREAMS, DAYDREAMS AND FANTASIES and DREAMING YOUR REAL SELF: A PERSONAL APPROACH TO DREAM INTERPRETATION.

This book by Louise DeSalvo is tells us how we can use writing to heal from personal tragedies and traumas. I learned from this book how many best selling authors have begun to write to ease their own pain. I know I have healed myself throughout my life by writing out my pain, my grief, my angst, This book reinforces my ideas that we can all benefit from writing or telling our stories.

I found this book very helpful, as the title suggests. It is grounded in the experiences of real writers. I am reading certain passages more than once, as I try to internalize what I'm learning from it.

I really love his book. There was so many nuggets in here. I have been researching using writing as a tool for healing for my business and gained a ton of insight and tips and also received confirmation from things that I was already doing, letting me know i was on the right page. This will definitely be my go to book on this subject. Great resource!

Despite being a writer, it's so hard expressing the extent to which this book has touched my soul. I came to it desperately in need of guidance, already knowing DeSalvo's reputation as a Woolf critic I've greatly admired. I knew her book would be useful. I had no idea it would be life-changing. This is one of the most influential books on my life I've ever read, and it may even be the most influential on me. I've never found any book on this topic to truly cut to the heart of what it is to need to find healing, much less a book with as much practical advice as this one. DeSalvo doesn't spew platitudes and feel good metaphor. She presents empathetic real advice on how to free yourself from the horrors of the past. I hope to meet Louise DeSalvo one day and thank her for this book. It's touched me to the core.

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