

Script Journaling: A Systematic Method to Reveal Your Delusional Mental Movie

Created by Tom Asacker - As found on <https://tinyurl.com/mvsm9fna>

Script journaling is a method of self-inquiry—examination of thoughts and thinking processes—based on the core philosophies in this program. The fundamental idea is that human cognition, emotion and behavior—our default programming—can be explained within a narrative paradigm. And the most powerful narrative framework is a protagonist striving to overcome obstacles. This journaling method casts you as that protagonist, the central character in the hypnotic “movie of you.”

Traditional, free-flowing journaling is promoted as a self-awareness and self-improvement tool. The idea is to write about your daily activities, feelings and problems, and through that process improve the quality of your thinking and ultimately achieve your goals. This conventional approach often reinforces one’s largely unconscious, self-concerned, and extrinsically-motivated narrative. And as such, you may find yourself being drawn deeper into your drama and becoming even more fascinated by it. And this may cause psychological distress for people who spend a lot of time ruminating about their lives.

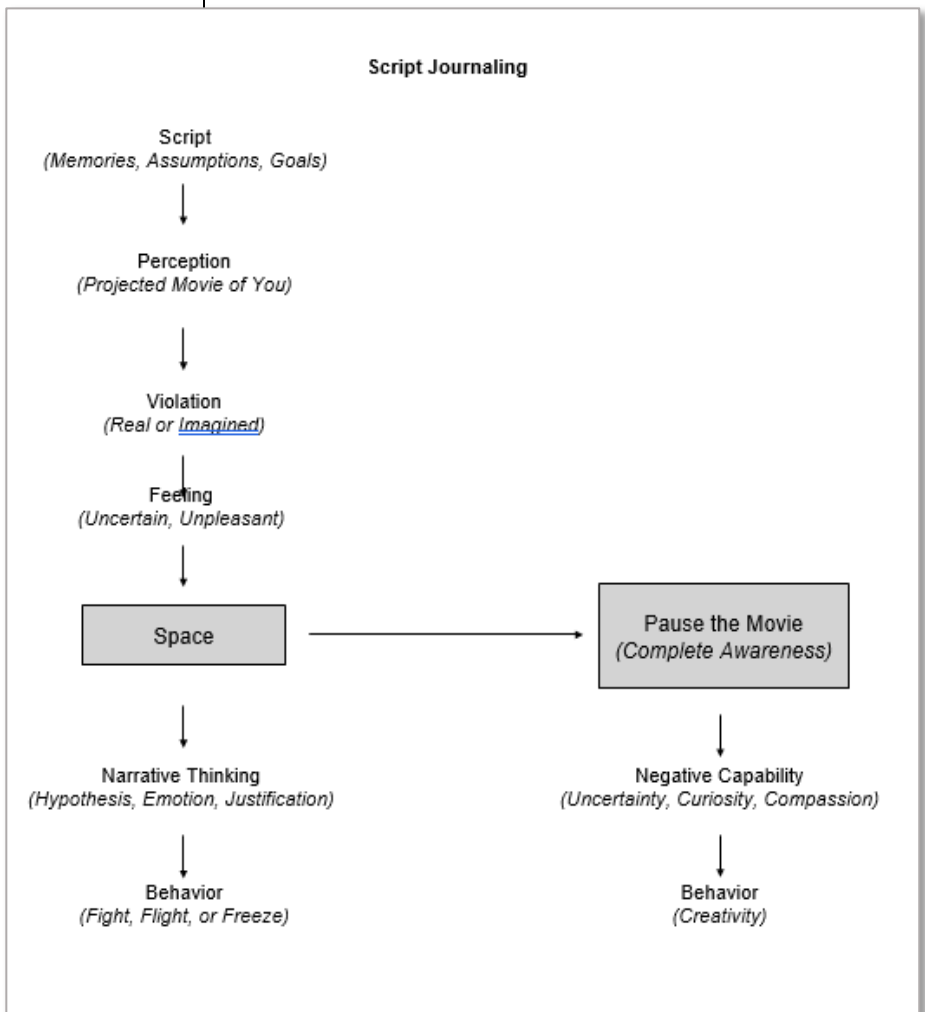
By contrast, script journaling is a systematic approach of narrative inquiry designed to help you create a different relationship with your feelings and thoughts. The point is not to deconstruct and solve particular problems, but rather to outline them, explore their context, and reveal your story-creating mind in action. And through that process of seeing yourself act in your self-created movie, to eventually free you to step out of that paradigm and live a dynamic, compassionate, and authentic life.

The Model

The following flow chart is a representation of the progressive, hypnotic process of narrative cognition and an explanation of each step. The left side of the chart illustrates the automatic, default process, while the right side shows what happens when you pause your mental movie, observe yourself, and dispassionately contemplate your feelings, thoughts and actions.

For the purposes of this particular journaling exercise, we will only be addressing the left side, or default process. In addition, to keep it simple and make the process easier to recount, we’ll be focusing exclusively on script violations. There are many experiences and thoughts that serve to validate your script and reinforce your beliefs, motivating you to remain in your hypnotic self-story. However, to pull the curtain all the way back this early in the program may be more of a hindrance than help.

This “belief formation” process is outlined in my book, “*The Business of Belief*.”



Script

Your script is your self-reinforcing narrative, which has been wired into the neural architecture of your brain through past experiences. Your various assumptions, internalized since childhood—about who you are, right and wrong, good and bad, success and failure—along with your fundamental goal to escape uncomfortable sensations, motivated your actions and reactions with the world. This trial and error, experiential feedback—by and large an unconscious process—was stored as memories, and those memories along with your present goals are now your script.

Perception

Your perception is your projection of that script, of the “movie of you,” onto the world. Your senses take in the chaotic information of the dynamic world, and your brain filters it and makes sense of it based on what is personally coherent and relevant. It then reveals that meaning (or story) to you on a three-dimensional screen that you call “reality.” It’s as if your brain is projecting the “movie of you” out of your eyes.

Imagine that you are the lead character walking onto the live set of “the movie of you.” What you perceive on that set is where you direct your attention and energy, based on your unconscious script. It’s what you should do and the way things ought to be for your movie to play out as predetermined (and expected) in a characteristically consistent and coherent manner and without any interruptions.

Violation

A violation is any “projection” that is in conflict with the unconscious script of the “movie of you.” It’s any happening in the world that is not playing out exactly how your movie-making mind unconsciously “sees it.” It can be something that jars you, confuses you, creates doubt or slows you down—a comment or action by an individual, or even something that you imagine happening to you or that you spontaneously see yourself saying or doing.

One thing to note, and this is very important: Wanting your movie to play out exactly as it has been scripted seems to imply that you consciously desire it to be logical, good or moral. In fact, what you really want is for it to feel “right,” to remain predictable and uninterrupted—consistent and coherent—based on who you think you are and how you unconsciously believe the movie should evolve. Because every time the scene goes off script and you pause the movie of you, your director becomes uncertain and hijacks your nervous system by yelling, “Cut!” You’ll then be challenged, and in a threatening manner, by the fact that nothing is happening in the movie of you, and you’ll feel compelled to get it back on track and get the cameras

rolling again. This is due to the imagined and unconscious “fact” that if your audience turns you off, your show is over. It’s equivalent, in your mind, to death.

Feeling

This is an uncomfortable bodily sensation, an arousal that is stimulated by uncertainty... by hearing “Cut!” Since your safety and survival is predicated on making accurate predictions and keeping your live movie streaming without interruption, any projection that challenges your script, or causes it to pause, will be viewed as a threat. You won’t be journaling this feeling, since it’s pretty much the same unpleasant sensation with each violation, albeit to various degrees.

Space

This space is the period between that initial feeling of uncertainty and your subsequent emotional response. It’s the space referred to in this passage, which is often attributed to Viktor Frankl:

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

In the beginning of this process, this space will appear to be nonexistent. You’ll feel that your emotions spontaneously arise, rather than being a subsequent creation of your own storytelling mind. It’s like an image hidden in an optical illusion. Even though you know it’s there, you simply can not see it. But, if you can recognize that it is an illusion, you can then work to bring it into focus. And as you’ll eventually discover, the recognition of that “space”—noticing it for what it is—will give you the freedom to become your true self and to choose the best responses.

Narrative Thinking

Narrative thinking is a self-referential approach to a feeling of uncertainty (script violations), based on the creation of hypothetical, cause-and-effect stories. Your mind rapidly forms a hypothesis to explain the uncomfortable feeling of “Cut!,” typically framing the identified “cause” as your antagonist. The “effect” of that cognitive prediction and meaning-making is an identity-driven emotion and judgement (a story).

Behavior

Once you create and justify that identity-driven emotion, it motivates a fight, flight or freeze response. Your immediate goals are to validate your coherent role in your mental movie; remove or suppress the interruption; and quickly return to the flow of your script. In general, the result of this automatic, unconscious process is intolerance, inner and outer conflict, and wasted energy and potential.

The Journaling Process

The script journaling process is fairly simple and straightforward. Your objective is to use your daily emotional reaction to, and judgement of, various situations and thoughts as the starting point for reflection. As an example, let's look at the popular tale, "The Fox and the Grapes."

In Aesop's fable, a fox spied a bunch of ripe, juicy grapes hanging from a vine high on a tree branch, and so he had to jump for it. He tried again and again, but kept coming up short. Finally, he sat down and rationalized that he was being a fool, since the grapes were sour anyway. He walked away in disgust.

Okay, if the fox was keeping a Script Journal (and could hold a pen), it might look something like this:

Fox and the Grapes

Thursday, March 7th: I got pissed off at a bunch of grapes.

Script

I was on my way home to relax in the den, when I suddenly came upon some grapes hanging from a vine. I was really hungry and I wanted those delicious grapes (my memory, assumption and goal).

Perception

They were just hanging there, speaking to me.

Violation

I'm a good fox and I was entitled to those grapes. They should have been gettable.

Narrative Thinking

My hypothesis was that the grapes were my problem. They made me angry, because I couldn't reach them. It didn't make sense. I'm a worthy fox, and I'm also one of the best jumping omnivores around. So I demonized those damn sour grapes.

Behavior

Flight. I walked away, pissed off.

Now this analysis may sound comical, but I can assure you that most of your narrative thinking and behaviors are about on par.

Here are a few real-life examples (we've changed the names to protect the deluded):

Bob and the Attractive Woman

Bob is wandering through the gym when he notices an attractive woman. She has just finished an aerobics class and is packing up and preparing to leave. Being single and desiring female companionship, Bob considers walking over and saying hello. Instead, he quickly talks himself out of it and walks away disappointed.

Wednesday, June 7th: I was afraid to say "hello."

Script

I was intrigued by a beautiful woman at the gym and I wanted to meet her (my goal).

Perception

She was alone, so it should have been easy for me to simply walk up and say hi.

Violation

I could actually see the entire situation play out before my eyes, with my director yelling, "Cut!" Because in the movie of me, I get rejected by beautiful women.

Narrative Thinking

My hypothesis was that she was my problem. First, she probably knew how attractive she was and was therefore, pretty much, full of herself. And even if she wasn't, based on the attributes of "me" as the lead character in my movie, she was totally out of my league, outside of my story. So why waste time with her and suffer the consequences?

Behavior

I froze. I just stood there, the inferior man that I am, and watched her leave. And I deserved it.

Matt and the Dirty Dishes

Matt pulls into his garage after a long, stressful day at work. He walks into the kitchen and notices a few unwashed dishes in the sink. He immediately feels disrespected. His wife and young son walk into the kitchen to welcome him, and they are greeted with anger and condemnation.

Monday, May 9th: A few dirty dishes ruined my evening with my family.

Script

I grew up in a poor family, where my father struggled to support us and my mother kept a pristine home. I work very hard to give my wife a beautiful life, and I just want to come home to a clean home (my memory, assumption and goal).

Perception

All I could see when I walked through the door were those dirty dishes. It was not the way things are supposed to be.

Violation

In the movie of me, I walk into a clean and tidy home.

Narrative Thinking

My hypothesis was that she was my problem. She was definitely wrong and I felt irritated by her lack of consideration and respect. Despite the sacrifices I make for my family, and the fact that I've expressed my desires and disappointments on various occasions, she simply doesn't care enough to make the effort.

Behavior:

I fought. I pointed out that it clearly doesn't matter to her that I am not appreciated.

Conclusion:

Each of us has a "movie" running continuously in our head, in which we play the lead role. Everything in that movie is concerned with what we do, what we have done, what we think we will do, what we would like to do, why we don't do what we like to do, what people around us do, what we think people around us are supposed to do, and what we think people around us expect us to do.

This journaling model represents the general mechanics of your mind within that narrative paradigm. The core idea is that becoming aware of the "movie of you" can help you systematically improve your relationship with reality. But it takes time. You need to examine your thinking and experiment with it in real life in order to uproot old mental patterns. This literally means that the next time that you are in an unpleasant situation, you must try to view that situation through this narrative lens.

This is not easy and it will take practice, but it is made doable by understanding the model and using it to journal. In addition, it should become more revealing and useful over time, since you will have deconstructed many similar experiences. You will therefore be more likely to recognize situations in which you become lost in your mental movie.

One final note: many people have asked about "the space" between the unpleasant feeling of uncertainty (the perceived threat), and the subsequent thinking process that generates self-reflective stories and emotions. Specifically, how it can be overcome.

First, you must recognize, and accept, that you will never eliminate that uncomfortable bodily sensation. Awareness of potential threats in your environment is necessary for physical survival. For example, if someone unexpectedly jumps out at you in a dark alley, your survival instinct—that bodily response—will automatically kick in to protect you. All animals are wired in that way, which is what has allowed them, evolutionarily, to survive.

That said, animals do not interpret that feeling as an attack on their identity, and then spin thoughts that manifest in traumatic stories, emotions and behaviors. Animals don't personalize their experiences. They deal with the perceived threat and then, literally, "shake off" the physiological response to discharge the energy of the happening.

And that's the intention of this process as well. To use the triggered feeling as a cue to stop, observe and interrogate what's happening in your mind. And then, if there is no actual physical threat, to learn from it, shake it off and dance with the happening. So adopt a curious mindset, use the framework to experiment and discover its effects on your emotional state and behavior, and see what happens.

For more information on this idea, check out Tom's small but powerful book:

YOUR BRAIN ON STORY

The Destructive Seduction of the Hero's Journey

In a simple, yet paradoxically profound way, *Your Brain on Story* charts a path toward a life without dispiriting illusions and delusions. It transports readers to a coffee shop where a fascinating conversation between friends illuminates how to escape your limiting self-story and create an exciting life in harmony with your innermost desires and values.

Provocative and engrossing, *Your Brain on Story* reveals how to transform your relationship with yourself and the world and do what you really want to do with your life. You'll discover why:

- Certainty is the killer of curiosity
- Comparison is the killer of compassion
- Comfort is the killer of creativity