

50 Journal Prompts to Power Your Daily Practice

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[For a complete picture of how to start and maintain a solid daily practice, please get your hands on [The Power of Daily Practice](#).]

THE FAQS OF DAILY PRACTICE

Q. What is a daily practice?

A. A daily practice is the formal way that you pay daily attention to something that is important to you. You can have more than one daily practice, if several things are important to you, say writing your novel, maintaining your recovery from an alcohol addiction, and practicing yoga. It is a time carved out from the day where you pay real attention, it has a beginning and an end, and it is characterized by certain specific elements of practice.

Q. Well, then, isn't a daily practice the same as "writing every day" or "meditating every day"?

A. Not exactly, though if you are writing every day or meditating every day you probably do have a daily practice in place. But "daily practice" is a different sort of idea and a different sort of thing. Daily practice is time you carve out independent of what you do with that time. It is the very idea of carving out time. It could have any sort of content, anything you find important. It is like having a drawer in your dresser that you dedicate to your important things and that always contains something worth keeping separate. What's in the drawer may change but you don't put junk in it. Maybe it's even empty sometimes. But it's still separate from all the other drawers, special, if you like that word, or sacred, if you like that word.

Q. But doesn't that mean that the content of a daily practice might change every day? Where's the consistency or power in that?

A. No, because this isn't like changing hats or changing your mind. While theoretically the content could change frequently or daily, in practice it won't. Your intention is to pursue something important, namely living your life purposes, and while your life purposes may and do change, they do not change daily. If one of your life purposes is to get your novel written, that life purpose doesn't change daily. If one of your life purposes is maintain recovery from an alcohol addiction, that life purpose doesn't change daily. If one of your life purposes is to defend

liberty, that life purpose doesn't change daily. So, you will not be constantly changing the content of your practice. You will be working on that novel month in and month out, paying attention to your recovery month in and month out, or being an activist in support of liberty month in and month out. That's where the power and consistency come from, from your intention to live your life purposes.

Q. How long is a daily practice?

A. Any length under the sun. It might be as short as a certain breathing-and-thinking centering sequence that takes half-a-minute. It might be hours of writing or hours of piano practice. It could be three different daily practices of differing lengths. It could even be all of the time, if you live your life that intentionally and mindfully. Your life could be a series of daily practices, which would functionally mean that you were living your life purposes all the time.

Q. What exactly am I doing during my daily practice?

A. That is as varied and various as the things that human beings can do. You might sit there writing your novel. You might practice your musical instrument. You might visualize forgiving an enemy or practice loving kindness. You might do the chores associated with building your business. You might practice contentment through ritual and ceremony. You might go on an inner journey. You might go out every day and visit your elderly aunt. You might meditate or do yoga or tai-chi. You might engage in an hour of political activism. It might take two minutes or two hours. Whatever you deem important can be translated into a daily practice.

Q. Do I have to do it at home, in private?

A. Absolutely not. In fact, you might construct a daily practice that must be done out in the world, for example a personality upgrade practice that requires that you manifest your new personality in the world, in real time. Maybe your daily practice is to devote your lunch break to really relaxing, or to be of service at an emergency nursery, or to perform folk songs in a neighborhood park. Your daily practice can happen anywhere.

Q. Is a daily practice always about doing something?

A. That depends on whether or not you consider being calm, being content, being passionate, or being anything "doing" or "being." If your daily practice centers around

sending loving kindness energy into the world or practicing forgiveness, is that about “doing”? In whatever way that you hold the distinction between “doing” and “being,” your daily practice certainly need not be only about “doing” in the sense of running a mile, writing a thousand words, or making ten business calls.

Q. Is a daily practice more about repeating something, more about getting good at something, or more about making progress?

A. That will depend on your particular practice, your particular intentions, and your particular goals (including the goal of not having a goal). For example, your relationship-building practice, where you visit your elderly aunt every afternoon, may not be the sort of practice where your intention is to “get good at it” or “make progress with it.” Your evening practice, however, when you work on your screenplay for an hour, may well have built into it the hope that your screenplay moves forward. In both instances, the core concept is showing up.

Q. Is daily practice connected to Buddhism or to any other spiritual or religious practice?

A. No. It connects to the philosophy of life I’ve developed over the years that I’ve dubbed kirisim, but it is completely independent of any spiritual or religious practice and independent of kirism as well. It is a stand-alone beneficial practice. As an analogy, some philosophical, spiritual or religious tradition might make the demand that you meditate daily. But deciding to meditate daily is separate and distinct from that demand and, being your decision, would be up to you to devise, design, and execute.

Q. Should every day’s practice be identical in terms of time spent on it?

A. No. One day you might spend twenty minutes writing your novel. Another day you might spend four hours. One day you might attend an AA meeting far from your home, which takes you three hours roundtrip. Another day you might attend a nearby meeting and be home in an hour. One day you might do your full meditation practice or your full yoga practice and another day you might do a shortened version, either because of time constraints or because the shortened version feels right. For consistency sake and to keep the bar high, you might demand of yourself that you spend the same amount of time every day on your practice, but that is nothing like a requirement.

Q. Does it always happen exactly once a day or at exactly the same time each day?

A. No and no. It might; and there might be good reasons for it happening those ways. But, except for the great value of creating a sturdy habit by arriving at your practice the same time each day, there is no particular reason why, for example, you can’t write once

on Monday, three times on Tuesday, twice on Wednesday, and so on; or write at 6 a.m. on Monday and 9 p.m. on Thursday. It can prove harder to maintain a daily practice if you don't anchor it to a particular daily time, but if it works for you to vary its timing and to vary how many times a day that you engage in it, then that's what serves you.

Q. Is there a “model practice”?

A. No. There is no model practice and there can be no model practice. To present one would be to present dogma, whether it's dogma about sitting versus standing, an hour versus a minute, indoors versus outdoors, and so on. I can easily describe my daily writing practice but that ought to mean nothing in particular to you. What if I wrote for ten minutes or for ten hours? What if I started it with a ceremonial cup of tea or a war cry? All of that might be interesting to hear but nothing like a model. There is no single model to mimic or to emulate.

Q. Why bother creating a daily practice?

A. The reason to bother is that life is difficult. No one faces just one challenge or just the occasional challenge. We all face multiple challenges, from maintaining our health to maintaining our emotional wellbeing to getting our creative projects done to our satisfaction to making enough money to figuring out how to relax. Each challenge we face can be partially met and maybe best met by a daily practice that pays attention to exactly that challenge. Build your daily practice(s) and see!

Use the following thought-and-quote pairs to deepen your experience of daily practice and your understanding of daily practice. Use each pair as a journal prompt to help you hold daily conversations with yourself about the importance of daily practice and the quality of your daily practice. Remember, this worthwhile journaling is not a substitute for your daily practice! It is complementary and supportive, not a substitute. Make sure not to use journaling about your daily practice as a way to avoid your daily practice!

Please enjoy the following pairs. They will take you to deep and interesting places.

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1.

A daily practice may sound like too much regimentation. In fact, it is the path to freedom.

“Freedom is not given to us by anyone; we have to cultivate it ourselves. It is a daily practice.”—THICH NHAT HANH

2.

Daily practice is the path to freedom. It is also the path to excellence.

“I know you’ve heard it a thousand times before. But it’s true—hard work pays off. If you want to be good, you have to practice, practice, practice.”—RAY BRADBURY

3.

Maybe you are ordinary in a lot of ways. But you can be extraordinary at your daily practice.

“I’ve always considered myself to be just average talent and what I have is a ridiculous insane obsessiveness for practice and preparation.”—WILL SMITH

4.

Practice is a way to make use of your mind. Mind and practice go together.

“Many roads lead to the path, but basically there are only two: reason and practice.”—BODHIDHARMA

5.

What will you practice? That which you want to accomplish.

“Why should I practice running slow? I already know how to run slow. I want to learn to run fast.”—EMIL ZATOPEK

6.

You could wait to begin your daily practice until you are the exact right person to practice and perfectly equal to practicing. Or you could just begin.

“Meditation practice is not about later, when you get it all together and you’re this person you really respect.”—PEMA CHODRON

7.

Simple doesn’t mean static. Simple doesn’t mean doing exactly the same thing each day. Simple means doing the thing appropriate to that day’s practice.

“I find it’s only when something is trying to come through that I really practice. And then, I don’t know how many hours I spend. It could be all day.”—JOHN COLTRANE

8.

You can run a quarter mile but not a mile? Then run a quarter mile. And run another quarter mile. And run another quarter mile. And run another quarter mile. That's a mile. Simple.

"Do what you can and you'll soon be able to do what you can't."—HUNTER POST

9.

What will you lose if you don't practice regularly? Maybe your voice and your career.

"It happens to the best of them. You lay off singing and your throat gets out of practice. No excuses. I blew it."—BOBBY DARIN

10.

Can a given daily practice no longer serve us? Of course, it can. But until it really no longer serves us, we keep at it. Just not being in the mood or just having lots to do aren't good reasons to miss our regular daily practice.

"We need to learn how to honor and use a practice for as long as it serves us."—JACK KORNFIELD

11.

Not the solemnity of dirges. The solemnity of rivers. The solemnity of sky. The solemnity of wood.

"Here on the river, as I lurch against a freshening of the current, is the practice of rivers. In navigating by the glow of the Milky Way, the practice of light. In steadying with a staff, the practice of wood."—BARRY LOPEZ

12.

One kind of playfulness? Improv! Maybe that's what your practice needs today, some improvisation!

"It sounds obvious, but I wonder how many people, whatever their medium, appreciate the gift of improvisation. It's your one opportunity in life to be completely free, with no responsibilities and no consequences."—TWYLA THARP

13.

The content of your practice needs to be the actual content it needs to be, not some simulation, substitute, or likeness. If your daily practice is writing a novel, you need to write your novel, not read a novel, dream about novels, or do something novel.

"You need mountains; long staircases don't make good hikers."—AMIT KALANTRI

14.

There is no ‘way’ to practice. There is only honesty and intention. Let your practice honestly and intentionally serve your desire to live your life purposes.

“Many Yogis are blindly attentive to their particular system of meditation and forget about the goal, the Self.”—SANTATAGAMANA

15.

You decide. Who else should?

“We are our own greatest teachers. Making a conscious decision to create our day takes some good practice but the end result is worthwhile.”—ANGIE KARAN

16.

You must decide on the contours of your practice. And you must decide to actually practice. You can’t begin to practice without deciding to practice.

“It begins as a decision, then it transforms into a practice and soon it becomes our daily habit.”—NICK CATRICALA

17.

You can spend an intense hour. Or an intense minute. Either way, make it intense!

“I made the valuable discovery that practicing wasn’t a matter of time at all. It was a matter of intensity. Five minutes spent working consciously and hard at the elimination of an error was worth five hours just playing away and ignoring errors as if they hadn’t happened.”—LEONARD WIBBERLY

18.

Got that scent in your nostrils? Go for it!

“I’m gonna go put my earplugs in and practice the piano for hours until my fingers bleed. Nothing can distract me from the scent of the music.”—KAREN QUAN

19.

You practice with intensity. And you also practice with lightness. This isn’t a paradox but a dance.

“The brush must draw by itself. This cannot happen if one does not practice constantly. But neither can it happen if one makes an effort.”—ALAN WILSON WATTS

20.

That isn't a moment zipping by, rather that is a moment slowed down to the slowest of slow motion by your participation.

"The basis of the practice is to directly participate in each moment as it occurs with as much awareness and understanding as possible."—STEPHEN LEVINE

21.

Kneading the dough? That requires your presence. Cutting the onions? That requires your presence. Whatever your practice is, be present.

"Great cooking is all about the three 'p's: patience, presence, and practice."—MICHAEL POLLAN

22.

You have a ceremony in mind that might support your practice. But you don't really know all the parts of the ceremony, or whether it's exactly right, or whether it's maybe on the silly side? Try it anyway.

"If you wait until you are positive that you understand all aspects of the ceremony before beginning to work, you will never begin to work."—LON MILO DUQUETTE

23.

There can be such joy in paying attention, in living one's life purposes, in doing a beautiful thing, in doing an excellent thing, in contributing, in creating, in being present. But our habit may be to downplay the joy, as if it were unseemly or illicit. Enjoy!

"Enjoy what you are learning and doing. This is one of the hardest concepts in the entire world to understand. Harder yet to put into practice."—CAREW PAPRITZ

24.

When the greats say that it isn't talent, it's practice, should we believe them? There must be a downside to taking them at their word, since we may be running a fool's errand if great talent is required, but mustn't there also be an upside, in case industry really is the main part?

"What I have achieved by industry and practice, anyone else with tolerable natural gift and ability can also achieve."—J. S. BACH

25.

What is devotion? It is something like the ratification of the human spirit, something like wonder and amazement, something like abiding love, and something like hope bobbing merrily in a sea of hopelessness.

“Only one who devotes himself to a cause with his whole strength and soul can be a true master. For this reason, mastery demands all of a person.”—ALBERT EINSTEIN

26.

Repetition of the right sort does something wonderful to the brain. It shapes it in its own best image. Neural pathways start to sparkle, so-to-speak.

“Any neural pathway is built and strengthened through repetitions. This is why practice is so vital.”—BRITT ANDREATTA

27.

But what does ‘repetition’ mean? It might mean playing the same chord over again and again. But it might also mean moving on. What you are repeating is your daily practice, not necessarily the content of the practice.

“You become a great writer by writing lots and lots of stories, not by rewriting the same story over and over again.”—SCOTT WILLIAM CARTER

28.

When you bring your intelligence, your wit, your curiosity, your talent, and your full creative self to the encounter, you are bound to innovate. Practice alone doesn’t lead to innovation: it takes practice plus a hankering for the personal, the new, and the excellent.

“Practice makes perfect, but it doesn’t make new. The gifted learn to play magnificent Mozart melodies and beautiful Beethoven symphonies, but never compose their own original scores.”—ADAM GRANT

29.

Is your daily practice a private one? It could be. But it doesn’t have to be. Practice in public, if that’s what your heart desires. Trust yourself to understand what your practice requires!

“I could never sit in a room and just play all by myself. I needed to play for people and all the time. You can say I practiced in public.”—BOB DYLAN

30.

What are you loving? Maybe the dive!

“I love all men who dive. Any fish can swim near the surface but it takes a great whale to go downstairs five miles or more.”—HERMAN MELVILLE

31.

Or maybe it's the sky you're loving and practicing!

"I love to do skies. It must be the old Greek gods Zeus and Apollo stirring within me."—STEPHEN MANIATTY

32.

Does your daily practice last only a minute or two? Well, all right. Does it last an hour, two hours, three hours? All right then. What matters is that it has its important place in your life. When its time comes, you attend to it fully.

"You are how you spend your time."—IAN ROGERS

33.

Maybe you'll complete your practice once a day. Maybe you'll complete it twenty-one times!

"I do the same series of five exercises twenty-one times each day—an ancient Tibetan practice that stimulates your chakras."—HARRY DEAN STANTON

34.

Inspiration may come. Let's hope so! But perspiration first.

"Trailing behind every successful writer are a million words that never saw the light of day. Sometimes it takes five million words. The most important piece of writing advice anyone can give or get is simple, and therefore can seem uninteresting, but it's true: just keep writing."—CHARLES FINCH

35.

Maybe you are very skillful. Maybe you've practiced thousands of hours. But are you an artist? To be that person, you may need a separate creativity practice, one where the focus is not on the notes but on the music.

"Practice transforms a skill into an art."—SIDDHARTH JOSHI

36.

Recovery is a full-time commitment. Your daily recovery practice supports that commitment. Its benefits spill over into your whole life.

"While you are continuing this practice, week after week, year after year, your experience will become deeper and deeper, and your experience will cover everything you do in your everyday life."—SHUNRYU SUZUKI

37.

That you've identified your life purposes and intend to live them means that you are obliged to act on their behalf. One core action is your daily practice in support of your life purposes.

"Mere philosophy will not satisfy us. We cannot reach the goal by mere words alone. Without practice, nothing can be achieved."—SRI S. SATCHIDANANDA

38.

There are many ways to coax the psychological experience of meaning into existence. One way is to spend some time each and every day doing something likely to feel meaningful.

"My son and daughter lost their father quite young, so we keep him present with us. It's just a daily practice."—PATTI SMITH

39.

Maybe your spiritual practice is wild, magical, and other-worldly. Or maybe is it just ordinary.

"On my journey from the fantastical to the practical, spirituality has gone from being a mystical experience to something very ordinary and a daily experience. For me, it is the daily practice of kindness, mindfulness, happiness, and peace."—ALARIC HUTCHINSON

40.

Put your mind to it. Research proves that mindfulness helps with everything, from your tennis backhand to your high wire act.

"The combination of mental and physical practice leads to greater performance improvement than does physical practice alone, a phenomenon for which our findings provide a physiological explanation."—ALVARO PASCUAL-LEONE

41.

Your health matters. Maybe it is time to start a daily health practice?

"Doctors won't make you healthy. Nutritionists won't make you slim. Gurus won't make you calm. Trainers won't make you fit. Ultimately, you have to take responsibility. Save yourself."—NAVAL RAVIKAN

42.

Maybe you are practicing some state of being, like contentment. Shouldn't that be easier than mastering something really hard, like the cello? No. Why should contentment be easier than the cello? As if contentment were easy to come by!

"Being content is perhaps no less easy than playing the violin well: and requires no less practice."—ALAIN DE BOTTON

43.

The goal of your relationship-building practice isn't perfect relating. It is much better relating.

"Setting the intention to practice kindness toward one's partner or family members or friends does not preclude getting angry or upset."—SHARON SALZBERG

44.

Looking forward to a personality upgrade? Don't you need to be that upgraded person out in the world? Practice it there and you will become it!

"You are what you practice most."—RICHARD CARLSON

45.

Should you read another business book? Or actually spend time every day building your business?

"Starting a business is similar to an athletic endeavor, like serving a tennis ball. Telling you how to do it is useless. You actually get better through a combination of practice, coaching, and repetitions with money on the line."—ANDREW YANG

46.

Many of the tasks required by your business may bore you, irritate you, or make you anxious. But they must be done. A daily practice can help a lot!

"Everybody should do at least two things each day that he hates to do, just for practice."—WILLIAM JAMES

47.

We may not be able to do a lot, but we can do what we can. Every day.

"There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest."—ELIE WIESEL

48.

It may seem hard enough to meet your own challenges. Are you to add on the world's challenges, too? Yes!

"I'm for truth, no matter who tells it. I'm for justice, no matter who it is for or against. I'm a human being, first and foremost, and as such I'm for whoever and whatever benefits humanity as a whole."—MALCOLM X

49.

You want to give a great performance. Maybe you can manage that without practicing. But how likely is that?

“Practice makes performance.”—DIANA GEDYE

50.

Is your warrior practice about defeating dragons and storming castles? Or are you transforming yourself into your best version of yourself?

“He who conquers himself is the mightiest warrior.”—CONFUCIUS

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