

## Readers' letters

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The Guardian, Wednesday 4 September 2002

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I was interested to read the article on the use of writing as a coping mechanism (The art of coping, August 28), particularly as my younger sister died from breast cancer a year ago at the age of 33.

However, writing as a therapeutic tool is not new. In the 18th century, the physician Benjamin Rush asked his patients to record their symptoms and found that writing lowered their tensions. Furthermore, therapeutic writing was used by countless practitioners throughout the 20th century, with some empirical studies showing that writing can decrease negative feelings in almost 50% of people.

Writing for those affected by illness (either directly for the person themselves or indirectly if it affects your loved one) can help in terms of self-growth and personal development, as well as behavioural self-monitoring. The therapeutic value of writing down day-to-day events, thoughts, emotions and actions can also be cathartic. Obviously, "writing therapy" will not work for everybody, but for those of us (for instance) who write detailed daily diaries, it has the capacity to ease psychological pain.

**Prof Mark Griffiths**

Psychology division

Nottingham Trent University Action and reaction