

WRITING AS A TOOL FOR GROWTH & CHANGE DURING THE PANDEMIC & BEYOND

WITH RAISING HOPE PROGRAM DIRECTOR AMY SUMMERS

Some ideas for this workshop were adapted from

*[12 Ideas for Writing Through the Pandemic](#), *The New York Times**



Personal Narrative/Journaling:

Journaling is well-known as a therapeutic practice, a tool for helping you organize your thoughts and vent your emotions, especially in anxiety-ridden times. But keeping a diary has an added benefit during a pandemic: It may help educate future generations.

As you write in your journal, you'll probably find that your life during the pandemic is full of stories, whether serious or funny, angry or sad. If you're so inspired, try writing about one of your experiences in a personal narrative essay.

- How has the virus disrupted your daily life? What are you missing? School, sports, competitions, extracurricular activities, social plans, vacations or anything else?
- What effect has this crisis had on your own mental and emotional health?
- What changes, big or small, are you noticing in the world around you?
- How has your life improved? What have you discovered about yourself?



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Poetry

People have long turned to creative expression in times of crisis. During the coronavirus pandemic, artists are continuing to illustrate, paint, play music, dance, perform, and write poetry.

That's what Dr. Elizabeth Mitchell, an emergency room doctor in Boston, did after a long shift treating coronavirus patients. Called "The Apocalypse," her poem begins like this:

*This is the apocalypse
A daffodil has poked its head up
from the dirt and opened
sunny arms to bluer skies
yet I am filled with
dark and anxious dread
as theaters close as travel ends and
grocery stores display their empty rows*

*where toilet paper liquid bleach
and bags of flour stood in upright ranks.
The Apocalypse
Post Traumatic Growth (PTG)
New world order
The beauty of scaling back*



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Letter to the Editor:

Have you been keeping up with the news about the coronavirus?
What is your reaction to it?

Make your voice heard by writing a letter to the editor about a recent Times article (or any news outlet you follow), editorial, column or Opinion essay related to the pandemic. You can find articles in The Times's [free coronavirus coverage](#)

Write briefly and to the point.

Be prepared to back up your facts with evidence.

Write about something off the beaten path.

Publishing Opportunity: When you're ready, [submit your letter](#) to The New York Times.



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Editorial:

Maybe you have more to say than you can fit in a 150-word letter to the editor. If that's the case, try writing an editorial about something you have a strong opinion about related to the coronavirus. What have you seen that has made you upset? Proud? Appreciative? Scared?

consider essential questions about the pandemic and what they tell us about our world today:

What weaknesses is the coronavirus exposing in our society?
How can we best help our communities right now?
What lessons can we learn from this crisis? [See more here.](#)

As an alternative to a written essay, you might try creating a video Op-Ed instead, like Katherine Oung's "[Coronavirus Racism Infected My High School.](#)"



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How-to Guide:

Being stuck at home with nowhere to go is the perfect time to learn a new skill. What are you an expert at that you can teach someone?

The Times has created several guides that walk readers through how to do something step-by-step, for example, this eight-step tutorial on [how to make a face mask](#).

Read through the guide, noting how the author breaks down each step into an easily digestible action, as well as how the illustrations support comprehension.

Then, create your own how-to guide for something you could teach someone to do during the pandemic.

Maybe it's a recipe you've perfected, a solo sport you've been practicing, or a FaceTime tutorial for someone who's never video chatted before.

Whatever you choose, make sure to write clearly so anyone anywhere could try out this new skill. As an added challenge, include an illustration, photo, or audio or video clip with each step to support the reader's understanding.



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Photo Essay

Daily life looks very different now. Unusual scenes are playing out in homes, parks, grocery stores and streets across the country.

In "[New York Was Not Designed for Emptiness](#)," New York Times photographers document what life in New York City looks like amid the pandemic. It begins:

The lights are still on in Times Square. Billboards blink and storefronts shine in neon. If only there were an audience for this spectacle.

But the thoroughfares have been abandoned. The energy that once crackled along the concrete has eased. The throngs of tourists, the briskly striding commuters, the honking drivers have mostly skittered away.

In their place is a wistful awareness that plays across all five boroughs: Look how eerie our brilliant landscape has become. Look how it no longer bustles.

This is not the New York City anyone signed up for.

Read the rest of the essay and view the photos. As you read, note the photos or lines in the text that grab your attention most.

Why do they stand out to you?

What does the pandemic look like where you live?

Create your own photo essay, accompanied by a written piece, that illustrates your life now.

In your essay, consider how you can communicate a particular theme or message about life during the pandemic through both your photos and words, like in the article you read.

Publishing Opportunity: The International Center of Photography is collecting a virtual archive of images related to the coronavirus pandemic. [Learn how to submit yours here.](#)



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Comic Strip:

Sometimes, words alone just won't do. Visual mediums, like comics, have the advantage of being able to express emotion, reveal inner monologues, and explain complex subjects in ways that words on their own seldom can.

If anything proves this point, it is the Opinion section's ongoing visual diary, "[Art in Isolation.](#)" Scroll through this collection to see clever and poignant illustrations about life in these uncertain times. Read the comic "[Finding Connection When Home Alone](#)" by Gracey Zhang from this collection. As you read, note what stands out to you about the writing and illustrations. What lessons could they have for your own piece? Then, create your own comic strip, modeled after the one you read, that explores some aspect of life during the pandemic. You can sketch and color your comic with paper and pen, or use an online tool like [MakeBeliefsComix.com](#).



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This week try one of these writing modalities:

- Journal/personal Narrative
- Letter to Editor
- Editorial
- How to Guide

Bring your finished work to the next Motivational Monday to share excerpts and/or your experience.



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