

1. Keep a large spiral notebook as a journal, making entries two or three times a week. On the right side, jot down events that struck you as meaningful or interesting. Use the left as an informal scrapbook. Stick in it quotations, cartoons, or photographs that catch your attention. Look through your family's pile of discarded magazines for intriguing bits to add.
2. Buy two different colored blank books. Use one to record observations or scenes that you observe, and the other to describe reflections or meditations. Write daily in at least one. Every so often, take time to read them both together, to see what your observant and your reflective self made of a certain situation.
3. Create an imaginary addressee for your journal—the addressee may be an imagined counselor, a parent, or a friend. Of course, your correspondent may be based on a real person. When you record events and reflections, imagine yourself explaining them to this individual. Your journal, then, will become a long series of letters, explaining your life experiences to a chosen reader. You can also simply name your journal. Anne Frank began entries in her world-famous Holocaust diary with a simple "Dear Kitty."
4. A trick to help keep the journal going is to set yourself a daily number of minutes to write, say five or ten. This method works best with electronic journals, in which you can write a great deal in a small time. Set a timer, and then write without stopping until it rings. You don't have to stop if you don't want to or if you are in the middle of a good reflection.
5. Another trick is to keep two journals, a "private" one and a "public" one. Write in the private one daily, putting down thoughts and observations without censoring anything. Write in the public one once a week, selecting thoughts from the private one, shaping them and polishing them slightly. Share the public one with your instructor. This sharing will serve as your first step in the creation of poems, fiction pieces, or creative nonfiction.
6. Keep a journal that you have defined thematically. For instance, if you are particularly interested in environmental issues, keep a journal in which everything that you hear, read, and do concerning the environment is recorded. Sometimes, of course, writers use this technique unintentionally—they are so preoccupied with an issue that the issue shapes their observations. Doing it consciously allows you to be aware of your selection process. This kind of journal is often suited to creative nonfiction writing, when the goal of the writer is not autobiography but commentary.

7. Keep an image journal. On one side, paste any ads, photos, designs, and the like that interest you. Photocopy anything graphic that stimulates your imagination. You may also wish to download interesting images from the Internet. Write a brief analysis on the other side, keeping track of the source of the image and reminding yourself why you liked it or were compelled by it. Photos, paintings, cartoons, diagrams, ads—these may evoke verbal images that will be of value in your writing. A big scrapbook is best for this kind of "journal." In my scrapbook, I have some illustrations from old German children's books that I inherited when they were falling apart. They are magical in their poem-drawing power. The stories in the original were heavily cautionary tales: parents did not shy away from terrifying their children into obedience. One illustration showed a giant with huge scissors who rushed into the rooms of children while they sucked their thumbs and who then snipped off the thumbs. This illustration of what happened to thumb-suckers suggested a sequence of poems on fear and nightmare. "Struwwelpeter," or "Sloppy Peter," was a sort of child demon of disorder—if the German child didn't brush his or her teeth or wash his or her hands all the time, then the child would turn into Struwwelpeter. These figures and others that may have more appeal to you are now available on the net—try some net-surfing to fill out your scrapbook. Some will tap the wells of inspiration. What kinds of threats and images were used to keep children in line during your own childhood?
8. In addition to your regular entries, keep track of your intellectual development in your diary—write down the titles of books read, ideas mulled over, attitudes modified. Now and then ask yourself what individuals or events were most influential in defining your intellectual growth, and in what ways. This kind of reflection serves well in both creative nonfiction and fiction.
9. Just keep a ratty old spiral notebook around, in which you write anything, at any time.