

HOW TO WRITE A WORRY SCRIPT

A helpful tool in managing your excessive worries involves writing a **worry script**. This skill is most useful for worries about hypothetical situations over which you have little to no control. Examples of these types of worries include:

- Worries about you or a loved one developing a serious illness
- Worries about you or a loved one being in an accident, getting injured, abducted, or killed
- Worries about failure or loss in your future (e.g., losing your job, getting divorced)

These worries take up a lot of time and energy, and they probably cause you a great deal of anxiety. In general, the best way to get over fears is to face the fear through gradual exposure. The problem is that although this kind of exposure is very helpful for getting over a fear of dogs for example, it is not very useful when your fear is of a negative event in the future that has not happened, and may never happen. In this case, the best way to deal with your worries is to write a worry script. It is similar to a journal or diary entry, where you write out in great detail your worst fear every day for about two weeks.

Why is a worry script helpful?

Research shows us that people with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) have a hard time dealing with their negative emotions, such as sadness or fear. They either try to push the negative feelings away, or they keep switching worry topics. Unfortunately, neither of these techniques work. Why?

- Pushing bad thoughts and feelings away: If you have ever tried to push a bad feeling or thought away, you probably noticed that it didn't work at all or that the thoughts and feelings came back pretty quickly. Trying to push something out of our minds is a little like trying to push a beach ball under water: it takes a lot of work to keep it down, and the minute you let it go, it pops right back up again.
- Switching worry topics: Research on worry has found that people often “hop” from one worry topic to another. They think about one worry, which makes them feel anxious, and then they switch to another worry. The problem with this approach is that you never get to fully “digest” your fear, and really clearly see what it is that you are afraid of. Instead, you are avoiding upsetting thoughts and feelings by

constantly “switching” your worries. The problem with this strategy is that avoidance **doesn’t work** in the long run.

So how is a worry script different? Rather than putting all of your energy into avoiding upsetting thoughts and images, you can instead face your fears head on! By writing about your biggest worry, you will be facing those negative thoughts and bad feelings. You will also get a clear picture of what it is you are really afraid of, which will give you a chance to “digest” your anxiety and change how you think about your fear. People who write a worry script for a few weeks report that they feel less anxious and worried about the worry topic they were working on.

The Good News...

Although you might have many worries about hypothetical situations, they usually fall under one or two themes. That is, different worries might involve a similar idea. For example, worries about losing your job, problems in your relationship, and concerns about your personal health might all involve a theme of personal failure (that is, “what if I don’t succeed in life, and others see me as a failure?”). When you work on one worry script, your worries about a similar theme will also go down.

How to Write a Worry Script

- Your worry script should be about the **worst-case scenario** for one of your worries. For example, if you are worried about a loved one being in a car accident, you would write about your loved one actually being in a car accident.
- Your script should be **vivid and visual**. That is, it should include the five senses as much as possible (touch, taste, sight, smell, hearing), as well as your feelings and reactions. If you were writing about a loved one in a car accident, you might describe the sound of ambulance sirens, the smell of burning tires, and feeling like you might pass out.



IMPORTANT REMINDER: If you are feeling anxious, upset, or tearful while writing your script, **you are on the right track**. Your worry script is about your worst-case scenario, so it is supposed to be upsetting. Remember that this exercise is designed to help you get over your worries and anxiety in the long-term. When it comes to anxiety, in order to get a long-term gain you will always experience some short-term pain.

- You should write your worry script for **30 minutes** every day. Set aside time in your day to do it, and eliminate distractions: turn off the ringer on your phone and the television, and go into a room by yourself to write it.
- **Write a new worry script every day.** It should be about **the same subject**, for example a loved one being in a car accident, but you can go deeper into your feelings and reactions each time. For example, in one script you might write about how the loss of a loved one would affect your family, or you might write about your fears for the future after the loss of a loved one.



DON'T FORGET: If you get upset and tearful while writing your script, you are on the right track!

- Expect to write about the same worry topic for 30 minutes every day for **two weeks**.
- **KEEP IN MIND:** Sometimes when people write a worry script, they find that they worry more about the topic or generally feel more anxious during the day. This reaction is normal, and will pass. Just keep at it, and you will see that writing about your fears and negative emotions is a better strategy in the long run.

One Final Point...

Some people who face their worries by writing a worry script are afraid that writing it down will make the worst-case scenario actually happen, or that doing this type of exposure means that they will no longer care if it happens. **This is not true.**

1. Just writing about something bad will not make it happen!

If that were true, you could write a script about having millions of dollars and the next day you would win the lottery! You have probably been thinking and worrying about your worst-case scenario for years. The only difference now is that you are writing it down so that you can start to let the worry go.

2. The goal of the worry script is not to make you no longer care!

If you write out your worry script every day for two weeks, you will find that you spend less time and energy worrying about fears. However, this does not mean that you don't care about them. It simply means that you don't spend hours worrying about it every day.