

# Writing With Parts: Fostering the Part-Self Relationship

M. A. Syverson  
pegsyverson@gmail.com

Research has shown that expressive writing can benefit us in many ways. It is helpful when people have experienced trauma, and it boosts the auto-immune system in ways that can be measured, for example. This set of exercises is intended to help people explore their inner world in the IFS model, using writing as a medium. The exercises are only a guide; please follow your own sense of what to write about, and for how long. Studies show that writing about our thoughts and feelings can help us gain more clarity and equanimity.

Exercise 1: Warming up. Please sit in a quiet place and allow your body to completely relax. In a few moments, you are going to begin writing, but for now just settle into a relaxed, attentive state. When you begin writing, don't worry about grammar or spelling, or even making complete sentences. Just let the writing flow until the end of the exercise. For this exercise, simply describe your present moment experience. Write about whatever you notice: physical sensations such as cool air on your arms, perceptions such as a sound or color, thoughts or ideas, emotion states, or just general consciousness, such as agitation, worry, or doubt. Write without stopping for the next five minutes, and I'll let you know when to stop.

Exercise 2: Discovering a part. Allow your body to become still in a comfortable position and become mindful, turning your awareness inward. Let all of your parts know that you are ready to hear their stories. Is there a part that comes forward, or a part you would like to get to know better? Let that part know that you want to write down what it tells you, so that you can be sure to get it right, in its own words. No one has to see the writing unless the part wants to share it. It is completely confidential. Ask if you may first describe the part as it wants to be known. This first bit of writing is simply a description of the part and how it shows up for you. Is it a tight place in a shoulder, an image of a young child, a voice in your mind, an animal or even just a felt sense? Does it have a name it wants to be known by? You may even feel completely blank, or confused; that is fine too. Simply describe the blankness or confusion, which is also a part. Write for five minutes, and I'll let you know when to stop.

Exercise 3: Befriending a part. Now, becoming mindful and attentive to the part you've discovered, let the part know you would like to get to know it better. Once again you want to write down what it tells you, in whatever way it wants to express it. You will be listening closely and simply capturing what it wants you to know. Let the part tell you its story in its own terms. It may want to tell you how it came into being, what it believes, or how it feels right now. If the part is a very young child, or preverbal, pay very close attention and write down whatever you can learn about it by observing. You may begin to recognize a feeling tone: contentment, distress, curiosity, vulnerability, or a sense of its relationship to you: closeness, trust, or loneliness, for example. Just write for five minutes whatever the part wants you to know.

Exercise 4: Going deeper. Once again, allow yourself to become mindful and still, and attentive to this part you are coming to know. Let the part know you are curious about it and want to know a bit more, if it is willing to tell you about itself. If so, you might ask a few questions to learn more, for example:

How are you helping me? What job do you do?

What do you like about this job? What do you wish you didn't have to do?

Do you feel your work is appreciated by others and by the Self?

What are you afraid might happen if you were not doing this job?

What might you do instead, if you didn't have to work so hard at this job?

Are there any other parts you are involved with—parts that don't get along with you, parts that are your friends?

Is there anything else the part wants you to know?

Just write for five minutes, in whatever ways will deepen your understanding of the part.

Exercise 5: Completion. Again, allow yourself to become mindful and still, and attentive to this part. Let the part know that you will have some time to write about any last information it wants you to have, and about how it feels having its story written down. How does it feel toward you, knowing you have been paying this close, caring attention? Let the part know that even though this is the last writing session for now, you will continue to be connected. Write whatever it wants you to know about its relationship with you. Write for five minutes, and at the end, when you are ready to stop, write, "to be continued..."

Let the other parts of you know that they too can have this chance to write their own story.

### **Writing exercises for fostering parts relationships**

Here are some ideas for writing to foster healthy relationships among our parts. Be open!

- **Parts in conflict:** Ask each part to write a description of the other part, explain what it thinks that part's job is, and why it imagines the other part thinks it is helping you. What might the other part be afraid will happen if it is not doing that job? What does the other part believe about the Self and about the world? Why should you (Self) care about the other part?
- **Parts agreement.** Ask each part to write a bit about the difficulties between them. How do they get into conflict? What effect does their conflict have on you? How might they work together instead of against each other? Can they write an agreement together that they are both willing to make to create a harmonious working relationship?
- **Parts letters.** Ask each part to write a letter to another part about itself. Ask it to share whatever it wishes the other part knew about it, what it hopes for in its relationship with the other part, and whatever its concerns and feelings for the other part are.
- **Writing for exiles.** Exiled parts feel alienated from the other parts, and blocked by the protector/managers. In essence, all of their letters are sent from prison. While it is helpful to hear from the exiles, probably the most healing thing is for the Self and other parts to write to them. In the writing let the exiled part know that it is recognized, cherished, and held with care. Let it know that when it is safe, you will retrieve it, care for it, and the other parts will welcome it. Let it know that it will never be forgotten, condemned, or pushed away again.