



THREE-DAY SENTENCE COMPLETION PROGRAM

Choosing to do any psychotherapeutic process means that you deeply appreciate who you are —and who you'll become. That's something to be quite grateful of. Most people on the planet are sleepwalkers through their existence, and they typically choose to remain so.

Self-concept is destiny. How you see yourself and what you view as possible *to you* mainly determine who you are and who you'll become.

The sentence completion exercises below are the main tools that will help you discover the process by which you sometimes act contrary to your own best interests and feel badly about it. After actively engaging in these exercises, you'll be well on your way to achieving the state of enlightenment that is the hallmark of a healthy self-concept.

The key to successfully completing the following sentence stems is to surrender yourself to the process. Really, wave the white flag here. Since you seek to end any and all internal wars, you must wave the white flag with yourself. Your conscious mind may be hesitant or even resistant, but this is simply part of the process of recognizing that self-healing needs to occur. Objectively speaking, you are more than your feelings in these matters. You are that which explores, grows, and achieves. How do you accomplish this?

In a quiet place without distractions, get in a semi-meditative state (not so meditative that you can't do the stems, of course). The key is to let your endings flow without any conscious deliberation or censorship. To achieve this, you can even act as if something else or someone else is writing the endings. Even embrace the contrary, or pen the “untrue,” which means allowing yourself to write things that you normally wouldn't say or admit to. Here's an example:

At the thought of exploring my emotions...

I wonder what it will yield

This can be scary

I see I'm going to learn some things

It seems daunting

I don't know where to start

It's not easy

I feel relieved

I see that it will be helpful

I start to feel better

This is not a test of your character. This is not an indictment of the implications of all your “deep, dark secrets.” **Rather, this is an exploration into your subconscious mind, which you allow to take over and tell you what it thinks and feels.** Let's try another one:

Eating healthy to me means...

Keeping on track

Not giving in to temptations

Understanding what's good for me

Not lying to myself

Buying the right things

Being creative about what to eat

Giving up some things

A daunting proposition sometimes

Seeing the results in how I look and feel

Doing what is sensible

You'll discover that sentence completion exercises enable you to see past your ordinary defenses and conscious, or explicit, points of view. They allow you to understand the nature of your self-conflict in a way that you've only been vaguely aware of until now. They rely on the fact that you need self-esteem—self-confidence and self-respect—in order to function as a thinking and feeling person.

Developing a deep and lasting friendship with your subconscious means befriending the parts of you that yearn to be heard, understood, and accepted by you. So, breathe deeply and grasp the wisdom that your deepest part of self knows and feels.

During a part of the day when you have a free hour or so (depending on how much you write in the “reflections” section), **write down and read the specific stems for the day and provide endings without “thinking too much”—in other words, write endings off the top of your head.** Keep in mind that the more you delay in writing an ending, the less benefit you'll derive from the whole integrative process. Your subconscious is best accessed when its voice is honored and given free reign.

Provide about 8 to 10 endings for each stem, reading the stem itself over each time you proceed to write another ending. When you finish a set of stems, read over what you wrote and write a few paragraphs about the experience and about what you've learned; this is the “Reflections” part.

Day 1

Honoring Yourself

If I bring a higher level of self-esteem to my activities today...

If I bring a higher level of self-esteem to my dealings with people today...

If I am 5% more self-accepting today...

If I am self-accepting even when I make mistakes...

If I am self-accepting even when I feel confused and overwhelmed...

Self-Expression

If, when I was young, someone had told me my wants really mattered...

If, when I was young, I had been taught to honor my own life...

If I treat my life as unimportant...

If I were willing to say yes when I want to say yes and no when I want to say no...

If I were willing to let people hear the music inside me...

If I were to express 5% more of who I am...

Reflections...

Day 2

Exploring Feelings

Sometimes when I am afraid, I...

Sometimes when I am hurt, I...

Sometimes when I am angry, I...

An effective way to handle fear might be to...

An effective way to handle hurt might be to...

An effective way to handle anger might be to...

Child-Self

Mother gave me a view of myself as...

Father gave me a view of myself as...

Mother speaks through my voice when I tell myself...

Father speaks through my voice when I tell myself...

If I bring 5% more awareness to my relationship with my mother...

If I bring 5% more awareness to my relationship with my father...

If I look at my mother and father realistically...

Reflections...

Day 3

Evolving

If I reflect on the level of awareness I bring to my relationship with my mother...

If I reflect on the level of awareness I bring to my relationship with my father...

At the thought of being free of Mother psychologically...

At the thought of being free of Father psychloogically...

At the thought of belonging fully to myself...

If my life really does belong to me...

If I really am capable of independent survival...

Mindfulness

If I bring 5% more awareness to my life...

If I am 5% more self-accepting...

If I bring 5% more self-responsibility to my life...

If I operate 5% more self-assertively...

If I live my life 5% more purposefully...

If I bring 5% more integrity to my life...

If I breathe deeply and allow myself to experience what self-esteem feels like...

Reflections...

CONNECTING WITH YOUR SAGE-SELF

As you've now experienced the nature of sentence completion exercises to reveal your subconscious feelings and beliefs, you've no doubt become more psychologically integrated. This integration process will continue as time passes. By doing the exercises, you're able to see and reflect on many things that likely have been only in the periphery of your awareness.

Things brought from the periphery of your awareness to the center of your awareness tend to induce much needed changes in you.

Now, it will be much more difficult to be in conflict with yourself, because the self you've been in conflict with has been given a definite voice—and this voice has been heard, understood, and honored by you! Of course, even deeper understanding and more thorough integration can occur by doing the three-day program again (and even again), leaving no subconscious stone unturned.

Psychologist Nathaniel Branden is known as the father of the self-esteem movement (though not the pseudo-self-esteem and praise taught to kids in governmental schools and popularized in our culture). He has devised and utilized sentence completion exercises in his psychotherapy practice for decades, and he's noted that all of us have a “sage-self,” which is the deepest, most authentic part of who we are.

Your own sage-self has become strengthened immensely by doing these exercises, and your mind has been opened to more layers of understanding and insight. As Branden has observed in

his explanations of this process, each of us knows all the things we think we don't know and can do all the things we think we can't do (within the wide confines of reason and reality, of course). My favorite comprehensive sentence stem workbook of his is *The Art of Self-Discovery*.

Becoming aligned with your sage-self takes you to a place where self-conflict becomes the exception rather than the rule in your life. And when you do encounter self-conflict, you'll be able to deal with it effectively. In other words, being much more aware of your contradictions and your emotions makes it next to impossible to continue on a deficient path. You'll be much more in touch with the parts of yourself that fostered conflict. By living through your sage-self and seeing such conflicts objectively, you can accept, honor, and finally integrate the subconscious parts that tended to leave you feeling confused, frustrated, guilty, resentful, or depressed.

CONFLICTS WON AND CONFLICTS LOST—FALSE-SELF DISTRACTIONS

Of course, we can't escape our nature as human beings. As much as we might like to be a superhero or demigod, we face challenges in our lives that test our coping skills. Essentially these are challenges to our self-esteem, which is accurately defined as the conviction that one is able to properly think, judge, and deal with life's challenges, coupled with the feeling that one is worthy of happiness—in short, a combination of self-confidence and self-respect.

Our cultural context can have a major bearing on our coping skills, if we allow it. Others in our midst may not have done the internal hard work that we have done, or are striving to do, so they (along with ordinary issues of life) may test our coping skills considerably.

Doing sentence completions enables you to check in with your sage-self in these trying times—to in a real sense connect with the objective part of yourself that knows that it's going to be okay and that you are “good enough.” All of us need check in for emotional

tune-ups, if we are to keep running in top psychological condition.

Fortunately, your feelings are excellent indicators of how smoothly your mental engine is running. By just listening to your inner voice (or voices, as in the case of mixed emotions and feelings stemming from non-integrated subelves), you can readily grasp how you're dealing with things.

Unfortunately, most people spend scant time listening to their innermost voice, their sage-self. So, they run roughshod over their (and others) feelings, via such protective mechanisms as denial, evasion, projection, repression, rationalization, all of which spell continued self-dishonesty. Of course, these mental events have an impact on their behavior patterns. Making excuses, blaming others, and perpetuating mistakes become commonplace.

Though people realize this isn't living consciously, they push that realization aside so they don't have to change. **Again, self-conflict thrives on avoiding full awareness and thus repeating deficient patterns of thought and action.**

Throughout all your trials and tribulations, it's vital to remember that you are always just a few moments away from authentically reconnecting with your sage-self and realigning with your stated values.

Integrity and self-honesty are always possible and always beckon us. Gaining and keeping such virtues may be the most profound choice.

AN ATTITUDE OF CURIOSITY AND SELF-RESPECT

Ultimately, curiosity and self-respect may be the most important components to maintaining your happiness.

Curiosity means asking questions and discovering answers, even when others shrug or remain stuck in their ways. After all, there's not much to gain mentally by joining a big crowd of incurious people.

Being open to new ideas, new evidence, and new ways of looking at things definitely fosters (and reflects) an attitude of self-respect. Seeing yourself as worthy of all the great things that life has to offer, means that truth and goodness matter to you, rather than what is expedient or easy to do (or not do) in the moment.

As human beings seeking to flourish on this wonderful planet, we can also impart our attitude of curiosity and self-respect to others who may not be as motivated. Nothing persuades and convinces like a person who shines with the radiance of happiness! Such is your birthright.

All the best,

Wes Bertrand, MA

P.S., If you want to do more sentence stems personally with me over the Internet (Skype), just send me an email at wes@happinesscounseling.com. I look forward to helping you on the heroic journey of exploring your inner continent.