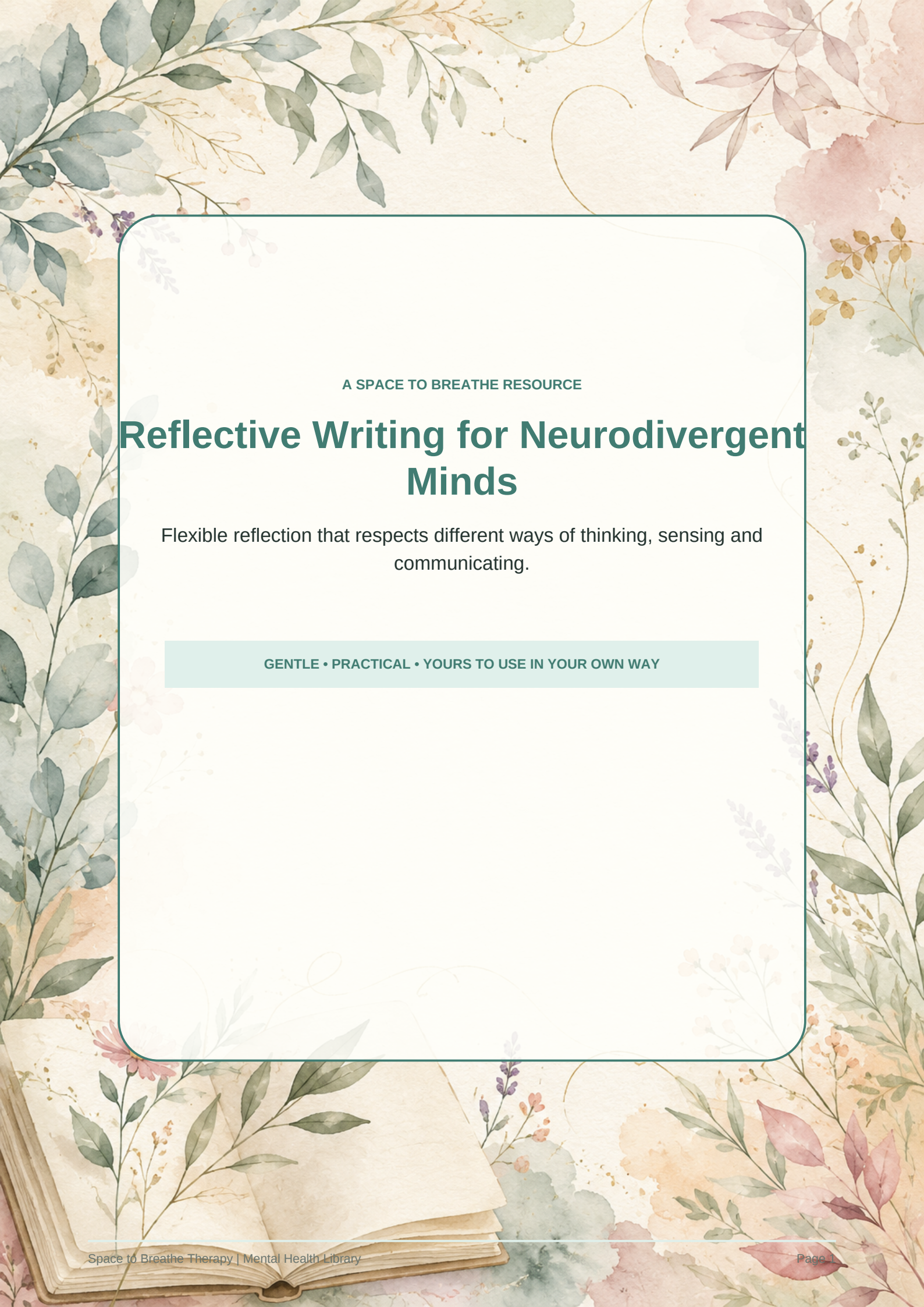




A SPACE TO BREATHE RESOURCE

Reflective Writing for Neurodivergent Minds

Flexible reflection that respects different ways of thinking, sensing and communicating.

GENTLE • PRACTICAL • YOURS TO USE IN YOUR OWN WAY

Reflection does not have to look linear

A blank page can demand organisation, language, memory and emotional access all at once. For autistic people, people with ADHD, dyslexia or other neurodivergence, that demand may hide the value of reflection. Change the format, not yourself.

Traditional journalling can rely heavily on executive function: deciding where to start, sequencing events, choosing language and sustaining attention. Remove as many steps as possible. Keep a prompt visible, use the same simple headings, dictate while walking or complete a two-minute check-in. Consistency of format may make reflection more accessible than increasing motivation.

- Use speech-to-text, keywords or a mind map.
- Start with body sensations or sensory information.
- Use headings and answer only one.
- Write in fragments; do not correct spelling.
- Use a timer and stop while capacity remains.

REFLECT

Which way of recording thoughts asks the least from my brain today?

Include the environment

Many reflections focus only on thoughts, but environment can be central. Notice noise, light, temperature, hunger, transitions, unclear expectations, social performance and interruptions. What looks like an emotional overreaction may be an overloaded nervous system.

Include sensory and communication demands in every account. Bright light, competing voices, uncomfortable clothing, hunger, pain, eye contact, telephone calls and unclear language can change capacity dramatically. If you omit the environment, you may mistakenly interpret overload as personal weakness. The more precise the barrier, the more precise the adjustment can be.

- What sensory input was present?
- Was I masking or monitoring myself?
- How many transitions or decisions had I managed?
- Had I eaten, rested or had time alone?
- What adjustment might reduce the demand next time?

Move from shame to useful information

Try replacing character judgments with observations. "I am lazy" may become "Starting felt impossible because the task was unclear and I was depleted." This is not making excuses. It identifies conditions that can be changed.

Delayed processing means an answer given under pressure may not represent your full view. Write what you noticed later and what extra time revealed. This can help you request agendas in advance, written questions, breaks, follow-up by email or permission to revisit a decision. Processing time is an access need, not a lack of intelligence or commitment.

REFLECT**What explanation fits the evidence better than self-blame?****Permission**

Your reflection can be short, visual, repetitive, private and unfinished. It is still meaningful.

3. Interoception, alexithymia and delayed processing

Some neurodivergent people notice internal signals faintly, intensely or only after a delay. Alexithymia can make identifying or describing emotions difficult even when the experience itself is powerful. This is not a lack of feeling or insight.

A meltdown or shutdown reflection should happen only after recovery has begun. Avoid reconstructing the event while highly activated. Later, map accumulating demands, the final trigger, early signs, what increased distress and what helped. Focus on changing conditions and support responses. Shame does not prevent overload; safer planning may.

Try recording data before labels: temperature, pressure, movement, energy, sensory tolerance, urge to escape, need for sameness, or changes in speech. Meaning may become clearer later.

REFLECT

What information can I record without requiring myself to name an emotion yet?

4. Masking, shutdown and meltdown

Reflection can reveal the effort involved in appearing calm, sociable or capable. After prolonged masking or overload, a person may experience meltdown, shutdown, loss of speech, withdrawal or exhaustion. These are not moral failures.

Adjustments work best when they are specific. “I need support” may become “Please send instructions in writing and identify the first priority.” “Meetings are hard” may become “After sixty minutes of spoken information I lose processing capacity, so I need a break and written actions.” Reflection provides the evidence needed to describe impact clearly.

- What demands had accumulated?
- Which needs did I hide or postpone?
- Were there signs that others could help me recognise earlier?
- What would reduce language, social or sensory demand during recovery?

A useful plan focuses on prevention, dignity and recovery rather than punishment.

5. Turning reflection into adjustments

Insight becomes practical when it changes the environment. Adjustments might include headphones, predictable plans, written communication, recovery time after meetings, fewer consecutive appointments, body doubling, visual prompts or permission to leave early.

Notice strengths without turning them into reasons to deny support. Deep focus, honesty, pattern recognition, creativity, loyalty and specialist knowledge can exist alongside significant access needs. You do not have to be struggling in every area to deserve adjustments in the areas that create disability or distress.

- Name the barrier precisely.
- Describe its impact on function or wellbeing.
- Identify the adjustment that reduces the barrier.
- Record whether it helped and what still needs changing.

Your needs are valid

Support does not have to be earned by reaching crisis. Earlier adjustments can prevent avoidable distress and burnout.