

A FLEXIBLE REFLECTION WORKBOOK

Reflective Writing for Neurodivergent Minds

A practical guide that makes room for different ways of thinking, feeling, communicating and processing.

START HERE

Reflection that makes room for your mind

Reflection can help you understand an experience, notice what you need and choose a next step. It should not require you to think, write, communicate or regulate in one approved way. This workbook offers options; you decide which ones fit.

Neurodivergent is not one experience

People use the word neurodivergent in different ways. It may include autistic people, people with ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette syndrome, learning disabilities and other forms of cognitive difference. Some people identify with one description, several, or none. The pages do not assume that everyone shares the same traits, strengths, support needs or language.

You do not need a diagnosis to use these prompts. You also do not need to explain or prove your way of thinking. Use the words that feel right to you, and leave anything that does not.

Reflection is not a test

You can begin with a sentence, a voice note, a drawing, a list, a mind map, a sensory description, a conversation, or a pause to think. You can answer in a different order, repeat yourself, use examples, or stop halfway through. A page left unfinished is still allowed to be useful.

The aim is not to make you seem more typical or to turn every difference into a problem to solve. Reflection can help you understand what happened, what mattered, what support was present or missing, and what you would like to do next. Sometimes the next step is an adjustment, a boundary, rest or asking another person to communicate more clearly.

Make the process yours

- Choose one prompt. You do not need to complete a whole section.
- Change the format. Type, speak, draw, dictate, point, or ask someone to write your words.
- Change the setting. Adjust light, sound, movement, temperature, privacy or time if you can.
- Pause without penalty. You can come back later, skip a question or close the workbook.

If reflection brings up distress, stop and orient to the present. Seek support from someone you trust or a qualified professional if you need help holding what has come up.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

What would make this reflection feel more accessible to me today?

Possible answers: less noise, a shorter time, a spoken answer, movement, clearer wording, or another person nearby.

01 | MAKE ACCESS POSSIBLE

Find a format that fits your brain

It can be hard to reflect when the task itself creates barriers. The page, timing, language or environment may ask for skills you are not trying to practise. Adjust the process before deciding that you are “bad at reflection.”

Writing is only one route

If writing by hand is tiring, painful, slow or difficult to organise, you could type, dictate, record an audio note, use speech-to-text, draw, make a voice memo, or ask someone to scribe. If speech is hard in the moment, use keywords, a prepared choice list, text, symbols or a communication device. You can reflect privately without showing anyone the result.

Some people think best while moving, speaking aloud, handling an object, or returning to a question after a delay. Others need quiet, a predictable sequence or more time before they know what they think. These are different access needs, not evidence that one person is trying harder.

Reduce the start-up demand

- Set out only what you need. A single page or one open note can feel easier than a full workbook.
- Use a timer as a boundary, not a performance target. Two minutes can be enough.
- Make the first action concrete: open the note, choose a colour, say one word, or name the event.
- If remembering is difficult, capture a thought when it appears. You can sort it later.

Make language easier to enter

A broad question such as “How do you feel?” can be difficult to answer. Try choices or more specific wording: “What did you notice first: body tension, a thought, an urge to leave, or something else?” You may prefer “What happened next?” to “Why did you do that?” Clear, literal language can reduce guesswork. You can ask someone to explain a vague question.

A small example

Instead of asking yourself to “reflect on the whole meeting,” start with: “When did I first notice the meeting becoming hard?” You might record “after the room got louder” or “when the plan changed.” That small observation can be enough to begin.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

Which format, setting or first step would make it easier to begin?

Try naming one change you can make now, and one change you may need to ask someone else for.

02 | START ANYWHERE

Reflect without forcing a straight line

Thoughts do not always arrive in a tidy beginning-middle-end sequence. You may remember one detail, jump between time points, notice a connection later, or need to revisit the same part. Your reflection can follow that shape.

Use an entry point that is available

You could begin with the clearest fact, the strongest feeling, a sensory detail, the moment things changed, a question you cannot stop turning over, or the part you want help with. There is no requirement to start at the beginning. Add missing context when it becomes clear.

If several ideas arrive at once, capture them without sorting. Use separate lines, speech notes, a mind map, or labels such as “what happened,” “what I felt,” “what I need to check,” and “next step.” Later, circle one idea that matters most. You can leave the others for another time.

Separate layers gently

- Event: What do I remember happening?
- Body and senses: What did I notice in my body or environment?
- Meaning: What did I think the event meant at the time?
- Uncertainty: What do I not yet know or remember?
- Need: What would help me understand or continue?

You do not need to force a confident account. Memory can be patchy, especially during stress or overload. Mark an uncertain detail as uncertain. You may later remember more, or you may decide that you have enough information for now.

A flexible example

You might write: “The room got louder. I lost track of the instruction. I smiled and nodded. I am not sure what the other person thought. I wanted a written list. Next time I could ask for the steps in a message.” This does not answer every question, but it records a pattern and identifies a practical support.

If a mind map or list becomes too much, reduce it to one mark or one sentence. If a paragraph feels restrictive, expand it into fragments. Choose a structure that helps you see, not one that looks impressive.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

Where can I begin without needing the whole story first?

Name a detail, sensation, question or next action. You can leave the rest open.

03 | CONTEXT AND MEANING

Understand the moment without blaming yourself

A behaviour can have an impact and still make more sense when you know the conditions around it. Context helps you learn what to keep, change, repair or request. It does not erase another person's experience, and it does not turn your needs into a moral failing.

Look at the conditions around the moment

Consider what was happening before the event: changes in plan, unclear instructions, waiting, competing demands, sensory input, fatigue, hunger, social uncertainty, effortful masking, pain, interruption, or pressure to respond quickly. You may notice none of these, one of them, or something completely different. The point is curiosity, not finding a single explanation.

People can reach a limit after many small demands. The last demand may look minor to someone else, while your system is already working hard. A useful reflection asks what had accumulated, what early signs were available, and what support could have changed the conditions.

Separate what you did from who you are

"I raised my voice" describes an action. "I am a terrible person" turns one action into a verdict on your whole identity. "I missed the instruction" is more specific than "I never listen." Specific language makes a next step possible: clarify, repair, prepare, or ask for a different format.

A fair account can hold more than one truth: "I was overwhelmed, and my words hurt someone." "I needed more processing time, and I did not communicate that." "The instruction was unclear, and I can ask for clarification next time." You are allowed to understand your needs while taking responsibility for your choices.

Check assumptions before treating them as facts

After an interaction, you may replay tone, facial expressions or timing and try to work out what another person meant. If you can, separate what you directly know from what you are guessing. You might write a question to ask, wait until you feel settled, or decide that the evidence is not available. You do not have to solve another person's thoughts alone.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

What conditions were shaping this moment, and what is mine to take responsibility for?

04 | SENSORY AND EMOTIONAL SIGNALS

Notice overwhelm, shutdown and recovery

Stress may show up in the body, attention, speech, movement or ability to make decisions. Some signs are easy to recognise; others become clear only afterwards. This page is for noticing your own pattern, not comparing it with someone else's.

Map your early clues

You might notice sound becoming sharp, light feeling uncomfortable, words disappearing, restlessness, faster thoughts, going quiet, difficulty switching tasks, tension, irritability, urgency, numbness or a strong need to leave. These are examples, not a checklist. Your signs can vary across settings and days.

Some people mask their distress or keep meeting expectations until they cannot. Others show their distress visibly. Either way, a response may reflect an overloaded system, a need that has not been met, or a demand that has become too much. It is not automatically deliberate defiance or a character flaw.

Use a simple sequence

- Before: What demands, changes or sensory conditions had built up?
- Early signal: What was the first sign I can identify now?
- At the limit: What became difficult to do, say, hear or decide?
- After: What helped me recover, and how long did I need?
- Next time: What support could arrive earlier?

Recovery is part of the story

After intense effort or overwhelm, you may need less sound, fewer questions, predictable food or routines, time alone, movement, sleep, help with tasks, or company without conversation. The right support is individual. Reflection can help you name what helps before a crisis, what is useful during it, and what recovery needs afterwards.

You do not have to write while overwhelmed. A short note after the event may be more useful and kinder. If you do not remember details, focus on what you need now.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

What is one early sign I would like to notice, and what response could help?

05 | COMMUNICATION AND REPAIR

Make space for different communication styles

Misunderstandings can happen when people use different assumptions about tone, timing, hints, eye contact, detail or how quickly a reply should come. You can explore your part without assuming that every communication difficulty belongs to you alone.

Describe the mismatch, not a defective person

Instead of “I am impossible to talk to,” try describing the specific mismatch: “I thought the question needed a detailed answer; they wanted a quick yes or no.” “I needed time to process; the conversation moved on.” “I took the words literally; the other person expected me to infer an unstated request.” A precise description can suggest a practical adjustment.

Communication is shared. You can ask for direct wording, written instructions, one question at a time, extra processing time, notice before a change, or a clear signal that a conversation is urgent. Another person can also ask what you meant instead of assuming. Both people’s needs and boundaries matter.

A simple repair can be direct

If your action affected someone, acknowledge the specific impact and offer a realistic repair. For example: “I interrupted you and I can see you did not get to finish. I am sorry. Would you like to continue now, or would another time suit you?” You can also explain context without using it to dismiss impact: “I was overloaded and missed the cue. I still want to understand how it affected you.”

If you need to clarify your own intent, keep it brief and leave room for their experience. An apology is not a demand for immediate forgiveness. You can make a change even if the conversation cannot be resolved today.

Boundaries are allowed

You may ask for a pause, use a written message, bring a support person, or leave a conversation that has become unsafe. Taking responsibility does not mean accepting blame for everything or forcing yourself to communicate in a way that causes harm. A respectful repair includes your safety and the other person’s choice about what they need.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

What would clearer, fairer communication look like for me in this situation?

06 | PROGRESS AND SUPPORT

Notice growth on your own terms

Progress is not measured by how well you hide your differences, tolerate distress or meet someone else's pace. Reflection can help you notice what supports you, what you value, what you have learned, and where the environment needs to change.

Count useful changes, including support

Growth might look like recognising overload earlier, asking for clarification, using a communication aid, disclosing a need to a trusted person, changing a plan before reaching exhaustion, resting without apology, or choosing not to mask in a safer setting. It can also mean deciding that a goal was never yours, or that a barrier needs to be addressed by someone with power to change it.

Accommodations are not shortcuts around growth. They can make participation possible. A written agenda, flexible timing, reduced sensory load, movement, reminders, clear expectations or extra processing time may allow you to use your skills more reliably. Needing support does not make a success less yours.

Build an evidence log that works for you

- What helped? Name a person, tool, routine, adjustment or condition.
- What did I do? Include asking for help, pausing or changing course.
- What mattered to me? Link the moment to a value, need or relationship.
- What would I repeat or change? Keep the next step small and specific.

Use a format you can return to: a notes app, a calendar mark, an audio folder, a few cards, or a message to yourself. If remembering to log is difficult, you have not failed. You can start again whenever it becomes useful.

Review patterns with care

If something keeps going wrong, ask whether the plan fits the conditions. Are the instructions clear? Is the task too large or too vague? Is the sensory environment workable? Is the timing realistic? Does the support arrive early enough? Sometimes the most helpful reflection is not "How do I try harder?" but "What needs to change around me?"

PAUSE AND REFLECT

What is one change, accommodation or support that would make the next step more possible?

07 | A FLEXIBLE TOOL

A reflection map to return to

Use this map in any order. Choose one point, change the wording, or ask another person to help you think it through. You do not need a polished conclusion. You may simply leave with a clearer need or a next question.

1. Pick an entry point

What part stands out: a fact, a feeling, a body signal, a sensory detail, a question, or something you want to change?

2. Add what you know

What happened, as far as you can tell? What is still uncertain? You can mark gaps rather than filling them with guesses.

3. Name the conditions

What was happening around you? Consider demands, communication, sensory input, time, energy, transitions, support and what else was happening in your life.

4. Notice needs and impact

What did you need then? What did you need from other people or the environment? Who was affected, and what matters to you about that?

5. Choose a next step

Could you clarify, repair, request an adjustment, set a boundary, prepare a reminder, rest, or leave the question open? Choose one action that is realistic.

6. Close the reflection

What would help you shift attention now? You might save a note, tell someone you are finished, stretch, move to a quieter place or return to an ordinary activity.

A worked example

“The plan changed in the meeting. I had missed the message and could not follow people speaking over each other. I went quiet. I needed the new plan in writing and time to process. I can ask for the updated version and tell the organiser what helps me take part.”

A closing thought

Your way of thinking can be understood without being corrected. Reflect in a way that respects your pace, communication, sensory needs and values.

Take one sentence with you

- I can adapt reflection to fit me.
- My needs are information, not a verdict.
- Support can be part of how I grow.
- One next step is enough for today.

If you would like support to explore these ideas, you can speak with someone you trust or a qualified professional. Space to Breathe Therapy can also be contacted to ask whether its support is right for you.