

Tips for Journaling With/Through Vertigo

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Introduction

These journal prompts are for you to use at your own pace. They can be completed in any order, and there is no requirement that you do all of them promptly, or ever. You're writing for yourself, not for a grade or an assessment. Many people find it useful to set an interval of writing time and write for at least that long--five minutes is a good start--even if they don't initially find something to say. "I don't like this question, it doesn't make any sense to me because..." is a totally valid way to start. So is, "This doesn't match up with my experience at all, I'd rather write about...." Trying things that don't lead you anywhere is not failure, it's *information about what works for you*. It's also fine if you want to include drawings or sketches with your words (and fine if you don't!). Even if what you write seems silly or unrelated, that's okay. You're not writing it for someone else's approval, you're writing it to take out what's in your head and look at it from a different angle. Sometimes that angle will make you cry, but it also might make you laugh--that's not any less useful or valid.

If you find that too much screen time triggers vertigo for you, please take frequent breaks between writing exercises or try good old pen and paper! This kind of writing can be emotional, so please find a place to write that's comfortable and safe for you.

1. Balance disorders or vertigo sometimes get the shorthand description of "the room is spinning."

What are some other sensations you've gotten from your vertigo? Tilt, ripple, sway, tip, lean,

veer, turn, shift, undulate? Fall, crawl, stagger? Choose one of these verbs or another of your choice and start a piece of writing with "I spin," "I tilt" or whatever verb you've chosen. OR choose to write about how one of them is absolutely wrong for your experience, "I DO NOT spin" or "I never spin" or etc.

2. We all have different vertigo triggers--and nobody loves theirs. Batman and Green Arrow sometimes fight Count Vertigo. What would one of your triggers look like as a supervillain, what costume, what powers? (Loud Noise Man? The Caffeine Kid?) How would that supervillain be defeated?
3. Vertigo is a popular metaphor for a new situation, a new and fantastical land. It comes up in the disorienting tumble Alice takes into Wonderland; we see it in the way the tornado spins Dorothy around en route to Oz. Where has vertigo taken you? Take a moment to describe Vertigoland for me. What things are inverted? What's off-kilter? What takes on a different color or smell or has different rules in your world remade by vertigo?
4. Ancient physician-philosopher Galen called vertigo "darkening" in the sense of causing deception or ignorance about the world around oneself. How do you feel imbalance differently without illumination, without visual references? Try a poem or open prose writing starting with the line, "In the dark."

5. To take the other side of things, some people with balance disorders find doorframes extremely convenient because they give you a clear reference for what's up and down, what's side to side. And yet many of us have fallen into or through a door. Start a journal entry or poem with one of the verbs from the first prompt, spinning, wobbling, weaving..."through a door." Or write about the steady, solid ground on the other side of the door would be like, if you could get there.
6. We sometimes talk about vertigo turning our world upside-down...but is everything that's "right" way up really right? What would you like to turn on its head if you could? What might benefit from being shifted, tilted, spun round?
7. We're often asked to keep a cheerful face on and not grumble about our medical problems. But for all that we've tried to think in different directions than pure sad loss, it's sometimes good to acknowledge that vertigo *does* take things from us. Write about what you really miss now that you have vertigo. (For me, this might be about ice skating: the sound of the blades, the feel of the wind in my hair if a spin on skates could still be under *my* control.)
8. Singer-songwriter Antje Duvekot's Vertigo uses our condition as a metaphor. Here's the studio version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHxxwQBbNFA> (If you have auditory processing needs, here are the lyrics without the music: <https://genius.com/Antje-duvekot-vertigo-lyrics>) Two last short questions, to close on: first, she sings, "I am teaching myself to be brave." What are some of the ways you've had to teach yourself to be brave because of your vertigo?

Second: how do you feel about someone who doesn't have vertigo herself using it as a metaphor in this way?

I hope that some of these prompts have been helpful for you. Feel free to return to things you've written to expand on them, or to go off in another direction completely. You don't have to do this on someone else's timeline. We're all trying to grab patches of steadiness in the middle of this, emotionally or literally--anything you can take from these prompts that helps you that way is excellent.

If you fancy sharing any of your work, or if you want to learn more about *The Vertigo Project*, you can get in touch with us: <https://vertigo.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/contact/>

Additional reading with vertigo metaphors:

L. Frank Baum, *The Wizard of Oz*. Also the movie.

Elizabeth Bishop, "In the Waiting Room" (<https://poets.org/poem/waiting-room>)

Octavia Butler, *Kindred*.

Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

About the facilitator: Marissa Lingen is a science fiction and fantasy writer, essayist, and poet from Minnesota. She has been living with vertigo for twenty years. A selection of her vertigo-themed work is available on *The Vertigo Project* website: <https://vertigo.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/creative-writing/>

More about Marissa generally can be found at www.marissalingen.com.

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