Supplementary Materials

The information contained in this supplement is meant to accompany our study and addresses issues related to the methodology of the study (Stapleton, Zhang, & Berman, 2021). The information contained in this supplement is not necessary to understand the writing study, but the information does address a few questions that we have received by reviewers.

One reviewer asked about our process for determining the number of participants in the study. Prior to beginning the writing study, an *a priori* power analysis was conducted in G*Power* (Faul, Erfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) to determine the sample size. It was determined that to achieve 80% power for medium within-subjects effect and medium between-subjects effects that a sample size of 120 participants would be adequate (Cohen, 1988).

One reviewer asked whether the participants had experienced significant distress in their life. The prescreening process was effective at selecting participants who had experienced at least two difficult life events with high distress levels. On a 10-point scale, the average prescreening distress for the most difficult life event was $M = 8.75, SE = .15$ and the average prescreening distress for the second most difficult life event was $M = 7.38, SE = .14$ for the entire sample of 120 participants.

Another reviewer questioned why a pre-experimental assessment (i.e., pre-test) of the study variables was not included in the study design. Such assessments often sensitize participants to the goals of the study in ways that work against the experimenters’ ability to find an effect. However, random assignment is effective at making sure that individual differences are evenly distributed across the study groups. With random assignment, we expected that preexisting differences between the study groups on any of the study variables—including level
of distress, emotions, cognitive intrusion and avoidance—was a matter of chance (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002).

One reviewer asked us to address issues related to the validity of the Impact of Events Scale. The instructions of the Impact of Events Scale (IES; Horowitz et al., 1979) may limit the interpretation of that measure. The scale asks participants to rate how they reacted to a particular situation in the past seven days. Participants used this measure to rate both an event that they just wrote about and an event that they did not write about. Because this measure was administered immediately after the writing intervention, it could be argued that differences in the ratings of avoidance and intrusion concerning the event written about and an event not written about cannot be due to actual differences in behavior, but only perceptions of their behavior.

Given that the IES asks participants to rate their cognitions for the last seven days and the measure was completed after the writing task, a counterargument might be that participants’ ratings also reflect their activity during the writing session. The IES is a valid measure of the change that occurred during the writing session. Nonetheless, even if the measure may not be a valid measure of actual behavior changes, it may still be a valid measure of participants’ cognitive change and willingness to be less avoidant. We do not want this to be understood as saying writing merely distorts memories of the experience. In the context of therapy, clients reorganize and reframe their understanding of their behaviors. A similar process may be happening here.

Although initially designed for clinical samples, the factor structure of the Impact of Events Scale has been validated in non-clinical samples (Gargurevich, Luyten, Fils, & Corveleyn, 2009; McDonald, 1997). Therefore, use of the IES with a sample of college students, such as was done in this study, is appropriate.
Experimental Writing Instructions

Please write about the following event you have experienced:

[The first or second experience from the screening questionnaire inserted here]

When writing about this experience, do the following: (a) try to make your memories of the experience as vivid as possible, including mental images, emotions, and sensations in your body; (b) describe both the facts about the experience and also your feelings about it; and (c) write as much as you are able.

Control Writing Instructions

Please write about the following event you have experienced:

An interesting experience that recently happened to you.

When writing about this experience, do the following: (a) try to make your memories of the experience as vivid as possible, including mental images, emotions, and sensations in your body; (b) describe both the facts about the experience and also your feelings about it; and (c) write as much as you are able.
References


