

Step 1 Writing Guide

We admitted to ourselves that we were powerless over _____ and that our lives had become unmanageable. (Alcohol, Lust, Gambling, Compulsive Overeating, Compulsive Spending, etc.)

This step is an experience--a realization, a process. As long as we feel that we are in control, we are deceiving ourselves. As long as we try to fix our problem, it will not work. As long as we minimize the effects of our "substance" or "behavior" there is no need to do any of the other steps as there is no need to give it up.

Many of us had momentary realizations that this is probably not good for me. So we may stop momentarily, until we pick it up again.

The 1st step inventory is basic two things:

1. We can not stop and really are **powerless**.
2. We have had negative effects of our use and thus, our lives have become **unmanageable**.

So we **write out a personal story** of our history of how our use has affected our lives. We write out all the ways we tried to **control our using** and stop and how we failed staying stopped, or we couldn't stop at all. [we are powerless]. We admit formally to another person (or in a 12 step group) that we cannot stop. We also write out how our lives have **been affected by our use**. [how our lives are unmanageable].

Suggested Reading:

- Read Step 1 of the *12 Steps and 12 Traditions(12X12)*
- Read Chapter 5 of Alcoholics Anonymous (
- Read the Step in either NA, SA or GA that is specific to your program. In addition for Sexaholics, read the *Step Into Action*, the section on Step 1

Then do the writing. This, for many, is actually doing the step work.

Here are some questions to help. This is not meant to be a question and answer exercise, but to help stir up the ground where we have buried our addiction.

Spiritually

How has the addiction affected me spiritually?

How has the addiction affected my relationship with God?

Physically

How has the addiction affected me physically?

I have hurt myself while using?

Have I neglected my body while using?

Have I minimized the effects of the drug/alcohol/sex/overeating to my body?

Mentally

Have I had a pattern of not remember what I just did?

Have I had obsessional thinking?

Have I obsessed about using?

Relationships

How has the addiction affected my relationships?

How has my addiction hurt others? My spouse, children, family and friends?

How have I been self centered, not thinking about how my use/behavior has affected others?

Where is my confidence level?

Have I led a secret life?

How have I minimized my addiction or use?

How did I pretend to be not affected by my use and what was that like?

Addicts struggle with impression management. How have I tried to impress people or “make” people think highly of me to compensate for low self esteem?

Am I overly sensitive which leads to resentment which leads to acting out because things are not going as I planned. (see Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, pgs. 60-66)

Emotionally

How has the addiction affected me emotionally?

Have I been depressed?

Have I been anxious?

Did I feel like I was going to go insane or lose my mind?

Have I tried to control my emotions by using? Using the drug to make me feel better, not so ashamed. Did it work?

How did the ‘drug’ initially work for me and how did it make me feel?

What were the long term effects of my use emotionally?

Was I grumpy, irritable and resentful?

The natural state of an alcoholic (or any addict) is “irritable, restless and discontent.”

Addicts tend to not have a lot of peace or serenity. How does this fit my life?

Have I felt guilty?

Have I felt shameful?

Financially

How has the addiction affected me financially?

How much money have I spent on my addiction? (estimate)

How much money have I lost due to my addiction?

How much money have I mismanaged because of my addiction?

Dangers and using with inferiors

Where there any dangerous episodes?

Has my addiction led me to places or people I would not normally associate with?

Has my addiction led me to ignore my morals and philosophy of living?

Have I gotten into a relationship with someone that I would not normally associate with?

Have I sworn that I would stop and then go do it again?

Have I used anniversaries, birthdays, special days or seasons to try to stop?

How have I tried to stop and how has it not worked?

Examples: Trying to stop drinking by just drinking one.
 Trying to stop lusting by getting rid of the internet just to find
 oneself signing up again.
 Trying to stop spending by being on a strict budget.
 Trying to stop overeating by being on a diet.

This should get you started in writing Step 1. The key is to do it. It should only take about 20 minutes to read it. So, you don't need something that is too long, nor should it be too short. At the beginning, I said it was a story. I have heard many 1st steps that was a story, but really didn't admit powerlessness nor shared much of the unmanageability, how it hurt them. So don't get lost in the story.

In the early days of AA, many did a number of the steps in about 2 weeks. The problem with addiction is it makes us delay in working the steps. Our procrastination comes up and tempts us to find something more important to do. I tell you, this is one of the most amazing things you can do for your self. Also, in the early days of AA the sponsor sometimes helped the sponsee write the steps. I am not quite sure what this looked like, but it was probably helpful in getting the job done.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at Erik Bohlin, mail@erikbohlin.net