

Valued Living Questionnaire

Working Manual V. 1-15-08

Some Clinical and Theoretical Issues

This questionnaire is under development in our research group. We have used it clinically and are now in the process of writing up the psychometric data. We currently have a manuscript under review. The manuscript can be downloaded from www.contextualpsychology.org. (Just search for VLQ there.) This manuscript contains preliminary psychometric data on the VLQ. If you are interested in the development of this instrument, please contact:

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Scoring Instructions: the Valued Living composite is calculated multiplying the Importance and Consistency responses for each domain and then calculating the mean of those scores. The resulting Valued Living Composite scores can range from 10-100.

Original manuals for the use of the VLQ used discrepancy scores (*consistency minus importance*). We still use discrepancies between consistency and importance clinically. However, we now recommend using only the composite scores if you are using the instrument as an assessment.

Because we continue to be interested in discrepancies in clinical practice, we have retained instructions on the potential meaning and examination of discrepancies.

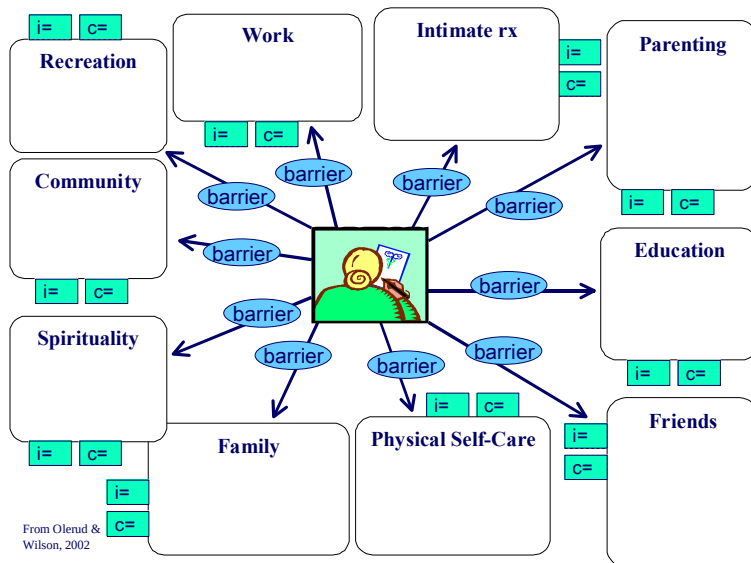
There are several domains we are interested in exploring. We would like to examine the clinical implications of the following:

1. High discrepancy (should be a lot of distress and what we think of, in our group, as core pathological functioning and a core source of self-generated distress— not doing what you value)
2. Extreme high total importance score (looks pretty common at present, probably just high social desirability)
3. Extreme low total importance score (clinically interesting— sometimes see this among academically failing youth, for example. My guess is that we will see this among people who have resigned themselves to some sorry situation— who feel no way out— defended. Definitely interview to determine whether they are even answering the question. Sometimes you will ask about a domain that they endorse as unimportant and what they will say is that it's not possible. Whether it is possible is a different question and one that we will explore. Here we just want importance.)
4. Extreme high total consistency score (could be real, but could also be really inflated sense of authenticity, or with very high social desirability/defensiveness)
5. Extreme low total consistency score— self-deprecation, guilt, very interesting to treat me thinks
6. What we are currently calling "strange discrepancy score"— that is, where a client expresses very low importance scores and high consistency scores. This would be an odd configuration— might be nothing,

like I am great at civic life. I don't really care about it personally, but my spouse really does, so I invest in it, but it is really for love of her, not civic life itself. Might also be interesting if some high importance were low consistency, but low importance were high consistency. Raises an important treatment question— why are you invested in these areas you don't care about?

In-Session Values Work

- Use white board or paper
- 4 parts:
 - Importance (rating)
 - Intention
 - "I spend time regularly with my kids. It is fun to just hang out. My connection to them is rich and meaningful."
 - Consistency (rating)
 - During the past week, how well did your activities coincide with your intention in each life domain
 - Barriers
 - Set physical barriers to one side
 - Do exposure and defusion with psychological barriers



Initial Values Work

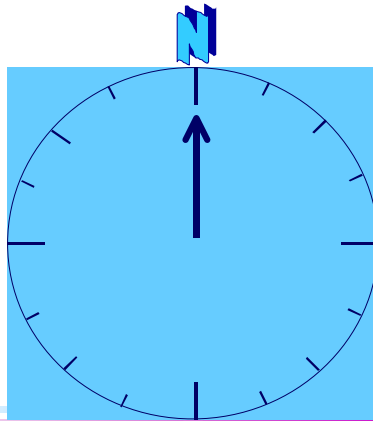
- Whole person
- Examine high value, low consistency
- Examine low value (adaptation?)
- If an area of your life could change, which would it be?
- What if there were something extraordinary for you—something just out beyond what you can imagine?
- And, what if the stuff in your life that feels as though it is burying you alive could be an important piece of what makes something extraordinary happen?
- The Mule in the Well metaphor(ACTified)

A Behavioral Compass

- What if your intention were true north?
- Over the past week?
- Does that action head true north?
- If that thought could give advice, would the advise head you north?
- Being an intention.

Parenting

"I spend time regularly with my kids. It is fun to just hang out. My connection to them is rich and meaningful."

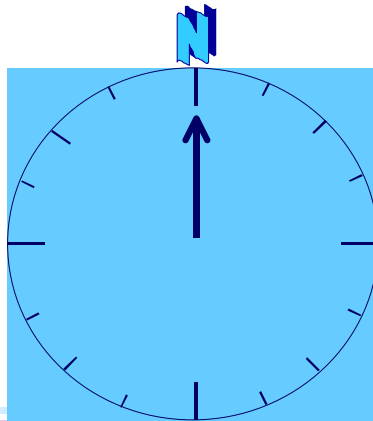


- If that thought (emotion, bodily state, memory, conversation) could give advice, would the advise head you north?

- What advise would the value give right now?
- What would you advise someone else to do?
- What would you advise your child to do?
- Use as material for exposure/defusion

Parenting

"I spend time regularly with my kids. It is fun to just hang out. My connection to them is rich and meaningful."



What have you tried to manage, control, reduce symptoms?	Results Short term: Were symptoms reduced?	Results Long term: Have you come closer to the way you want your life to be?	What does your experience tell you about this solution?
Physical Therapy	Temporary	No	Didn't work, felt good for the moment
Sick Leave	Temporary	No	Didn't work, lost my job
Pain Killers	Temporary	No	Didn't work, got dependent on drugs
Rest	Temporary	No	Just got more tired
Avoided Physical Work	Temporary	No	Got weaker
Alternative Therapy	I hoped, but no	No	Just cost a lot of money

From Olerud & Wilson, 2002

Valued-Events Scheduling

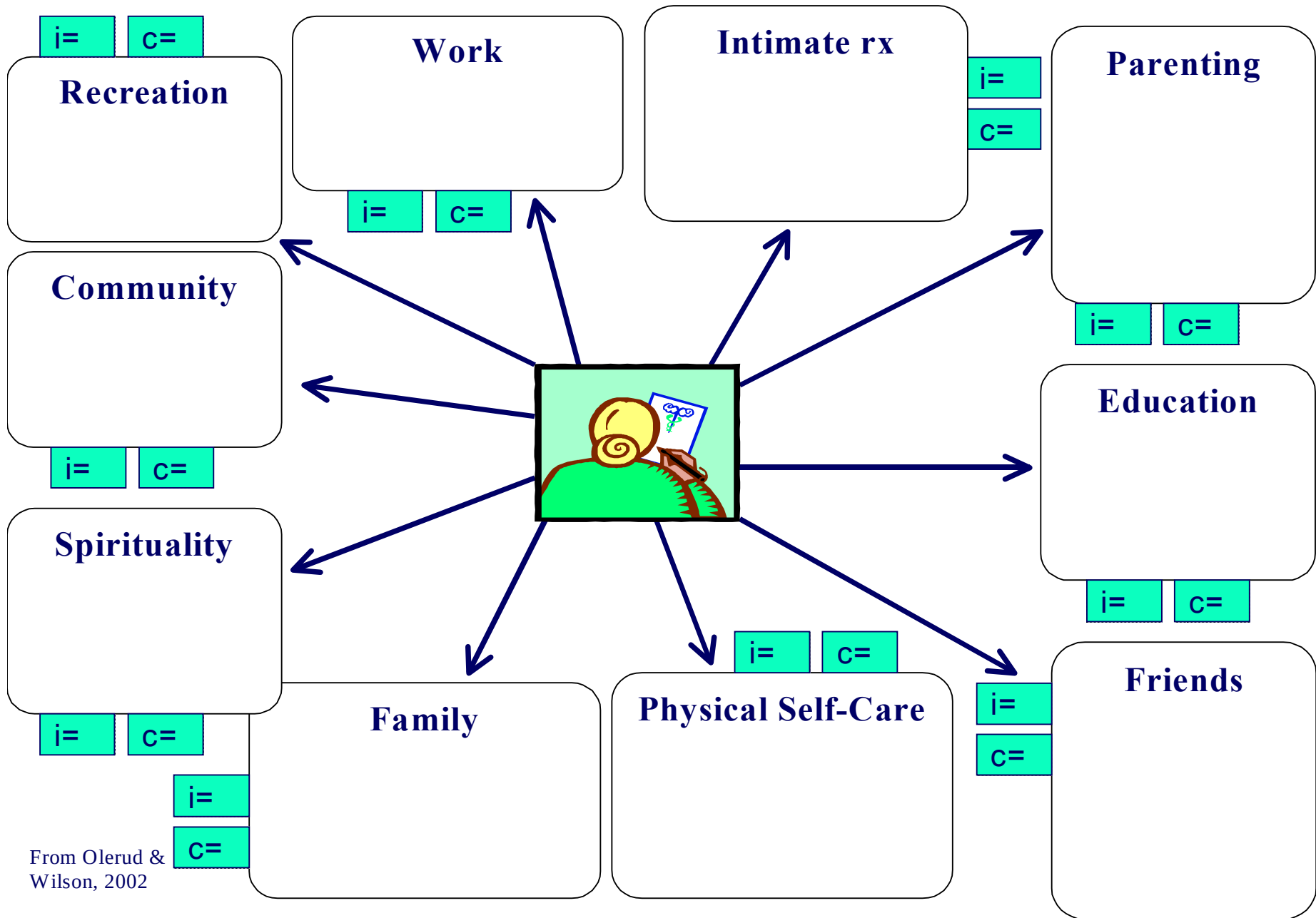
- Generate values-consistent activities in each domain
 - Rate important
 - Report frequency over past week
- Parenting
 - Imp__Frq__: 20 minutes child-directed play
 - Imp__Frq__: Read to kids
 - Imp__Frq__: Sit down to dinner with whole family without distractions (no phone, TV, newspaper)
 - Imp__Frq__: Go for a walk with kids
- Multiply Importance X Frequency and sum for total valued events score

Building Broad and Flexible Repertoires Exposure and Defusion Mixed Throughout

- Watch for barriers to emerge in session
- Use defusion/exposure to build flexibility with physical and psychological barriers
 - Use model values/exposure session
 - Exposure/Defusion persistently reconnect to value
 - Persistently renew the contract
 - If stepping into this could make a difference—would you step

Building Broad and Flexible Repertoires Exposure and Defusion Mixed Throughout

- Physical barriers
 - Momentarily set to one side—see what else emerges (If that weren't an issue, then what?)
 - Do exposure/defusion with associated thoughts, emotions, memories, bodily states
 - If these physical barriers generate too much avoidance, other solutions may not even occur as possible
- Psychological barriers
 - Do exposure/defusion with any and all verbal material that emerges as a barrier, including "I don't understand," "I can't," "I can't stand X," "X just can't happen," fears about forever, fears about always



NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN ACT VALUES INTERVENTIONS

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The following are two writing sessions constructed for use in working with clients at risk for academic failure. We have sometimes had difficulty getting clients engaged fully in the values work. At times, when addressed directly, clients will produce a relatively lean, conventional endorsement of valued domains. In the area of academic success, for example, who doesn't want academic success? It's a bit like mom, the flag, and apple pie. In order to help the client connect with these values in the context of avoided fearful thoughts, we have devised some therapy sessions that incorporate experiential exercises and emotionally expressive writing as a bridge to discussion of valued ends that will ultimately direct the treatment.

Although these sessions are designed for an academic risk case, the content can be readily adapted to other sorts of difficulties. Simply replace the avoided historical and feared future outcomes used in these sessions and replace them with material relevant to another valued domain. The client need not accept failure, but if they cannot tolerate thoughts and feelings associated with failure, they cannot play for success. Any major undertaking will generate fears about failure. These sessions are based on the assumption that our clients need a broad and flexible repertoire with respect to these and other difficult psychological content in order to pursue a life they would find rich and meaningful.

Introduction to Values/Defusion-Exposure Session

Therapist: We will be doing several things in this session. Some of the things we will do may be emotionally painful. If engaging in these could be useful to you in furthering your academic and personal goals, would it be worth it? Would you be willing?

(Here, we are about to do some exposure. Notice that we do the exposure in the context of client values.

That is, the pain of the exercise is dignified by placing it in the service of values. The exercise is not characterized as a way to lessen discomfort. Instead, it is characterized as increasing discomfort in the service of values.)

If the client responds in the affirmative:

Therapist: First, we will be doing an eyes-closed exercise. During the exercise, I will ask you to close your eyes and follow my voice. If you become distracted, that is quite normal, and you should simply return to the sound of my voice and continue with the exercise. After the exercise, I am going to ask you to do some writing. We won't talk until after the exercise and the writing are finished. I will be leaving the room while you write and will return and let you know, when the time for writing is complete. (Go over writing instructions with the client and be sure that they understand the task. You should not interrupt the flow of events with additional instructions after the exercise.)

In this particular project we were working with students at serious risk for academic failure. I had interviewed the client about previous academic failures, and he had reported failing the ninth grade as being particularly salient. I asked about the details of the client finding out about flunking, where he was, the time of day and location, what people had said to him, how they had treated him, things he thought and felt at that time. Armed with these details, begin the exercise. Be certain to gather contextual details as they can add significantly to your ability to facilitate the client's engagement in the exercise.

Experiential Defusion-Exposure Exercise

The form of this exercise is quite flexible. The function is to do exposure with respect to difficult and avoided psychological material, such as fears about the future and regrets about the past. The content of the exercise can be altered depending on the particulars of the valued domain targeted for intervention.

Begin the exercise by asking the client to sit upright with their legs and arms uncrossed and their feet flat on the ground. This posture tends to remain reasonably comfortable throughout the exercise and makes the client's need to adjust their position less likely to interfere with the exercise. The exercise should be delivered in a slow, deliberate, and somewhat sedate tone of voice. Insert plenty of pauses and go slowly. This can be particularly effective if the pauses are inserted where punctuation would not dictate a pause. The insertion of pauses will draw the client's attention away from external events and into the exercise and to your voice as they anticipate the next word. The insertion of pauses of varying length will also hold the client's attention. The client will be asked to imagine certain details of a situation and slowing down will facilitate this process. Follow this general pattern (do not read this protocol):

I want you to notice the sound of my voice. I would like you to follow my instructions. If you find yourself drifting off, thinking of other things, or distracted in any other way, simply return to the sound of my voice.

First, I want you to notice the different sounds you can hear around you. (Here, the therapist should pause and listen intently, then slowly catalogue the various sounds heard.)

Perhaps you hear voices from other offices around us.

Listen to the faint hum of the air conditioning.

As you draw your attention inward, see if you can picture the room around you. Try to picture where the chairs are, the carpet, the door. See what else you can notice as you imagine looking around the room.

Drawing your attention further inward, notice the position of your body, notice the feel of your clothing, where it touches your skin. See if you can notice slight differences in the temperature of your skin in different places on your body. See if you can notice that one hand is just slightly warmer than the other.

Now notice your breathing. Notice the temperature of your breath. Notice that it is warmer as you exhale and cooler as you inhale.

Now take three very slow deep breaths and try to picture the path of the air as it enters and leaves your body.

If you notice any tension anywhere in your body, imagine that each breath carries a bit of that tension away.

Now I want you to picture yourself in the ninth grade. I want you to see yourself walking down the hall of your junior high school. I want you to imagine allowing yourself to slip into the skin of that teenage boy. Imagine that you stop for a moment in the hallway. Look down at your body and notice what you are wearing. As you walk down that hall, notice what that young man sees. Notice who you see in the hall. Notice things you feel, what you are thinking.

Now I want you to imagine that you are in your homeroom. Look around and notice who else is there. Notice how it feels to sit in that desk. The teacher is about to pass out the final report cards. Look at them in the teacher's hands. Notice how you are feeling and the thoughts you are thinking as you anticipate getting your grades. You have a pretty good idea what is coming, but stillé .let yourself feel the weight of it. Imagine the teacher handing you that manila envelope. As you hold it in your hands, turn it over, and notice your name printed on the outside. Imagine releasing the clasp and opening the envelope. As you slide the card out, you see that the envelope also contains a letter. As you unfold the letter, you can see the school letterhead. Imagine reading the letter and listen to my voice: Dear parent, we regret to inform you that Henry will be required to repeat the ninth grade. Notice how you are feeling right now. If you find yourself trying to think of something else, return to the exercise and notice, how it feels to read those words. Let yourself imagine giving the card to your parents later. Picture the face of your mother as she reads the card. Can you see the pain in her face? Notice how it feels as you see that. Notice the thoughts that you are having. Notice how your body feels. Let yourself picture your father. Let yourself notice the way his face goes sort of blank. Again, notice how it feels as you see his face. Notice the thoughts that you are having. Notice how your body feels.

Now stop and spend a moment, allow the thoughts, memories, emotions, feelings in your body to be there. Just take a moment and allow yourself to feel them all.

After a few moments ask the client to gently, slowly, open their eyes. Without discussion, hand them the writing materials and ask them to begin writing and leave the room.

Debriefing the Exercise

After the writing period, the therapist should spend the balance of the session doing mindful exposure to whatever was generated in the exercise and writing. Themes that should be sought are the client's sense of what they hope for in the area of interest (academics in this instance). The question is asked of the client, "What if it were necessary for you to be willing to feel this pain in order to succeed in your academics? Would it be worth it? Would you be willing?" We cannot guarantee success. However, we can guarantee that pursuing academic challenges will bring up recollections of academic failures and fears about the possibility of failure. If one cannot tolerate thoughts, emotions, and memories related to failure, one must give up academic challenges. If, by contrast, one can "make room" psychologically for feelings of failure, taking up challenges, and therefore success, becomes possible (not guaranteed, but possible).

Session Objectives

1. Exposure to avoided psychological content related to important life domains
 - a. Treating conditioned elicitation and avoidance
2. Clarification of client values in the context of experienced losses
 - a. Identifying reinforcers
3. Assessment of the ways the client has avoided the disturbing content
 - a. Identifying ineffective avoidant repertoires

Writing Session 1 Instructions

Making Room for Thoughts and Feelings about Failure

You will be writing at the beginning of the next 6 sessions. We will ask you to write about several topics related to academics, personal goals, and what they mean to you. In your writing, I want you to really let go and explore your very deepest emotions and thoughts. Ideally, we would also like you to write about significant experiences, emotions, and thoughts that you have not discussed in great detail with others. Remember that you have five sessions to write. You might tie your personal experiences to other parts of your life. How is it related to your childhood, your parents, people you love, who you are, or who you want to be. Again, in your writing, examine your deepest thoughts, fears, and worries. As you write, try to allow yourself to experience your thoughts and feelings as completely as you are able. This work is based on the evidence that pushing these disturbing thoughts away can actually make them worse, so try to really let yourself go. If you wish, no one will look at what you have written. Although we would prefer you left it in your file, you may take it with you after the session. After you write, we will talk about what the writing brought up.

Be sure to write for the entire 20 minutes. If you cannot think what to write, just write the same thing over and over until something new emerges.

- You may have had thoughts—maybe fleeting, maybe persistent—about the possibility of failing out of the University. Take a moment and allow yourself to imagine that you have failed out of the university.

Write about any or all of the following topics. If you choose to write on only one of the topics for the next 20 minutes, that would be fine. You may write about them in any order you wish. If you cannot think about what to write next, just write the same thing over and over until something new comes to you. Please do not spend any time worrying about spelling, punctuation or grammar—this writing is intended to be “stream of consciousness”—that is you may write whatever comes to mind. Try to write as if no one else would ever read or hear about what you are writing.

- Remember past academic failures in your life. What memories come to mind?
- What was it like to experience these failures?
- What is it like to remember these failures now?

Remember, write your deepest thoughts and feelings.

Writing instructions adapted from Pennebaker, personal communication

Writing Session 2 Instructions

Making Even More Room for Thoughts and Feelings about Failure

Ideally, we would also like you to write about significant experiences, emotions, and thoughts that you have not discussed in great detail with others. Remember that you have six sessions to write. You might tie your personal experiences to other parts of your life. How is it related to your childhood, your parents, people you love, who you are, or who you want to be. Again, in your writing, examine your deepest thoughts, fears, and worries. As you write, try to allow yourself to experience your thoughts and feelings as completely as you are able. This work is based on the evidence that pushing these disturbing thoughts away can actually make them worse, so try to really let yourself go. If you wish, no one will look at what you have written. Although we would prefer you left it in your file, you may take it with you after the session. After you write, we will talk about what the writing brought up.

Be sure to write for the entire 20 minutes. If you cannot think what to write, just write the same thing over and over until something new emerges.

- You may have had thoughts—maybe fleeting, maybe persistent—about the possibility of failing out of the University. Take a moment and allow yourself to imagine that you have failed out of the university.

Write about any or all of the following topics. If you choose to write on only one of the topics for the next 20 minutes, that would be fine. You may write about them in any order you wish. If you cannot think about what to write next, just write the same thing over and over until something new comes to you. Please do not spend any time worrying about spelling, punctuation or grammar—this writing is intended to be “stream of consciousness”—that is you may write whatever comes to mind. Try to write as if no one else would ever read or hear about what you are writing.

- What thoughts or feelings come up when you imagine this?
- What would your failure mean to you?
- What would your failure mean to your parents? To other people you love?
- What would it be like telling people in your life about failing?

Try to allow yourself to go even deeper than you have previously gone.

Writing instructions adapted from Pennebaker, personal communication, 2001