



Working Step Four in Narcotics Anonymous

This is NA Fellowship-approved literature.

Copyright © 1988 by
Narcotics Anonymous World Services, Inc.
All rights reserved.

This is a model of what a thorough Fourth Step inventory might be. While we strive toward thoroughness, we may find, especially in our first attempt, that we are not able to answer all of these questions. In fact, many of us feel overwhelmed, but we do not let this deter us from being as thorough as we can possibly be.

Working Step Four in Narcotics Anonymous

“We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”

This guide is intended to be used as an aid to writing a Fourth Step inventory. It is extremely important that we work with an NA sponsor. If you don't have one yet, this is a good time to find one who can help guide you through these steps. After reading through this guide on your own, we suggest you read it again with your sponsor before beginning the Fourth Step. It is also very helpful to use other NA literature and step meetings to gain more information about the Fourth Step. There are many methods of writing inventories, and no one way is right for everyone. This guide represents the experiences, strengths, and hopes of many addicts who have found recovery in Narcotics Anonymous. Regardless of the method, our Fourth Step will be successful if we are searching and fearless.

Searching and fearless

Step Four calls on us to be searching and fearless. We are asked to look carefully at ourselves and to get beneath the self-deceptions we have used up to now to hide the truth from ourselves. We search within, as if entering a dark house with a single candle to guide us. We move ahead, despite our fear or resistance to the unknown. We need to be willing to illuminate every corner of every room of our minds as if our lives depend on it, because they do.

What we are searching for here is a complete and total picture of ourselves. We have found that this requires honesty—honesty to examine our behaviors, feelings, thoughts, and motives, regardless of how unimportant they may appear. Our self-honesty is most important since it will lead us to discover how our disease has affected our lives. We have operated with a distorted self-image, never fully looking at the whole picture all at once. Now, possibly for the first time in our lives, we will begin to see ourselves as we really are, rather than as we imagined or fantasized. The more accurate and complete this picture is, the more freedom we will gain.

At this point we need to emphasize that being thorough is not the same as being perfect. There aren't any *perfect* Fourth Steps. We do the best we can to be as thorough as possible. With diligence and perseverance, we write as honestly as we can. Expecting perfection from ourselves can sometimes be a way of putting off writing our Fourth Step. We may also have heard people say “If you don't do a thorough inventory, you'll use again.” But here we have to go back to our Third Step and trust God without any reservations. If we focus on our fear that our inventory won't be good enough, or worry about what our sponsor will say when we share it, we may never get going. This won't be the last inventory we write. It's not necessary to write a best-selling novel; it's only necessary to make an honest beginning and be as thorough as we can be. One of the things we learned in the Third Step was to trust God. Now we can be fearless

and write the truth. This Fourth Step is a freeing process as well as a healing one. We put our faith in a loving God and trust that whatever we write will be exactly what we're supposed to write if we are truly searching and fearless.

Moral inventory

In Step Four we are asked to take a *moral inventory*. When we first heard the word *moral*, some of us had misconceptions of what that meant, while others had no understanding at all. Morals are simply values, the principles that we choose to live by today in our recovery. It is not the purpose of this guide to define morality nor to define a set of morals that others should live by. We recognize that each of us possesses our own internal values. We may choose to define *good* as that which has the power to bring out the best in us and affirm our recovery and *bad* as that which has the power to bring out the worst in us and works against our recovery.

Looking at our feelings can be very helpful here too. In writing our Fourth Step, we will need to take a look not only at what we did, but also at how we felt. Our morals may have been vague or undefined, but even in our active addiction we had them. In situations where we felt bad, or felt that something was wrong, it was most likely because we compromised our morals or were unable to uphold them.

When we came to that understanding, we saw how the steps fit together. We began to see *the exact nature* of our wrongs. That meant more than just the wrong things we did. It meant looking beneath the wrong thing we did, to the *nature* of that wrong. For example, if we stole money from our parents to buy drugs, that was a wrong. What was the nature of that wrong? The nature of that wrong was our self-centeredness, our fear, our dishonesty, and unkindness. We were self-centered in that we wanted what we wanted at another person's expense. We were fearful that we wouldn't get what we wanted. We were dishonest in that we took money without the other person's knowledge or permission. We were unkind in that we did something that hurt another human being.

Of ourselves

It is important to remember that this is *our* inventory. It is not a place to list the faults or wrongdoings of others. When we look at our lives in this way, we see that the nature of our wrongs, our character defects, are the characteristics in our lives that are in opposition to spiritual principles. Our inventory, then, is a process of discovering how our character defects bring not only us, but also others, pain and discomfort and how our new life, founded on the Twelve Steps, is one that can bring us serenity, comfort, and joy. Out of the Fourth Step we discover those things that get in our way and those things that work for us.

General guidelines

When we are ready to begin, we ask God to help us to be searching and fearless in this inventory. Some of us even write a prayer at the beginning of our inventory. The important point is that we sit down and start writing. As feelings surface we must be willing to face them and keep writing. Some of them may be uncomfortable or disturbing, but no matter what happens, we know that God is with us. We can feel good about the fact that we are taking positive action for our recovery. We then ask a loving God to help us, and try to remember that what we write is between ourselves and the God of our own understanding.

The following outline provides a structure for examining ourselves. It contains the basic elements that we use in our inventory. To keep from getting bogged down, stay in touch with your sponsor. Some helpful suggestions are:

1. Follow the outline and take one section at a time;
2. Leave a wide margin so you have room to make notes of any thoughts that pop into your head as you write;

3. Don't erase or cross out anything and don't edit your inventory.

Throughout this guide, there are examples of the kinds of questions we ask ourselves. Some of these questions may not seem to apply to you. They are included to assist you in your inventory. Write each question on your paper as you go. Whenever the answer is a simple "yes," list examples. In each situation, try to see where you were wrong, what your motives were, and what your part was.

In looking at our behavior before, during and after active addiction, patterns begin to emerge. The purpose of a searching and fearless moral inventory is to get at the truth, to take a hard look at reality. What we are attempting to do here in the Fourth Step is not only to see where we were wrong, but to understand what our part was and how we might be perpetuating those patterns. It is this discovery and identification that allows us to be freed of our defects in the subsequent steps. Although it may sometimes be embarrassing or even painful to be honest with ourselves about our wrongs and character defects, simply writing this information down cannot hurt us.

First three steps review. By now you have taken the first three steps with your sponsor. These provide the necessary preparation and foundation for making a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. Many of us have found the process of writing out the first three steps to be valuable. Now, before writing your inventory, go back and review your first three steps. At this point we are reminded that it is only through a Higher Power, not our own power, that we can proceed fearlessly. Before we begin writing, we take a few moments of silence to ask the God of our understanding for the courage to be fearless and thorough. Now we are ready to begin writing our Fourth Step.

- I. **Resentments.** Our resentments caused us discomfort. We relived unpleasant past experiences again and again in our minds. We were angry about things that happened and kept a mental grudge list. We regretted the clever things we had not said and planned retaliation that may or may not have taken place. We were obsessed with the past and the future, and therefore cheated ourselves of the present. We need to write about these resentments now to see the part we played in forming them.
 - A. *List the people, organizations, and concepts you resent.* Most of us start with our childhood, but any order will work as long as it is complete. Include all the people (parents, mates, friends, enemies, ourselves, etc.); the organizations and institutions (jails, police, hospitals, schools, etc.); and the concepts (religions, politics, prejudice, social customs, God, etc.) at whom you are angry.
 - B. *List the cause or causes of each resentment.* With each resentment we examine the reasons for our anger and how it affected us. These are some of the questions we ask ourselves to help us identify our feelings:
 - Were my feelings hurt because of pride?
 - Was my safety or security threatened in any way?
 - Was a personal or sexual relationship hurt or threatened?
 - Did my ambition put me in conflict with others?
 - C. *With each resentment, we try to see where we were wrong and what part we played in the situation.* How did we react to our feelings in each situation? We must be as honest as we can and discover which character defects played a part in our actions. These are some of the questions we ask ourselves:
 - Where did greed or a need for power underlie my actions?
 - To what extremes did I carry my resentments?

- In what ways did I manipulate others, and why?
- How did I behave selfishly?
- Did I think that somehow life owed me?
- How did my expectations of others cause trouble?
- How did pride and ego show themselves in this situation?
- How did fear motivate me?

D. *Situations in which we are sure we are right require close observation and discussion with our sponsor.* Answering these questions, and others as they apply to us, helps us to identify our character defects. We must do so honestly, ignoring nothing. Where others have wronged us, we must realize that we need to stop expecting perfection from them. There is no room in our recovery for self-righteousness. If we are ever to have peace of mind, we must learn to accept others as they are.

II. ***Relationships.*** This is going to include a lot more than just a list of sexual relationships. We have had problems in all of our relationships. Many of our character defects come into play and prevent us from having healthy or successful relationships.

A. *List your personal relationships.* This includes your relationships with co-workers, friends, relatives, family members, neighbors, etc. Examine the positive and negative aspects of each one, being honest about your assets and liabilities. Avoid spending time on the wrongs others have done. We focus on our mistakes, and concern ourselves with areas where self-centeredness and other character defects seemed to prevail. We must look within and honestly appraise our motives. We examine how our character defects are present in our relationships, for example, intolerance. At times we probably refused to allow others the privilege of voicing or even having an opinion, and this attitude caused indifference, hostility, and other problems. We had a need, generated by fear, to “always be right.” We were unnecessarily critical of others; yet when constructive criticism was directed towards us, we were less than receptive. These are some of the questions we ask ourselves:

- When was I intolerant of others?
- When did I feel superior to others?
- How did I use and abuse other people?
- In what ways did I try to make other people feel worthless?

Another example is self-pity. It is one of the ways we manipulate others for our benefit. Indulging in self-pity was asking others to change or to bow to our demands; it was looking for a way to avoid responsibility. We ask ourselves:

- How did I use self-pity to get what I wanted?
- Did I lie or stretch the truth? If so, why?
- In what ways did I make others feel guilty?
- Where did self-will and self-centeredness play a part in my relationships?
- When I didn’t get what I wanted, did I become fearful and act jealously or dishonestly?
- Was I so consumed with self that I had very little perspective or understanding of others?

B. *List your sexual relationships.* This may include deep relationships or short affairs, spouses, lovers, or others. We answer questions such as these about each relationship:

- Did I manipulate and lie to meet my own needs?
- Did I care about the other person?
- How did I demonstrate that?
- Did I feel better or less worthy than my partner?
- How did my dependencies cause me to compromise myself?
- How often did I say “yes” when I wanted to say “no”? And, why?
- Did I end up feeling worthless, used, or abused?
- Did I think that sex would “fix” me and make everything all right?
- Did my relationships end in pain and unhappiness for myself or others?
- What kind of a partner did I choose to be with in my disease? Is that still true today?
- Was sex something traded or sold?
- Where was I dishonest in my relationships?
- When did I meet my own sexual needs at someone else’s expense?

Some of us had sexual experiences that did not fall under the category of “relationships.” We need to write about these experiences and our feelings, especially where shame or guilt were involved.

- C. *With each relationship you listed in Sections A and B, summarize how it affected you and try to identify what character defects were apparent.* Many of our character defects damaged our personal relationships. As addicts, our emotions often run to extremes—past the point of what is appropriate. Writing our inventory helps us to see where our addiction played an important role in our dealings with people, places, and things.

III. *Self-obsession and self-centeredness.* A part of Step Four is looking at how we have been obsessed with self. Many of our feelings, and even character defects, stem from our total self-centeredness. We are like little kids who never grew up. Throughout our active addiction, and maybe in our clean time, too, we continually have focused on our wants, our needs, our desires. We wanted everything for nothing. We weren’t willing to work for what we wanted or pay the price. We have found that we placed extraordinary demands on everybody and everything. We wanted people, places, and things to somehow make us happy, content, and whole. Now, in recovery, we find that only God can accomplish this task.

Throughout our Fourth Step, we have been looking at situations to see what was underlying our actions. It is also helpful to focus on the feelings. It is important that we learn to identify the feelings we may be having. We may want to look words up in the dictionary so that we begin to know what they mean. It is easy to say “I felt bad about that” but we need to probe deeper than that and understand what the feelings are. The following is a list of words that may help you focus on feelings:

guilt	shame	intolerance	self-pity
resentment	anger	depression	frustration
confusion	loneliness	anxiety	betrayal
hopelessness	failure	fear	denial
arrogance	inadequacy		

- A. *Examine each of the feelings listed above as well as other feelings you have identified in your inventory.* Of those you experience frequently, list several situations where they commonly arise. Examine the circumstances of each situation. List the reasons why you felt the way you did. Ask yourself:

- How did this feeling affect me?
- Was this feeling appropriate for the situation?
- Was my behavior appropriate for the situation?
- What did it remind me of?

B. *With each feeling and situation, try to see where self-obsession and self-centeredness played a part. Ask:*

- In this situation, was I feeling or acting self-righteous?
- Did I behave selfishly?
- What were my expectations for myself or others?
- Did I insist on having things my way or become enraged when I didn't get my way?
- How did I react to my feelings?

IV. ***Shame and guilt.*** One of the most frequent rationalizations we find for not working the Fourth Step is our “deep, dark secrets.” These situations that have caused us so much shame and guilt, the things we’ve never really taken a look at, are often some of the hardest to write about and share. Unwillingness to face these situations can be a stumbling block in our recovery. In dealing with shame and guilt we must remember that there are many things that occurred due to our disease. It is important to realize that we are not responsible for many of the things we did in our addiction, although we are responsible for our recovery.

Up to this point in your writing, you may have already uncovered some feelings of shame. It is very important to continue exploring those situations because these feelings are at the bottom of so many of our actions. For this reason, we encourage you to write as honestly as you can. We write about situations that make us feel guilty. We also write about situations where we really weren't at fault. Sometimes we have accepted guilt for situations that were not our responsibility. It is important to look carefully here too so that we can identify the feelings and see how they may still be affecting us today.

A. *It is important for us to identify our feelings and our character defects in these instances, too. Ask yourself:*

- What are the things I have never told anybody?
- What was it that made me keep this a secret?
- Were there any experiences (for instance, sexual, financial, family or work related) that created feelings of shame, guilt, or confusion?
- Was I the giver or receiver of physical abuse?
- Where did fear and self-centeredness come into play?
- Why did I hold onto the guilt and shame?
- How did I react when things didn't go the way I expected?
- Did I blame myself for another person's wrong behavior?
- How did my feelings of shame and guilt affect other aspects of my life?

V. ***Times we felt victimized.*** Throughout our lives we may have seen ourselves as victims. We may have felt this way for any number of reasons. For example, as children some of us were abused by adults in physical, mental, and/or emotional ways. We were victims in the true sense of the word because we had no power to protect ourselves from being harmed. Unfortunately, for whatever reason, many of us developed a habit of constantly reacting to life and viewing our world as if we were forever a victim. Wanting to be

helpless, wanting to be rescued, and not taking responsibility for ourselves are definite aspects of our disease. We blamed and resented others for all our troubles, unable to see our own part in our own problems. It is a cycle that is self-perpetuating. We find ourselves again and again in situations where we become victims or victimizers.

In reviewing our pasts we have found that we need to look at where we may have been the initiators or receivers of abusive relationships. We suffer from a self-destructive disease that magnifies these kinds of problems. Our desire for recovery may make this issue especially important for us to inventory in some detail. Honestly appraising these situations gives us a new perspective and helps us see how we have set ourselves up as victims. Through this process, we have the opportunity to find freedom from our victim thinking and our victim reactions.

A. *We answer questions such as these:*

- Did I feel victimized in any of the situations I've already written about (or some I haven't written about)?
- What expectations did I have of my parents?
- Do I still carry those expectations with me today?
- What was my behavior as a child when I didn't get my way?
- How do I react today when I don't get my way?
- How do I act like a victim today?
- What are the feelings I have in these situations?
- What is the relationship between my self-esteem and these situations?
- What is my responsibility for continuing this pattern?

VI. ***Fear.*** Having taken a close look at our self-centeredness, resentments, and relationships, we see that fear, doubt, and insecurity have been at the core of much of our behavior. We wanted what we wanted when we wanted it, and we were terrified at the thought that we might not get it. The bottom line was that we were afraid we wouldn't be taken care of. Many of our defects and their manifestations were just our own inept attempts to meet our own needs and take care of ourselves. If we look closely, we find that we are afraid of almost everything. Our fears have kept us from doing the things we wanted to do and becoming the people we wanted to be.

A. *We list all of our fears.* Some of these include: fear of the unknown, fear of pain, fear of rejection, fear of abandonment, fear of responsibility, fear of commitment, fear of growing up, and fear of success and/or failure. We feared we would never have enough of the things we wanted or that we would lose what we had.

B. *We answer these questions about our fears:*

- Why do I have this fear?
- How does this fear paralyze me or keep me from changing?
- Am I afraid because I feel I have only myself to depend on?
- How do I react to this fear?
- How does this fear manifest itself in my life today?

VII. ***Assets.*** We have examined our actions, our feelings, and uncovered the exact nature of our wrongs. Now it is time to look at our assets.

Keep in mind that examining ourselves should include character assets as well as liabilities. In looking at our behaviors, it is important to see how we want to act differently. Our assets provide us with ideals to strive toward. We gain humility when we honestly acknowledge that we are human beings, neither perfectly good nor perfectly

bad. We are made up of assets and liabilities, and there is always room for improvement. If we cannot find any good points about ourselves, we need to look a little harder. If we are searching, we will surely uncover some assets. The following list may help you to identify some assets in yourself:

willingness	faith	honesty	open-mindedness
God-awareness	patience	acceptance	positive action
courage	sharing	generosity	trust
kindness	caring	forgiveness	tolerance
being clean	love	gratitude	

These assets show us that we are not “bad people” as we originally believed, and give us the courage and strength to go on. We are clean, we have the willingness to change and grow, and we are taking positive actions for our recovery. We have placed our will and our lives in the care of a Power greater than ourselves and are learning to live by a new set of principles. By continuing on with the steps, those attitudes and behaviors which have not worked for us or for our peace of mind are modified. We are trying to build happy lives in recovery and Step Four is a clear-cut attempt at that.

A. *Write one paragraph about each of the assets listed in section VII above. Try to think of an incident in your past or present when these assets were apparent. List examples of where you practice these assets in your life today. It is just as important in this section as in the others not to leave anything out. If you find it difficult to identify a particular asset in yourself, we suggest you talk it over with your sponsor. We may also talk with other members we respect and in our home groups.*

The ability to identify the good in others is a character asset in itself. It is now time to use this ability for our own benefit; to be as kind to ourselves as we would be to others. We find that many assets start out simply as potentials and become assets only through practice.

What are the results that come from making a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves? Our Fourth Step helps rid us of our delusions and false perceptions of life, reality, and ourselves. The fantasy world that we lived in during active addiction fades as we begin to see and accept life as it is.

Now that we have uncovered our secrets, it’s time to let them go. By continuing to work the steps, the character defects which have destroyed our peace of mind begin to change. Seeing the exact nature of our wrongs shows us just how powerless we really are. We see how futile it is to try to live on our own power. By working the steps we come to believe in a Power greater than ourselves. The honesty of the Fourth Step reaffirms our Third Step because we see, in stark reality, what a tremendous relief it is to rely on a Power greater than ourselves. By practicing the spiritual principles of honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness, we find that love, acceptance, tolerance, faith, self-respect, and trust become possible. When we live the Twelve Steps, we begin to experience freedom from the past, freedom to be ourselves, and knowledge of who and what we really are. This process is a healing one—a big step in the direction of freedom. In this spirit we are ready to move on to Step Five, to share our inventory with God and another human being.

The Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous

1. We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Twelve Steps reprinted for adaptation by permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.