ZEN-JOURNAL

The More Mindful Planning System for Pen and Paper

The Zen Journal Sutra
- A Set-Up Guide

Zen Journal on Substack

Welcome to Zen Journal

Zen Journal is the more mindful planning system for pen and paper…specifically, a notebook and pen or pencil of your choosing.

As a minimalist and a practicing Buddhist, the aesthetic of my notebook reflects my appreciation for focusing on what's *essential* and what's most *relevant*.

I designed the Zen Journal system to reflect these values.

If you're familiar with other analog productivity planning systems, you most likely understand that using a pen and a notebook is much slower than using a digital device for the same activities.

Because we live in a largely digital society, blending the two when organizing and tracking our lives makes sense.

There were times when I was using other manual systems that I often substituted the use of my smartphone for certain functions.

In designing the Zen Journal system, I created a system that blends analog and digital in a way that makes sense for most people.

In the following pages, I explain my approach to setting up my own Zen Journal. However, that doesn't mean that you must use the system as I designed it.

Like any analog productivity system, its very nature creates opportunities for modification and innovation. The Zen Journal system works for me, and I hope it might work for you.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact me [via email](). You can also join me at [Stressing Less with Barry Baz Morris]() on Substack.

Mindfulness

"a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment."

Mindfulness is at the heart of the Zen Journal system; when you create an entry, you consciously choose what's relevant to your life on any given day.

Relevancy is a key term in the Zen Journal system, as it's meant to include only those tasks and work areas that are most relevant to your life on any given day. When tasks lose their relevance, they are eliminated from further attention.

Mindful Daily Reviews will help you determine what tasks are relevant. During the morning and evening reviews, explained later in this document, you'll assess each task's importance and/or relevance.

Zen Journal Components

Notebook: The Zen Journal system will work with any notebook: loose-leaf, disc-bound, spiral-bound, hardcover, softcover, etc. Use what suits you and your work style. I prefer the hardback **LEUCHTTURM1917,** A5-size. ($20-ish on Amazon)

Pen/Pencil: The choice is yours, depending on your preferences. I use LAMY fountain pens.

Digital device (optional): I use my smartphone for setting reminders, daily alarms, appointments, and recurring commitments. The monthly and/or calendar functions in most analog notebook systems didn't work well for me, so I opted for using digital devices to capture and maintain fluctuating schedules. Smartphones and tablets are optimal.

Set-Up Suggestions

STEP 1: TOC / INDEX

- ○ Title the first 3-4 pages in your notebook TOC or Index (The **LEUCHTTURM1917** includes page numbers and an Index)
- ○ Only place items in the TOC that are relevant enough to revisit later
    - ○ new business ideas, meeting notes, poems, etc.

STEP 2: LIFE TASK LISTS (LTL)

- ○ Think of the main categories/areas of your life
- ○ Create two or three pages for each life area:
    - ○ Home / Work / Health / Hobbies, etc.
- ○ Under each discipline, note tasks with the following style: (see photo)

    1 • brief description

- ○ This way, each task automatically has a <u>unique reference tag</u> composed of the <u>page number and the task number: Pg 4 / Task 1 = 4-1</u>
- ○ These reference tags will be used later in
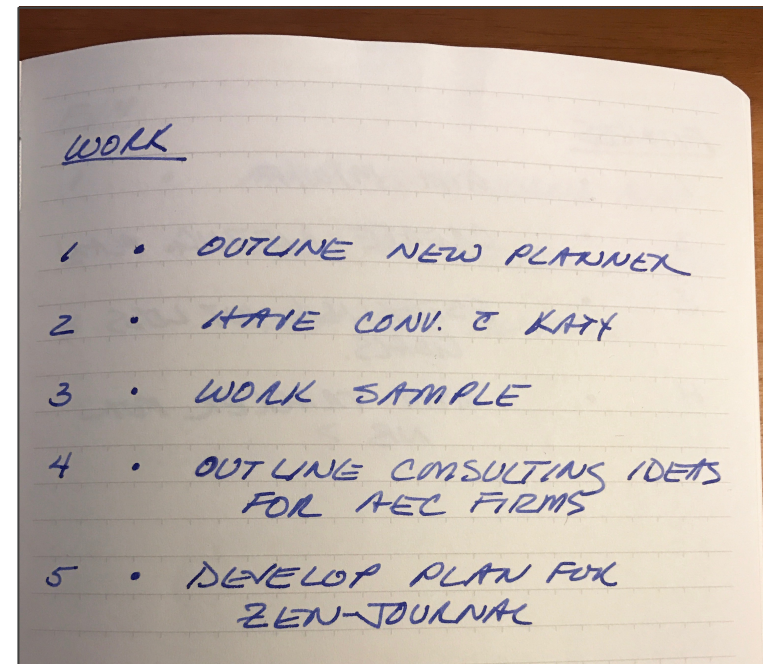
STEP 3 - the QLA

LTLs are a brainstorming area for any task relevant to that specific life area

- ○ Feel free to include as many as you feel are relevant right now. If their status changes, you can ~~eliminate them with a single line~~ at a later time
- ○ Create a spread (two facing pages) for each life area, and leave 3-4 blank spreads to accommodate future disciplines

STEP 3: QUARTERLY LOOK-AHEAD (QLA)

In other systems, monthly spreads schedule tasks on a single line per day. I found these annoying and cramped because we often have multiple daily appointments.

For Zen Journal, I opted for listing tasks using their reference tags and a one or two-word description required for completion during the month.

I make a mindful decision each day about the most important tasks (MITs) currently allocated for this month to accomplish on the current day. This dramatically decreases the amount of transfer necessary in some other systems - rescheduling tasks you didn't achieve.

As stated earlier, I use my smartphone for scheduling appointments, events, and recurring reminders. Here's how to do this:

- Create a spread or page for each month remaining in the current fiscal quarter
- Create a QLA for the year's remaining quarters
- Referencing the QLA, transfer those tasks that you feel are *relevant* and

appropriate for focus during the current month

- Instead of rewriting the same entry again, abbreviate the task using the unique reference tag and a one or two-word description to jog your memory
- I've found that if I only list the reference tag, I spend more time flipping back to the LTLs for clarification
- Referencing the LTLs, transfer those tasks that you feel are *relevant* and *appropriate* for focus during future months in the current or next quarter

STEP 4: DAILY WORK AREA (DWA)

This is where most of your Zen Journal pen and paperwork will occur…at least, it does for me.

Instead of a highly formatted artist's portfolio, my Zen-Journal's DWA is a work area. I use it to take notes for work meetings and phone calls, outline new ideas, write poetry and journal entries, etc.

It's where my life takes shape.

It's not generally for public display on the website because it's where I get things done. The photos in this handout are sample entries only.

If you're an artist who can format your pages and still get your stuff done, *more power to you*.

For me, the beauty of Zen Journal is found in its simplicity.
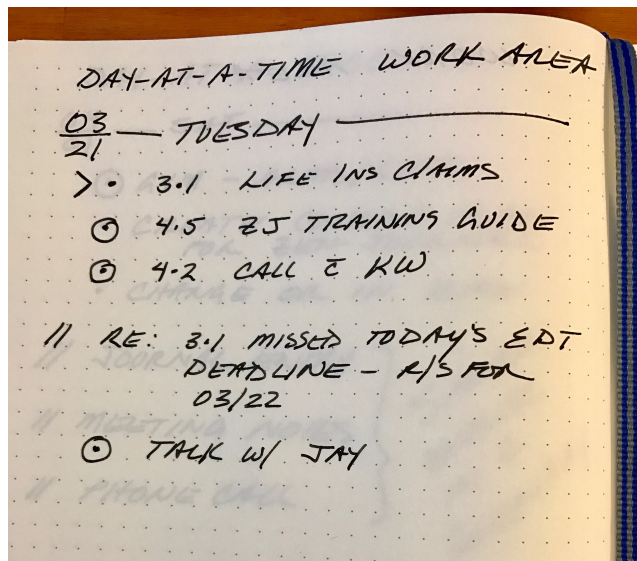
DWA ELEMENTS

As you might expect, Zen Journal's element collection is minimal. The circled bullet is a completed task. When a task is finished, line out the task on the QLA:

> The right-facing arrow is used when transferring a task to a different day

// This is used to denote a change in function, e.g., a journal entry, notes from a meeting or phone call

* A star is used to denote tasks that is critical to get done first

MITs – Most Important Tasks: These are bulleted lists of the top three tasks you must accomplish. I place these at the top of each day's DWA.

STEP 5: MINDFUL REVIEWS

Reviews are an important key to getting the most from any analog planning system, but even more so from Zen Journal since it was built on mindful planning and living principles.

Evening Review: *Yes, we start in the evening!*

Morning Review:

- Mindfully review your day's DWA and MITs
- Transfer any incomplete tasks from the current DWA to the next day and add a * next to them to denote the priority
- Review the QLA's tasks scheduled for the current month
- Select the most *relevant* and *meaningful* tasks for the month
- Populate the <u>unique referencing tag</u> and brief description for the MITs into the next DWA
- Note: Be careful not to overcommit…be mindful of what's possible for you

- Begin your day with some silent time, visualizing what you'd like the day to be like
- Open your Zen Journal and transfer appropriate tasks to the DWA, and review the tasks you prioritized with a * in your evening review
- Review the QLA's tasks scheduled for the current month
- Select any additional *relevant* and *meaningful* tasks for the day
- Transfer them using their unique referencing tag and brief description to the current DWA
- Note: Be careful not to overcommit

- Use a gentle bell reminder on your digital device to take a few minutes to breathe mindfully for a few minutes
- Open your Zen Journal Transfer to the DWA and make a brief //Note or //Journal Entry checking in with how your day is going

FAQs

I hope this brief set-up guide has helped you set up your Zen Journal. Very few guides anticipate all user questions, but in this final section, I've attempted to answer some of the most common.

Q1. Why didn't you include a monthly or weekly calendar spread like in other analog systems?

A1. Pre-allocated and pre-formatted spreads and calendars never worked for me; I'd always need more space, and I found inserting loose papers or Post-It Notes into my notebook was disorganized. I find my smartphone works best for calendars and reminders.

Q2. What notebook is best?

A2. It depends on what you like and can afford. If you have $20-25 to spare, get a **LEUCHTTURM1917.** It comes with pre-allocated index/TOC pages, and all 249 pages are numbered. It also has a great quality paper that rarely bleeds, even with a fountain pen. However, using whatever you have on hand is good, too, but pre-numbered pages are a must. My first analog planner was a spiral-bound notebook that cost me $1 at a grocery store.

Q3. Where are the lists… teeth-brushing and potty-break records? 😉

A3. OK, I'm kidding here… but we humans like to track a lot of weird stuff. If you'd like to insert a tracker for whatever purpose, feel free to do so. The plain version presented here is admittedly bare-bones. It represents the foundation; you can build upon it any way you wish to make it your own.

The One-Page Zen Journal Quick Start Guide

NOTE: *Fold into quarters and place this page in your Zen Journal's back pocket - a handy feature of the LEUCHTTTURM1917 notebook)*

Welcome to the ZenJo System

STEP 1 ~ TOC
- First 3-4 pages
- Only list entries you'll need to reference

STEP 2 ~ LIFE AREA TASK LISTS (LTL)
- Master lists for each area/category of life
- Work / Personal / Health / Hobbies, etc.
- Number each task, event, and to-do
- Assign a brief description
- Separate the task and description with a bullet
- Used for brainstorming everything you need to address
- Leave a few blank spreads for future DTLs

STEP 3 ~ QUARTERLY LOOK-AHEAD (QLA)
- Create a QLA spread for the current and future quarters
- Use the QLA for scheduling tasks, events, etc., from LTLs under the appropriate month using the task tag for each
- Brief description/reminder (optional)
- If a specific date is known, place it to the right of the task on the same line

STEP 4 ~ DAILY WORK AREA (DWA)
- Your daily work area
- Only create the current day's DWA
- You might need one page or 10
- Use a header for each day with the date, day, and anything else you deem relevant
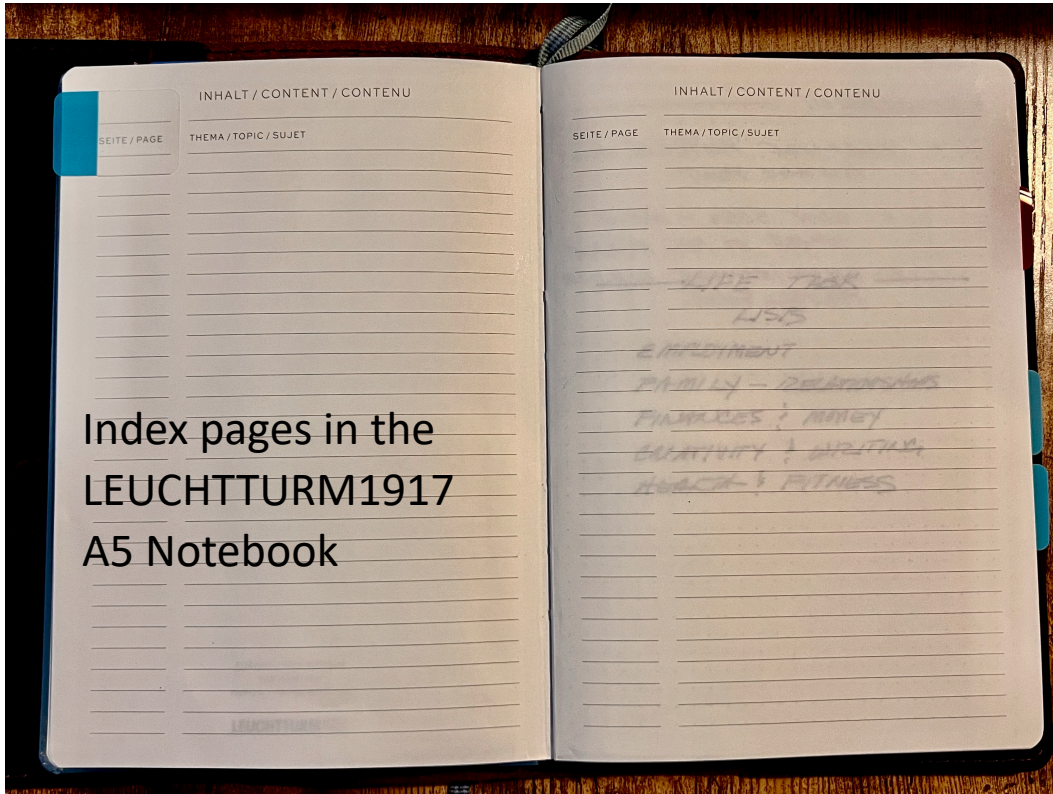- Some like an artistic header, but that's optional

SYMBOLS USED

> Right-facing arrow denotes a rescheduled item
// Denotes a change in function, e.g., journal entry, etc.
* Denotes priority task to be completed first
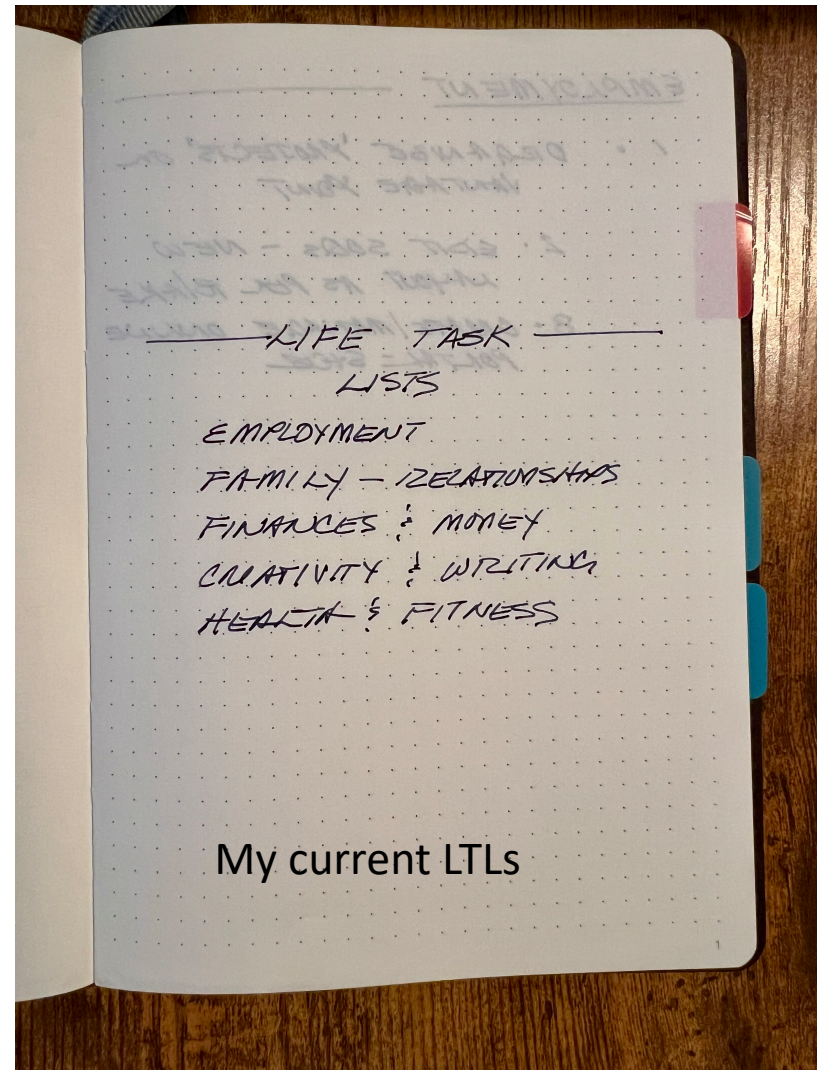
STEP 5 ~ MINDFUL REVIEWS
- **E**vening, Morning, and Afternoon - optional
- Evening Review
  - Review what you accomplished
  - Reschedule as necessary
  - Check QLA for additional items
  - Line out completed items
- Morning Review
  - Begin with visualization/silence
  - Fine-tune priorities for the day
  - Plan a mid-day check-in to reassess your plan (optional)

If you have any questions or comments, please get in touch with me via email here: ZenJournalMethod@gmail.com
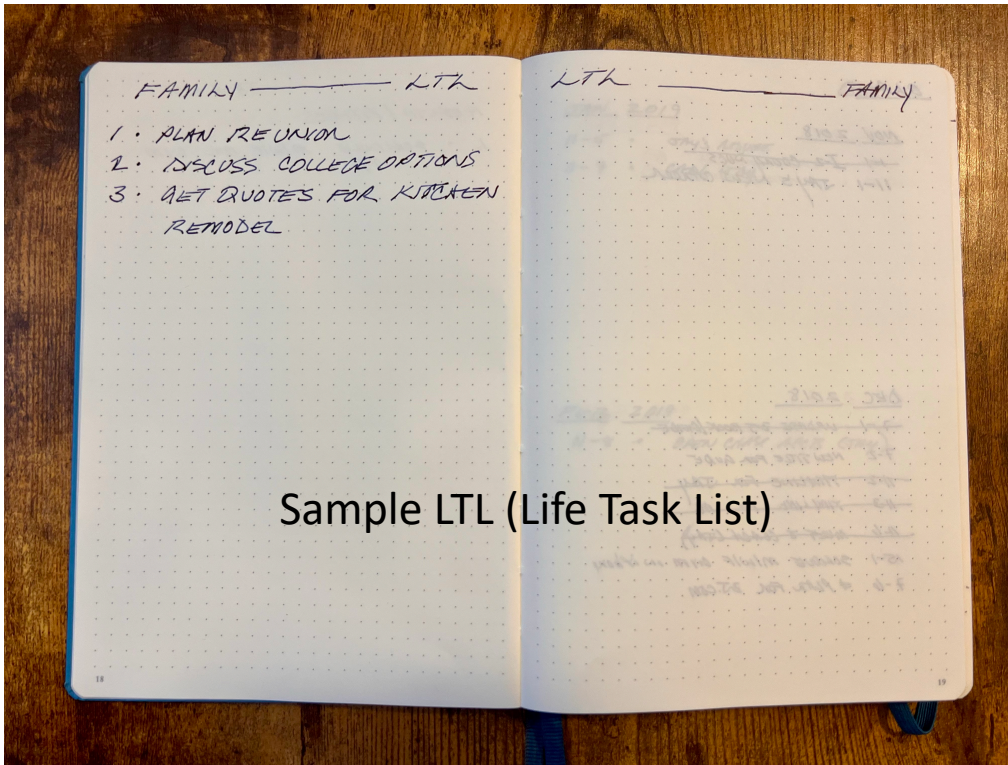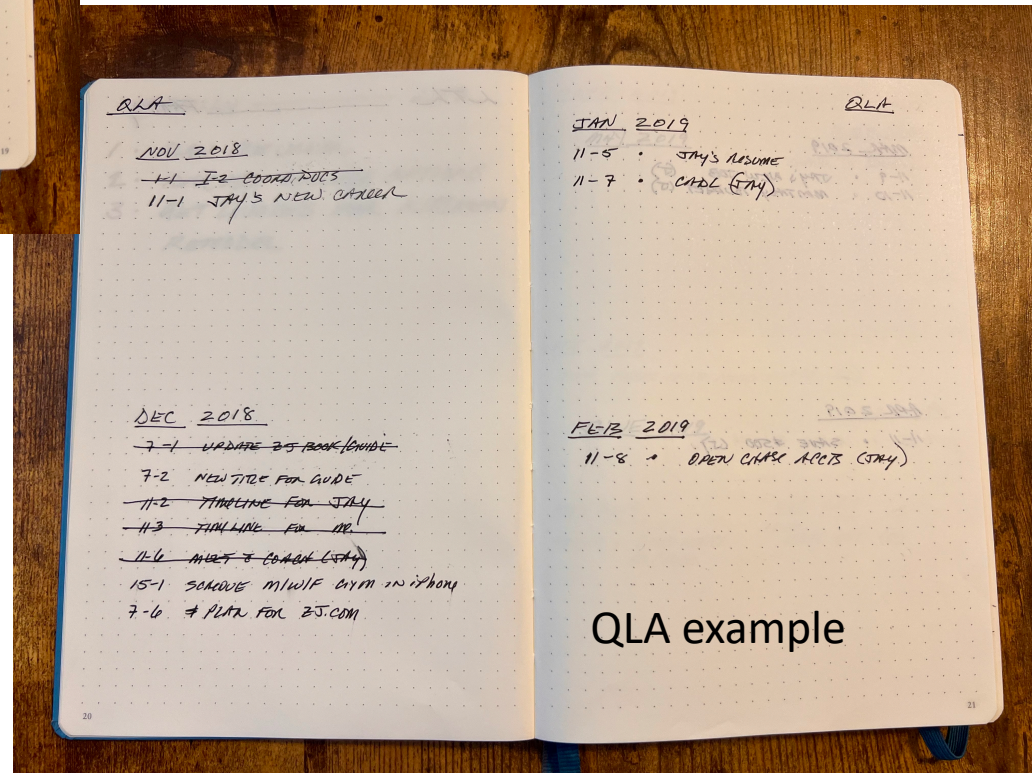
Index pages in the LEUCHTTURM1917 A5 Notebook

LIFE TASK
LISTS

EMPLOYMENT
FAMILY — RELATIONSHIPS
FINANCES & MONEY
CREATIVITY & WRITING
HEALTH & FITNESS

My current LTLs

Sample LTL (Life Task List)

QLA example

Sample DWA (Daily Work Area) entry