The Reader's Commonplace Book

Keep What You Read, By Theme, For Life - a print-first guided commonplace system: theme-headed entry pages, an index method taught step by step, a source register, and a monthly/annual revisit cadence

Free sample - three real pages from the journal: The Commonplace Method (p.3), The Index Method (p.7) and the first Courage entry page (p.11). Method + index + first entry: a usable starter - keep a real passage from tonight's reading in the sample itself. Print at 100% on US Letter or A4.

The Commonplace Method (How This Journal Works)

1. Capture the passage, completely. When a line stops you, copy it out exactly - or copy its first and last words and note the page - and complete the full entry anatomy on page 6: the passage, its source, its head, why it matters to you, and the date. An entry without its "why" is a quotation. An entry with it is a keepsake.

2. File it under a head, not under its book. Your heads are themes - Courage, Home, Attention - chosen on page 5. The eight starter heads fill pages 11-34, and the method for adding your own heads is on page 5. Filing by theme is the whole invention: a novel, a poem and a memoir can finally argue with each other on the same page.

3. Index every entry the day you make it. The Index Method on page 7 takes under a minute per entry: one line in the index, under the head, with the entry's page. Skip it and the book slowly becomes the blank notebook again. Do it and any kept line is findable for life - page 42 shows you how to check the index is complete.

4. Register every source. Each book, poem, essay or speech your passages come from gets one line in the Source Register (p.8) and a short source code. Twenty years from now, the code is how your future self knows exactly which book, and which edition, a line came home from.

5. Revisit on a cadence, not on a whim. Monthly, use the Monthly Connections page (p.35) to set two entries talking to each other. Annually, cull and carry forward (pp.37-38), write to your future reader (pp.39-40), and complete the First-Year Review (p.41). A commonplace book that is never revisited is a warehouse. Revisited, it becomes the truest autobiography a reader owns - written entirely in other people's sentences, chosen by you.

My keeping rule, in my own words (one line - e.g. "copy it the same day, or it does not count as kept"): _____

The day of the month I will do my Monthly Connections (p.9 sets the cadence; write the day here so it exists): _____

The Index Method

The index is not a section printed at the back of this book, waiting to be filled in someday. It is a habit: **you do not index at the end. You index at the moment of entry, one line, under a minute, every time.** That sentence is the one readers get wrong, so it is printed here in bold. Your index lives wherever you fixed it in the fields below - index sheets at the back of your binder, or the last pages of your tablet copy - and it grows one line at a time, in step with the entries themselves. Here is the whole method.

Step 1. The moment an entry is finished, turn to your index (kept at the back of your binder, or as the last pages of your tablet copy - fix its home below and never move it).

Step 2. Find the entry's head in the index. Heads sit in the index in the order you started them, each with room to grow; a new head starts a new index section the day it starts (p.5).

Step 3. Write one line, in this exact order: **date kept - first three words of the passage - source code - page of this volume where the entry lives.** Example: "14 Mar - 'We are not...' - S14 - p.11". Four facts, one line, under a minute.

Step 4. If the entry carries a cross-reference (p.6), write a second, shorter line under the second head: "See Courage entry, 14 Mar, p.11."

Step 5. Once a year, at the First-Year Review (p.41), run the Index Completion Check (p.42): count entries, count index lines, reconcile. An index that is checked annually never quietly rots.

To find a passage years later: remember any one of its four facts - its theme, its rough date, its book, or its opening words - go to that head in the index, and scan the lines. Four doors into the same room; that is what "findable for life" is made of.

My index lives (fix it now): [ ] Back of this binder, on index sheets [ ] Last pages of my tablet copy [ ] Other (state it): _____

My first index line, written now for the practice entry on page 6, in the exact Step 3 order (date kept - first three words - source code - page of this volume): _____

And if that entry carries a cross-reference (p.6), its second, shorter line, filed under the second head: _____

The door I will use most (tick honestly - it tells you which fact to never let an entry omit): [ ] Theme [ ] Date [ ] Book [ ] Opening words

Head: COURAGE - Entry Page 1 of 3 ((reprint))

Courage, first kind: acting while afraid. Keep here the passages where somebody does the frightening thing with the fear still in the room - the speech given shaking, the door opened anyway. Not fearlessness; that is a different, rarer head.

Passage (copied exactly - cuts marked ..., your supplied words in [brackets]): _____

Source (code from p.8 + page/chapter): _____ - Date kept: _____

Why it matters (2-4 lines, in your own words, written today): _____

Cross-reference (optional - second head this also belongs under, and where that note sits): _____

Index line written (p.7, Step 3 order)? [ ]

Passage (copied exactly): _____

Source (code + page/chapter): _____ - Date kept: _____

Why it matters: _____

The fear in this passage, named in three words or fewer: _____

Index line written? [ ]