

GRAY MATTER REFLECTION SERIES

THE YEAR YOU ACTUALLY LIVED

A GUIDED FALL INVENTORY

Before you decide what needs to change, take an honest inventory of what happened, what it required, and what you are still carrying.



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Printable Cover



Before you begin

PURPOSE & INTENT

This is not another performance review.

You are not here to grade how well you handled the year, identify everything you should have done differently, or create a plan to fix yourself.

Our goal is to help you see the year you had more accurately.

This workbook will guide you through what happened, what it required of you, what it may have cost, and what helped you make it through.

- 01** Move through the pages in order.
- 02** Begin with facts before trying to interpret, solve, or find meaning in them.
- 03** You do not need the perfect answer.
- 04** Write what feels honest today.
- 05** Leave something blank if you are not ready for it.
- 06** Pause when you need to.

Take a moment before you begin.

Ground yourself in the present through 3-4 deep breaths and noticing things in the space you are in.

You do not need to solve the year today.
Begin by naming the one you actually lived.

A NOTE ABOUT YOUR WELL-BEING

This workbook is intended for education and personal reflection. It is not a substitute for mental-health treatment.

If something feels overwhelming, stop and return when you feel supported. If you are in immediate distress or feel unsafe, call or text 988. Veterans and service members can press 1 to reach the Veterans Crisis Line.

Privacy: Your responses are not submitted to Gray Matter. If you use the fillable PDF, save a copy to your own device.

SOURCES:

Hudson, F. M. The Adult Years: Mastering the Art of Self-Renewal. ERIC record
McLean, P. D. Self as Coach, Self as Leader. Wiley
Lieberman, M. D., et al. "Putting Feelings Into Words." PubMed
Watkins, E. R. "Constructive and Unconstructive Repetitive Thought." PubMed

Why this process works

HIGHLIGHTS

- *Sustainable growth is cyclical*
- *We aren't always meant to be producing, executing, or going at the same pace*
- *Reflection and renewal is part of the growth process*
- *Rumination circles abstract, self-critical questions*
- *Constructive reflection is concrete and contextual*
- *Putting experience to words supports emotional regulation*
- *This workbook moves in a deliberate order*

The Cycle of Renewal, developed through the work of Frederic Hudson, PhD, and Pamela McLean, PhD, recognizes that sustainable growth is cyclical. Periods of action and accomplishment are also accompanied by disruption, inward reflection, renewal, and preparation for what comes next.

We are not always meant to be producing, executing, or pushing toward another goal. Reflection and renewal are not interruptions to progress. They are part of the process that makes meaningful change possible.

Psychology also distinguishes constructive reflection from rumination.

“**Rumination** repeatedly circles abstract, self-critical questions such as, “What is wrong with me? **Constructive reflection** is more concrete and contextual. It asks what happened, what the experience required, what effect it had, and what is needed now.”

Putting an experience into words can also support emotional regulation. Research on affect labeling suggests that naming emotions can reduce activity in brain regions involved in emotional reactivity while engaging areas involved in regulation.

That is why this workbook moves in a deliberate order:

- 01 Name what happened.
- 02 Understand what was required.
- 03 Recognize what it cost.
- 04 Identify what sustained you.
- 05 Then decide what to keep, recalibrate, or release.
- 06 Pause when you need to.

The goal is not to relive the year, force meaning from it, or remain focused on the past. It is to organize the experience well enough that your next decisions can come from greater accuracy rather than exhaustion, urgency, or self-judgment.

Name the year you lived

INSIGHT

High-pressure professions teach us to record outcomes.

But outcomes are not context. They do not show everything that was changing, accumulating, or being carried behind the scenes.

When we skip context, reflection can become self-criticism.

Start by marking this year's events, changes, losses, transitions, responsibilities, and periods of uncertainty that shaped your year.

Start with the facts, not verdicts about how you handled something. Do not minimize, compare, or explain the year away.

THINK ABOUT *What did you have to keep functioning through?*

What changed?

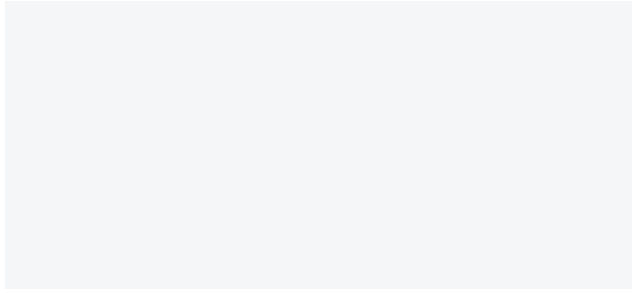
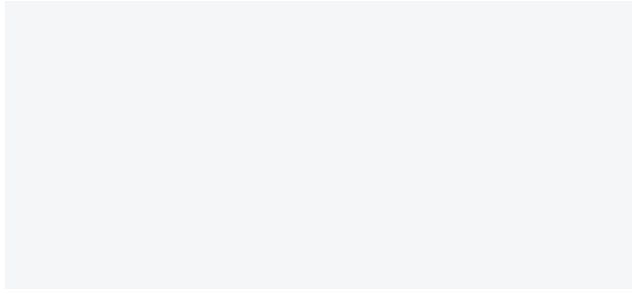
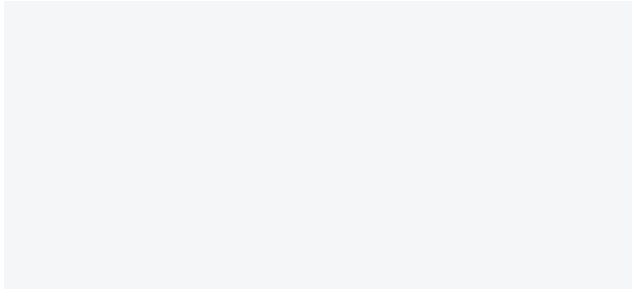
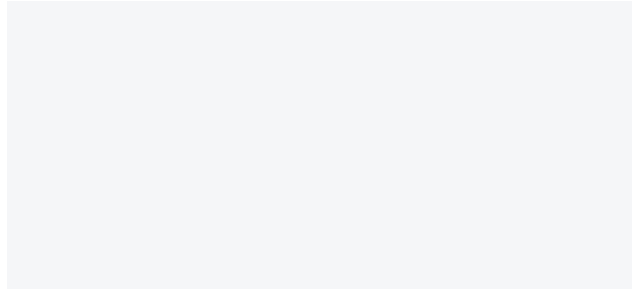
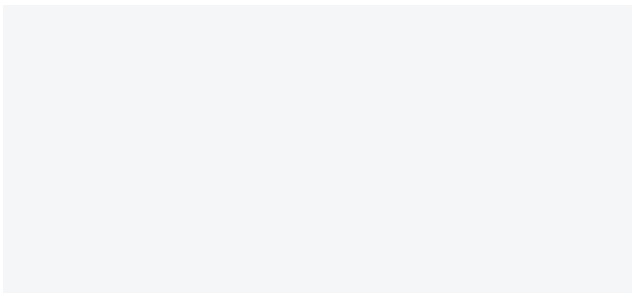
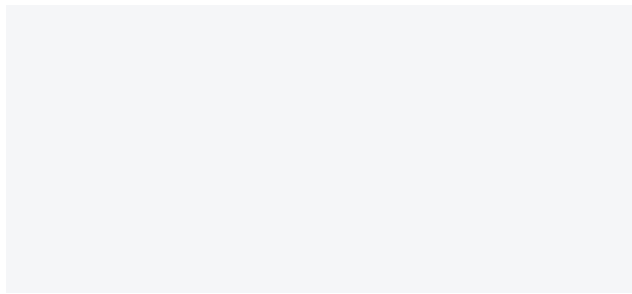
- Your role.
- Unit.
- Leadership.
- Team.
- Home.
- Health.
- Relationships.
- Identity.

What kept demanding something of you?

- Threat.
- Uncertainty.
- Loss.
- Long hours.
- Broken sleep.
- Conflict.
- Caretaking.
- Responsibility.

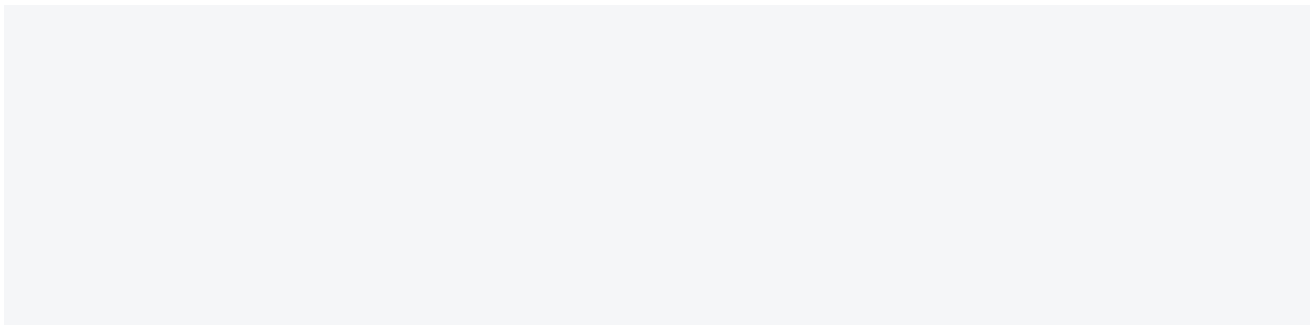
JANUARY	FEBRUARY
MARCH	APRIL
MAY	JUNE

Name the year you lived continued

JULY 	AUGUST 
SEPTEMBER 	OCTOBER 
NOVEMBER 	DECEMBER 

**REFLECT**

When I see the year together, what stands out?



What did the year require of you?

INSIGHT

This is not what you accomplished. It's what did you make it through?

Some requirements are visible. Internal requirements are harder to see and explain.

When we fail to name what a year required, we can mistake the aftermath for a personal failure.

You just named what happened. Now name what it required from you. When we fail to name what a year required, we can mistake the aftermath for a personal failure.

This is about the internal requirements that are harder to see: holding it together for everyone else; still leading when you are exhausted; keeping fear, grief, or frustration quiet; slow disconnection with loved ones; feeling lost without knowing why.

- What roles did you have to take on?
- What did you have to contain, manage, or push aside?
- Where did you have to remain capable despite what was happening?
- Who depended on you?
- What did you not have time or space to process?

Instructions: Complete this sentence five times.

This year required me to _____.

1 |

2 |

3 |

4 |

5 |



REFLECT

Which of these requirements are still operating in your life?

What did functioning cost you?

Continued functioning does not mean the year had no effect on you. Look for changes without turning them into another verdict. A difficult year can require you to mobilize again and again without enough time to recover. Eventually, functioning itself requires more effort.

INSIGHT

*The cost does not always
look like falling apart.*

You may still be working,
leading, helping, and producing.

These changes are not a verdict on your character. They are information about what functioning required.

BODY & ENERGY

Sleep, tension, exhaustion, burn-out, restlessness

THOUGHTS & ATTENTION

Vigilance, urgency, focus, decision fatigue, depression

EMOTIONS & CONNECTION

Irritability, numbness, grief, isolation, disconnection

ROLES & BEHAVIORS

Over functioning, control, self-reliance, suppression



CONSIDER

- What did I begin to call normal?
- What did I judge in myself without considering the context?
- What still needs acknowledgement, care, processing, forgiveness, release, or grieving?

What helped you make it through?

An honest inventory includes what sustained you, what steadied you, and what you needed but did not have. You are identifying what provided steadiness, safety, connection, or relief when you needed it. This is useful data.

It may have been a person who checked in, a routine that gave your days structure, treatment that helped, a boundary you finally set, or a place where you could lower your guard.

You are also identifying what was missing. What support did you need, was missing, or you didn't ask for? Why?

This helps you build what you need for consistent support during the next season.

INSIGHT

This is not forced gratitude.

Two things can be true at once - hurt and gratitude. Joy and pain. Love and frustration.

You do not have to turn something painful into a positive lesson.

WHAT SUPPORTED ME

BELIEFS OR VALUES

PEOPLE

PRACTICES

PLACES

TREATMENT OR RESOURCES

WHAT WAS MISSING

What support, protection, rest, honesty, connection, or understanding did you need more of?

CARRY FORWARD

In the next season, I need more...

What still needs to be acknowledged?

INSIGHT

Grief is not limited to losing a person

You may also be grieving lost time, health, trust, belonging, identity, opportunity, safety, a role you left, or the future you expected to have.

Some experiences cannot be released until their impact has been honestly acknowledged.

Acknowledging a loss or pain does not mean becoming stuck in it. It means giving yourself an accurate account of what changed before asking yourself to move forward.

You do not need to find the lesson, make meaning from it, or decide what to do about it yet.

Answer the following questions honestly.

I have not fully acknowledged:

What did this change (in my life, my beliefs, relationships, behaviors, feelings, etc.)

What did it cost or require me to leave behind?

What did I not have time or space to feel?

What still needs time or care?



REFLECT |

Am I ready to release this, or does it need to be witnessed, grieved, discussed, or supported first?

What moves forward with you?

You do not need to solve the year. An honest inventory does more than explain where you have been. It helps you decide what still deserves a place in your life, needs change, or needs released. Use what you can see not to make **one** deliberate decision about what you want to carry forward in the the next season.

KEEP	RECALIBRATE	RELEASE
What continues on with you to strengthen and support you?	What is valuable but costly in its current form?	What may no longer be yours to carry or is not helping you?



CONSIDER

It is actually still required, or has it simply become familiar?



REFLECT

What ONE thing do I want to keep, recalibrate, or release for the next season?



What's next?

A More Structured Way to Prepare for the New Year

The Cycle of Renewal, developed by Frederic Hudson, PhD, and Pamela McLean, PhD, recognizes that sustainable growth is not a straight line. It includes periods of action, disruption, inward reflection, and preparation. We are not always meant to be producing, executing, or pushing toward the next goal.

Reflection and renewal are also part of forward movement.

Over the coming months, Gray Matter will continue walking through this process:

- November: Recognize what sustained you and reconnect with what matters.
- December: Rest, process, and integrate what the year held.
- The new year: Discern what comes next and begin planning from a more accurate place.

You do not need to become a new person at midnight on January 1. Give yourself time to understand what happened, recover what needs care, and decide what you want to carry forward. That is not procrastination. It is sequence.

Follow to walk through this process

 @hannahlifestrategycoach

 Hannah Walters Gray Matters Life Strategies

 Hannah Walters Gray Matters Life Strategies

Learn more



WEBSITE