

THE BOOK OF SHADOWS

Your Book of Shadows is your personal record of your experiences in the Craft. It may contain rituals, herbal recipes, spells, music or poetry, and lesson materials you've received during your apprenticeship. It should certainly contain a record of your own journey in the Craft and your thoughts on what it is to be a Witch.

In some of the more formal traditions, the trad's core BoS is fixed in content, and must be laboriously hand-copied by each new student. In more flexible Eclectic groups, the BoS has no standardized core, and may contain typed or photocopied materials. There was a point to Uncle Gerald's injunction to "keep this book in your own hand of write"; you're more likely to understand and remember material into which you've put a lot of effort than something you've simply photocopied. And keeping material that's in someone else's handwriting means that the secret of their identity as a Witch is at risk if your BoS is discovered by outsiders.

Nowadays, most BoS's contain a mixture of self-written, hand-copied, typed, and photocopied materials. Some people even keep a e-book of Shadows.

The physical format of your BoS may range from an elegant hardbound book, to an inexpensive coil notebook, to a three-ring binder, to a tablet. The hardbound book is prettier, but the binder is much more practical; it lets you add and rearrange materials easily. What's best is what works for you.

Your BoS should be organized and indexed so that you can find things quickly. You may wish to keep separate sections for each of the following:

Rituals: Every time you participate in a ritual, a record of it should go into your BoS. Include copies of any handouts you were given, write a brief description of the rite, and comment on what you got out of it. If you were part of the ritual team, include your planning notes and tell how the actual rite differed from what was planned. If you weren't part of the ritual team, what worked for you, and what didn't? How might you have done the ritual differently, if you'd been in charge? Why do you think the person who created the rite made the choices they did?

Remember the "24-hour rule": always give a ritual a full day to do its work within your subconscious mind, before you begin analyzing and critiquing it.

Your feelings about the effectiveness of the ritual may change after the first few days. Write a follow-up commentary, if necessary.

Spells, herbal recipes, formulas, and lore: Depending on how much material you have, you may want to subdivide this category. Record where you found each bit of information, when and how you used it, and comments on how well it worked for you.

Poetry, music, quotations, ideas: any bits of wording which express your attitudes and beliefs about the Craft, or which you might want to incorporate into a ritual some day. You may find these in published Wiccan sources, or in the works of mainstream writers. You may write some yourself.

Lesson materials and study records from your apprenticeship. Some of this material may eventually find its way into one of the other sections of your Book.

Your private thoughts and feelings about your experiences in the Craft. This should be kept in a separate volume. It is for your eyes alone, and therefore you can say whatever's on your mind without censoring it. If you want to share a particular bit of this with someone else, read them or show them only the relevant fragment, but don't put the entire book into their hands.

What's the point in having a personal BoS, when there's already so much published material available?

Your BoS is your record of your personal experiences and discoveries within the Craft. It may contain bits of published stuff, but most of it is a first-hand record of what you have directly experienced and learned.

It's a durable record for your own use, so that even after time has dimmed and altered your memory, you can be reminded of what you've done and discovered. When you begin leading rituals yourself, your BoS will be full of details about rites you enjoyed, and mistakes to avoid. When you wonder how your first few months in the Wiccan community have changed you (and much of the Craft is about introspection and personal growth, so this is very relevant), you can look back and remember how it was.

It's an expression of what you've learned in your apprenticeship, that helps your teacher figure out how you're doing. How much of the lesson material did you really understand? What did you get out of the rituals? Which of the Mysteries have you discovered? Your BoS tells your teacher how to help you learn more of what you need to know.

It's an expression of what kind of Witch you are, and how well trained, that will be useful if you ever move to another community. Anyone can arrive from out of town and say, "I was initiated by Lady Highhat of SnobVale Coven in Inconnuville," but if nobody's ever heard of Lady H. or the S-V trad, this doesn't mean much. Even Lady H's telephoned assurances that you're okay won't tell the Elders of your new community much about your approach to the Craft or your skill level. You can spend months being treated like a raw beginner in your new home community, while they try to figure you out -- or you can shortcut this process by giving them a peek at the shareable parts of your BoS.

If none of the above sways you in favour of doing all the work it takes to maintain a good BoS, try this fact: Your BoS is a required part of your apprenticeship. Without a reasonably good BoS, you won't graduate. 'Nuff said?