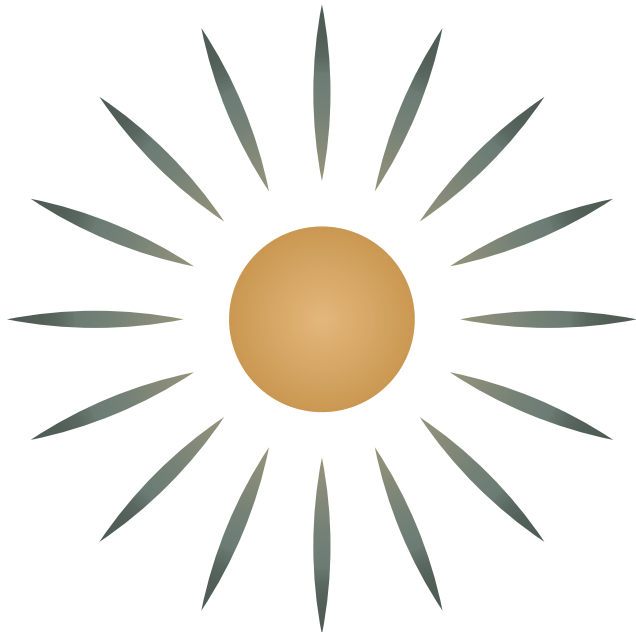
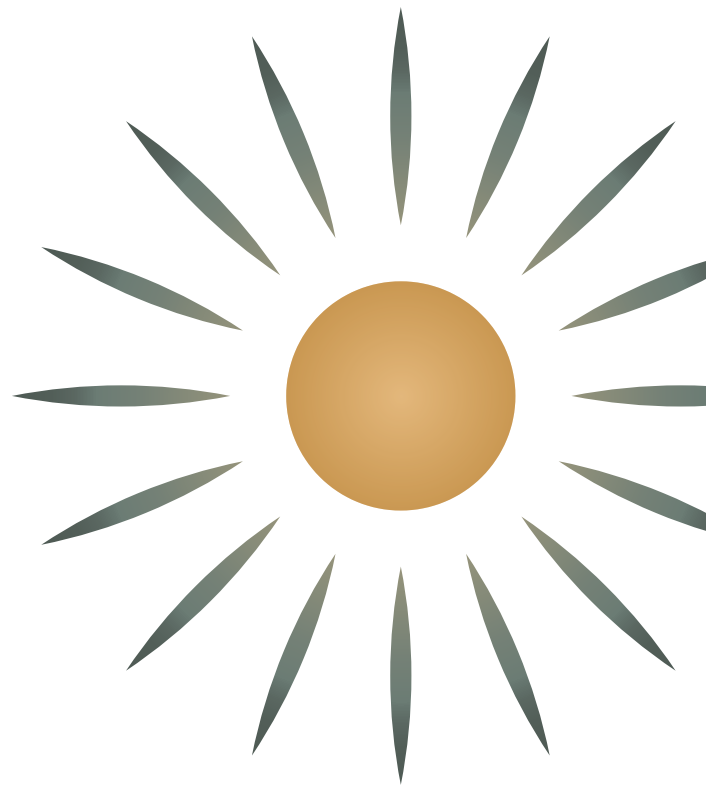


**Illuminate
Counseling**

**30 Day Journal to
Greater Emotional
Attunement**



**Kylie Larson
MA, LPC, NCC**

Hey there,

I find myself full of gratitude that you are here. Choosing to lean into your emotions is a brave and courageous choice and likely not easy. Over the next 30 days, you are going to engage in practices that will increase your emotional vocabulary, create better attunement to your emotions, and increase your relationship and understanding of your emotional experiences.

This journal was designed with you in mind, meaning that you can utilize it in whichever way you want. While I prefer printed pages versus electronic copies, the structure of this journal allows you to utilize either method. You will find the 30 prompts for your journey at the beginning of the document so you can easily print them off. If you want to use your personal journal to reflect on your journey, go for it! If you don't have a journal already, I have included additional journaling pages for you to use if you'd like. Those pages can be found after the prompts.

I encourage you to create a sacred space for the next 30 days to engage in these practices. While I know that life throws curveballs and things come up, try and choose a time of day that typically is open and free from distractions.

Some days may be harder than others. Having a hard day does not mean you have done something wrong, in fact, it likely means you are doing the right work. On those hard days, I encourage you to continue leaning in, be curious about why it is hard, and know that those hard feelings will not last forever.

There is a mindfulness practice called "Loving Kindness" and it involves mentally sending goodwill, kindness, and warmth to others by repeating phrases.

So as you begin this journey, may I extend loving-kindness towards you:

May you be alive, engaged, and joyful.

May you have love, warmth, and affection.

May you find the strength to lean in when things get hard.

May you experience inner peace and ease.

Warmly,
Kylie

Instructions

Every day part of your daily reflection will include an "emotions check" section. For this part, I encourage you to reflect on your day and try and name various emotions that came up for you. When it comes to emotions, there is a saying that "if you can name it, you can tame it." The goal when it comes to emotions is not to extinguish emotional fluctuation. Rather, the goal is to become better attuned to your emotions, name what those emotions are, and lean into and healthily work through those emotions.

To help name your emotional experiences, we are going to focus on increasing your emotional vocabulary during this journey. If you really want to dive into this I recommend buying Brene Brown's book *Atlas of the Heart* or watching her series on HBO Max. This book is a culmination of her research on emotions and processes through the 87 emotions she believes we experience. I keep this book as my "emotional dictionary" and often reference it with clients and myself to ensure I accurately name what I'm going through.

If you're not able to gain access to her book, or do not have the time to explore it in depth yet, I have put a chart that Brene Brown provides on her website that displays all 87 emotions in their designated "places we go when..." groups.

Instructions

Due to the format of her chart, I recommend printing it so it is easier to read or look it up on her website. Go to www.BreneBrown.com, click on Explore, click on Guides and Resources, and type in "Atlas of the Heart List of Emotions" and it should pop up.

When using the chart, I recommend becoming familiar with the different "places we go when..." groups, and as you reflect on your emotional experience for the day identify the places you went. Once you identify the groups you went to, explore the various emotions underneath and see which depict your emotional experience.

87 Human Emotions & Experiences

Based on the research of *Atlas of the Heart* by Brené Brown

PLACES WE GO WHEN

Things Are Uncertain Or Too Much

- Stress
- Overwhelm
- Anxiety
- Worry
- Avoidance
- Excitement
- Dread
- Fear
- Vulnerability

PLACES WE GO WHEN

We Compare

- Comparison
- Admiration
- Reverence
- Envy
- Jealously
- Resentment
- Schadenfreude
- Freudenfreude

PLACES WE GO WHEN

Things Don't Go As Planned

- Boredom
- Disappointment
- Expectations
- Regret
- Discouragement
- Resignation
- Frustration

PLACES WE GO WHEN

It's Beyond Us

- Awe
- Wonder
- Confusion
- Curiosity
- Interest
- Surprise

PLACES WE GO WHEN

Things Aren't What They Seem

- Amusement
- Bittersweetness
- Nostalgia
- Cognitive Dissonance
- Paradox
- Irony
- Sarcasm

PLACES WE GO WHEN

We're Hurting

- Anguish
- Hopelessness
- Despair
- Sadness
- Grief

PLACES WE GO

With Others

- Compassion
- Pity
- Empathy
- Sympathy
- Boundaries
- Comparative Suffering

PLACES WE GO WHEN

We Fall Short

- Shame
- Self-Compassion
- Perfectionism
- Guilt
- Humiliation
- Embarrassment

PLACES WE GO WHEN

We Search for Connection

- Belonging
- Fitting In
- Connection
- Disconnection
- Insecurity
- Invisibility
- Loneliness

PLACES WE GO WHEN

The Heart Is Open

- Love
- Lovelessness
- Heartbreak
- Trust
- Self-Trust
- Betrayal
- Defensiveness
- Flooding
- Hurt

PLACES WE GO WHEN

Life Is Good

- Joy
- Happiness
- Calm
- Contentment
- Gratitude
- Foreboding Joy
- Relief
- Tranquility

PLACES WE GO WHEN

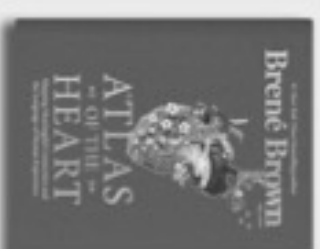
We Feel Wronged

- Anger
- Contempt
- Disgust
- Dehumanization
- Hate
- Self-Righteousness

PLACES WE GO

To Self-Assess

- Pride
- Hubris
- Humility



Day One

As you journal today, write about how you are feeling about this journey. How are you feeling about leaning into your emotions for the next 30 days? Discouraged by your understanding of emotions so far? Happy to be starting this journey towards emotional attunement? Nervous about the work you may encounter when leaning into your emotions? Do you have goals in mind for this experience? Also, do not forget about the daily emotional check-in. Whatever your emotional experience may be, take time to put a name to it and process why you think those emotions are coming up for you.

Day Two

Sometimes, putting a name to emotions can be difficult. This can occur for a variety of reasons. A helpful tool to turn to when this occurs is to become aware of what you are feeling in your body.

A friend of mine lost his mother and for the month following her passing, he woke up every day with a stomach ache. For him, he held grief within his stomach. I hold stress at the top of my neck. I can reach back and feel a bump forming on the top of my neck when I am feeling heightened stress. My forehead gets tense when I am worried. My chest becomes full of weight when I am anxious.

A helpful tool to explore the way your body holds emotions is to do *Body Scans* throughout the day. To do this, sit in a comfortable, relaxed, seated position. Slow your breathing down, attune to your breath, and minimize any distractions. Start at either the top of your head or the tip of your toes and slowly work your way to the other end of your body. As you scan, make a nonjudgmental note of areas that catch your attention in your body. Maybe your jaw is clenched, your hands feel tense, your lower back is aching, or your legs feel restless. If you notice your mind wander, gently bring it back and continue with your body scan.

Day Two

To do this nonjudgmentally, the goal is to not get consumed with why you are feeling the things in your body. Maybe you are feeling stress in your neck and your mind starts to wander about how you should have done things differently so you are not feeling stressed.

Nonjudgmentally attuning to your body means attuning to what you are feeling, but not attuning to judgmental thoughts that may come in about why you are feeling that way.

For today's journal reflection, do a body scan before you start. If you would like to do a guided body scan, where somebody walks you through the steps, you can find guided ones on YouTube. Write about what came up for you after you complete the scan. Did you notice your neck was tight? Your shoulders were tense? Your toes tingled?

Then, think about the emotions you experienced today and name how you felt them in your body.

Taking it another step, you can go through common emotions that you experience and name where your body stores them. I hold stress at the top of my neck and my forehead. Anxiety resides in my chest. Anger can be found in my jaw, shoulders, and hands.

Day Three

When it comes to coping with your emotional experiences there are coping skills that I call *baseline level coping skills*. These coping skills keep your baseline for managing your emotions at a steady pace. Not engaging in these coping skills can cause you to be stressed more easily, more prone to heightened emotional fluctuation, and feel less in control of how you respond to your emotions.

These baseline level coping skills include:

- **Sleep:** While there are recommended hours of sleep to get, this can vary from person to person. What is the amount of sleep you need to be most successful? What things keep you from getting this much sleep? Are there adjustments you can make to help you get the sleep you need?
- **Diet:** Having a well-rounded diet can have numerous beneficial effects. Are you eating three meals a day? Are you engaging with the various food groups throughout the day? Are you drinking enough water? Are there areas you can improve?

Day Three

- **Hygiene:** When I became a parent, a friend of mine told me that if my son has a particularly fussy day to bathe him. She has elementary-aged kids now and she said water can still fix a tough emotional day. Even as an adult I notice I feel better after a shower, warm bath, or day at the pool in the summer. How do you do engaging in hygiene? Do you shower/bathe frequently, brush your teeth, and get dressed for the day? Are there areas you can improve?

As you journal today, reflect on the questions in these three areas.

Day Four

When you have engaged in your baseline level coping skills, it does not mean that there will never be emotional fluctuation or times when your emotions feel out of control. Over the next few days, we will explore what I call *reactionary coping skills*. These are coping skills you can turn to when you want to regain control over your emotions or allow yourself to be better attuned to your emotions. The body scan you did on day two is a reactionary coping skill.

The reactionary coping skill we will cover today is your *breath*. When our body experiences heightened emotional reactions, numerous systems will start to activate. One of those systems is the *sympathetic nervous system*. This will cause your breath to quicken, your pulse to increase, and blood flow increases to the muscles.

Sometimes this system is helpful and necessary, and other times it can get in the way of processing your reactions. To allow you to gain better control over your reactions is to downregulate the sympathetic nervous system. A way to implement this is to attune to your breath. When you breathe, ensure that your breath is reaching down to your belly. You can attune to this by placing one hand on your heart and one hand on your belly.

Day Four

As you breathe, make sure your belly is expanding. When you breathe, have a longer exhale than you do inhale. You can adjust the counts to what feels comfortable for you, but an example could be to breathe in for 4 counts and breathe out for 8 counts. Some people like to have a pause, so it could be breathing in for 4, holding for 4, breathing out for 8, and holding for 4 again. Explore this throughout your day until you find a pattern that feels best for you.

As you journal today, write about how you are feeling, pause and take 1-3 minutes to attune to your breath and do a body scan, then reflect on what you noticed during, and how you feel after.

Day Five

Another reactionary coping skill you can turn to is *grounding*. Grounding involves engaging with your 5 senses and bringing your awareness to the present moment. Heightened emotions can sometimes get you stuck thinking in the past or the future, so grounding helps you come back and be in the present moment.

A common way to engage with the 5 senses is to look around you and find 5 things you see, 4 things you hear, 3 things you feel, 2 things you smell, and 1 thing you taste. You can switch up the amount that goes with each sense to do what feels best for you. You can also pick one sense and really lean into that. Pick an object around you and lean into how it looks. Take time to look at the minute details you often pass over in your day-to-day. You can light a candle and lean into how it smells. Pop a piece of gum in your mouth and lean into how it tastes. Grab a fuzzy blanket and lean into how it feels on your skin. Nature is always extra grounding for me, so when I can I engage with my 5 senses while being outdoors.

While you engage in this, I encourage you to still be mindful of your breath. If your mind wanders during this exercise, gently bring it back to your engagement with your 5 senses.

Day Five

For your journal today, write about how you are feeling, and then take a few minutes to engage in grounding through your 5 senses. Journal again after you have engaged in grounding and process how it went for you and how you feel after.

Day Six

While the coping skills we went over the past few days are what I call reactionary coping skills, you can benefit from engaging with them consistently. When you engage in them daily or even several times a day, your body starts to become comfortable implementing them. That way, when you try to implement them when you are having a heightened emotional reaction, your body will have some "muscle memory" stored with these skills. So, you will find turning to them and implementing them easier than if you only use them when reacting to heightened emotions.

As you journal today, reflect on the reactionary coping skills you have engaged in so far. Is there one you found particularly helpful? What was helpful about it? Is there one you struggled to implement or did not find effective? What experience did you have that let you know it was not effective?

Write about how you hope to implement these moving forward. Would you like to do them every morning when you wake up? As breaks from work throughout the day? Before bed each night?

Day Seven

In addition to baseline level coping skills and reactionary coping skills, there are also *preventative coping skills*. These can also be called self-care and are coping skills we implement to minimize our experience of stress and emotional overwhelm. Things that can fall into this category include exercise, social interactions, and hobbies.

Glennon Doyle, in *Untamed*, makes an important differentiation between our preventative coping skills. She talks about *easy buttons and reset buttons*.

Examples of easy buttons could be substance use, social media, shopping, gossiping, and eating unhealthy. These things will help you numb, avoid, and ignore your emotions. It may feel good at the moment, but in the long run, they are not helpful.

Examples of reset buttons could be engaging with nature, exercising, drinking water, taking a shower, engaging with loved ones, and engaging with a hobby. These things help you lean into your emotions, name them, process them, and healthily move through them.

As you journal today, think about your self-care. Are there things you engage in that you feel may be more like an "easy button?" Are there things you engage in that feel like "reset buttons?" How could you improve your self-care?

Day Eight

Next, we are going to work through 5 core emotions. We will work to better understand your relationship with these core emotions and patterns in the way you interact with them. Each day will have the same questions to explore. As you journal, process through the questions that resonate with you for that particular emotion, and do not feel like you have to answer every question for every emotion.

Today, we will lean into *joy*. *Brene Brown defines joy as an intense feeling of deep spiritual connection, pleasure, and appreciation.* Write about the last time you felt joy. What about that experience do you think caused you to feel joy? Do you notice that you feel joy in a certain place in your body?

How do you usually interact with joy? Are you able to lean into it? Do you avoid it? Do you numb it? Do you enjoy feeling it?

Are there ways you want to grow in your interaction with this emotion? Have you seen somebody engage with the emotion of joy in a way you admired? What about it did you admire? Have you seen somebody engage with the emotion of joy in a way you did not admire? What about it did you not admire?

Can you identify ways to cultivate a more healthy response to joy?

Day Nine

When it comes to joy, it is important to be mindful of an emotional concept called *foreboding joy*. Brene Brown has found in her research that despite tough emotions like shame and fear, joy is the most vulnerable emotion for us to lean into.

Do you struggle to lean into good news or joyful moments? Have you found moments where you dress rehearse disaster? Do you assume that at some point the other shoe is going to drop?

It is tempting and enticing to want to dress rehearse pain because you feel that it will make it hurt less. But, you cannot selectively numb emotions. If you try to prepare for painful emotions in hopes of minimizing your experience of them, you also limit the ability in which you experience joyful emotions.

As you journal today, reflect over times when you have engaged in foreboding joy. Why do you think you had a hard time leaning into the joyful emotions? What emotions were you preparing yourself to experience? Did your foreboding joy help you in that situation or cause you to hold back?

Day Ten

A practice that can help increase your capacity to lean into the more positive emotions, instead of engaging in foreboding joy, is to practice *gratitude*. Brene Brown defines gratitude as *an emotion that reflects our deep appreciation for what we value, what brings meaning to our lives, and what makes us feel connected to ourselves and others*. It is a practice and something that you are encouraged to engage with consistently.

Ways of practicing gratitude include: keeping a gratitude journal, discussing with those you live with something you were grateful for that day, doing check-ins with yourself throughout the day and identifying something you are grateful for, or engaging in an artistic response to express what you are grateful for.

As you journal today, write about something or several things that you are grateful for. Also, process a gratitude practice you would like to consistently engage in. Is there a particular practice you want to engage in regularly? How often do you want to practice this?

Day Eleven

Today, we will lean into *sadness*. Brene Brown defines sadness as *a normal response to real or perceived loss and defeat*. Write about the last time you felt sadness. What about that experience do you think caused you to feel sadness? Do you notice that you feel sadness in a certain place in your body?

How do you usually interact with sadness? Are you able to lean into it? Do you avoid it? Do you numb it? Do you enjoy feeling it?

Are there ways you want to grow in your interaction with this emotion? Have you seen somebody engage with the emotion of sadness in a way you admired? What about it did you admire? Have you seen somebody engage with the emotion of sadness in a way you did not admire? What about it did you not admire?

Can you identify ways to cultivate a more healthy response to sadness?

Day Twelve

Today, we will lean into *anger*. Brene Brown defines anger as an emotion that we feel when something gets in the way of a desired outcome or when we believe there's a violation of the way things should be. Write about the last time you felt anger. What about that experience do you think caused you to feel anger? Do you notice that you feel anger in a certain place in your body?

How do you usually interact with anger? Are you able to lean into it? Do you avoid it? Do you numb it? Do you enjoy feeling it?

Are there ways you want to grow in your interaction with this emotion? Have you seen somebody engage with the emotion of anger in a way you admired? What about it did you admire? Have you seen somebody engage with the emotion of anger in a way you did not admire? What about it did you not admire?

Can you identify ways to cultivate a more healthy response to anger?

Day Thirteen

Anger is a unique core emotion, so I want to take another day to process it. While it is one of the core emotions, it is also called a surface-level emotion. Anger tells us there are more emotions present.

To explain what is meant by this, I like to use the metaphor of an iceberg. When you look at an iceberg there is the part that you can see above the water, this is like your anger. While the part above the water may seem large, many are often surprised to see the massive iceberg that is present beneath the water, too. This part that is beneath the water is like the other emotions present when you are angry.

Oftentimes, the emotions that are present beneath the anger are uncomfortable to feel. I often mask my emotions in the realm of sadness with anger, because sad emotions make me feel small and weak, while anger makes me feel big and powerful.

As you journal today, think about a recent time you felt angry. Can you identify other emotions that may have been present during that time? Why do you think anger came up for you during this time instead of the other emotions?

Day Thirteen

As you think about anger throughout the course of your life, do you notice common emotions that are underlying it? Are you similar to me and often mask your sadness with anger? Why do you think these emotions often get covered up by anger?

Day Fourteen

Today, we will lean into *fear*. *Brene Brown defines fear as a negative, short-lasting, high-alert emotion in response to a perceived threat...*" Write about the last time you felt fear. What about that experience do you think caused you to feel fear? Do you notice that you feel fear in a certain place in your body?

How do you usually interact with fear? Are you able to lean into it? Do you avoid it? Do you numb it? Do you enjoy feeling it?

Are there ways you want to grow in your interaction with this emotion? Have you seen somebody engage with the emotion of fear in a way you admired? What about it did you admire? Have you seen somebody engage with the emotion of fear in a way you did not admire? What about it did you not admire?

Can you identify ways to cultivate a more healthy response to fear?

Day Fifteen

This is the last core emotion group we will process. Today, we will lean into *disgust*. *Brene Brown turns to emotions research pioneer Paul Ekman to define disgust as an emotion that "arises as a feeling of aversion towards something offensive."* Write about the last time you felt disgusted. What about that experience do you think caused you to feel disgusted? Do you notice that you feel disgust at a certain place in your body?

How do you usually interact with disgust? Are you able to lean into it? Do you avoid it? Do you numb it? Do you enjoy feeling it?

Are there ways you want to grow in your interaction with this emotion? Have you seen somebody engage with the emotion of disgust in a way you admired? What about it did you admire? Have you seen somebody engage with the emotion of disgust in a way you did not admire? What about it did you not admire?

Can you identify ways to cultivate a more healthy response to disgust?

Day Sixteen

You have made it halfway through your 30-day journey! Take a moment to be proud of leaning into this journey, choosing to continue leaning in even when things got hard, and being willing to engage in self-reflection.

Look back on day one at what you hoped would occur as you engaged with this journal and how you were feeling at the start.

As you journal today, reflect on your progress so far. What have you learned about yourself? How are you feeling now compared to day one? What do you hope to continue to learn as you keep engaging in this experience?

Day Seventeen

Emotions are like a wave. I used to think if I leaned into the tougher emotions that they might suck me in and I would never come back out. And they can build up to a height that can feel overwhelming and scary. But, if you stick with it, if you keep leaning in, eventually that emotional wave will start to calm back down. And, before you know it, you will realize that emotion has passed and you are back in calm waters.

And by choosing to lean into and ride the wave of the heavier emotions you experience, the wave of the lighter, more positive emotions will also start to reach greater heights than they ever have.

Brene Brown talks about this in her work and explains that we cannot selectively numb emotions. When you numb those more challenging emotions, you also, indirectly, numb the more positive emotions.

As you journal today, reflect on the emotion groups you have spent several days processing. Do you notice a set of emotions that is hardest for you to lean into? Why do you struggle to lean into them? What do you think will happen if you do lean into them?

Day Eighteen

Many people may find themselves familiar with the survival responses of fight, flight, and freeze. We turn to these survival responses when we experience an external threat and our body drops down into survival mode.

But, sometimes, we are our own worst enemies and our internal dialogue is a far greater threat to us than our external surroundings. In their research, Kristen Neff and Christopher Germer, who wrote the book *The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook*, have correlated the fight, flight, and freeze responses with their internal-threat presentations.

They have related:

- *fight with self-criticism*
- *flight with isolation*
- *freeze with rumination* (rumination means continuously thinking about the same thing)

As you journal today, reflect on your engagement with these internal-threat survival responses. Do you engage in self-criticism, isolation, or rumination? What things lead you to engage with these different responses? Are there common emotions that correlate with the different responses?

Day Nineteen

Kristin Neff and Christopher Germer also correlated these survival responses with practices that we can turn to that bring us out of survival mode, and they are the three components of self-compassion. We will explore these over the next few days.

For today, we will explore self-criticism. When you find yourself engaging in self-criticism, Kristin and Christopher recommend turning to *self-kindness*. Self-kindness means *caring towards yourself as you care towards others*.

As you journal today, reflect on how you care for a close friend when they are going through a hard time. How do you respond to them? What are common things you say and common things you feel towards them?

Now, think about how you care for yourself when you are going through a hard time. How do you respond to yourself? What are common things you say and common things you feel towards yourself?

Reflect on any differences between these two areas. Why are differences present? Can you identify steps you can take to treat yourself similar to how you treat others?

If they are the same, what has allowed you to express self-kindness towards yourself? Does it happen naturally or is it something you have to be intentional about?

Day Twenty

Kristin Neff and Christopher Germer correlated flight with isolation. Isolation can mean physically distancing yourself from others but it can also mean thinking that you are the only person experiencing feelings of inadequacy and disappointment.

To combat isolation, they recommend turning to *common humanity*. This means *reminding yourself of the shared human experience, that we all experience disappointment and feelings of inadequacy*.

As you journal today, reflect on a recent experience where you felt inadequate or disappointed in yourself. What did this experience look like? Was your self-talk isolating and pushing you to believe you are the only person who would do what you did? What feelings were you experiencing?

Look at the same experience with common humanity in mind. Can you think of others who did what you did or went through a similar experience as you? Can you think of times when others felt similar emotions as you did with this experience? How does your self-talk change when you start to realize others have gone through similar experiences as you?

Day Twenty One

Before we move on to the last survival response, I want to spend another day on isolation. Isolation is a breeding ground for a pesky little thing called *shame*.

Brene Brown defines shame as an *intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging*. To further understand what shame is, it is helpful to look at its emotional buddy, guilt. When you take a situation, and your self-talk becomes "I am bad" then you are in the grasp of shame. If you take that same situation and your self-talk becomes "that situation was bad," then you are in the grasp of guilt. Shame speaks to you as a whole, while guilt speaks to just the experience.

Shame can often come across as "should statements." Like: I should have done that, I should be feeling this way, I should not have reacted the way I did, I should not have done that. Go back to your day 16 reflection and see if you wrote any should statements in processing your journey so far. If so, that likely means you were experiencing some shame.

Shame thrives off of isolation and it will do what it can to push you towards isolation and keep you there. The way to combat shame is through social connections, speaking about it, and having it be met with empathy and compassion.

Day Twenty One

As you journal today, are there common shame thoughts that you have or has there been an experience recently where you felt shame? What is your self-talk like when experiencing shame? Is there somebody you would feel safe engaging with when you are experiencing shame, who you feel would respond to you with empathy and compassion?

Day Twenty Two

For our last survival response, Kristin Neff and Christopher Germer correlated freeze with rumination. Rumination means continuously thinking about the same thing.

To combat rumination, Kristin and Christopher recommend *mindfulness*. You have already engaged in mindfulness at the beginning of this journey with your body scans, focus on your breath, engagement with your 5 senses, and grounding.

The specific purpose of engaging in mindfulness with rumination is to be able to catch yourself when you are getting stuck thinking about the same thing and then work to bring your mind back to the present. This is important because our emotions don't come with a time stamp. So whatever emotions came up for you in that past event or whatever emotions you expect to feel in the future event you are ruminating on will come up for you right now.

As you journal today, has there been something lately that you have found yourself ruminating on? Why do you think you find yourself stuck on this particular thing? What emotions come up for you when you are ruminating? Is there a mindfulness strategy you want to try to implement when you notice you are ruminating?

Day Twenty Three

When you end up engaging in your survival response longer than anticipated this can create stress. You were meant to engage in these responses for seconds at a time, but you may find yourself in a more persistent state of survival. Emily and Amelia Nagoski wrote about their work on completing the stress cycle in their book *Burnout*.

When it comes to dealing with stress, it is important to differentiate stress from the stressor. Work may be a stressor and fatigue, overwhelm, and anxiety may be the emotional stress. A relationship may be the stressor and shame, unworthiness, and despair may be the emotional stress.

You may think that once you have dealt with the stressor you have also dealt with the stress. But, you still have to complete the emotional stress cycle. Meaning you still have to deal with those emotions or else you stay in a heightened stress response.

Have you ever felt persistent fatigue? Burnout? Overwhelmed and your normal coping skills are no longer helping? Journal about an experience you have had like this. Tomorrow we will start to look at various responses you can turn to when this happens.

Day Twenty Four

Emily and Amelia discuss how emotions have a beginning, middle, and end. When you find yourself in heightened stress or with persistent heightened emotions, you have not completed the cycle. Over the next few days, we will discuss some responses Emily and Amelia have researched that will help you complete the cycle.

The first response we will cover is *physical activity*. While this does include your typical forms of exercise this can also include what is called *progressive muscle relaxation*. This is similar to a body scan, but while scanning the various parts of your body you will tense them, hold the tension, and then slowly release it along with an exhale. You can also try tensing your whole body at once, release it, and then repeat it until you start to feel it taking effect. There are "progressive muscle relaxation" videos on YouTube that you can watch to guide you through it.

The next response is *breathing*. A reminder that when you breathe, focus on a longer exhale as this will down-regulate the sympathetic nervous system.

Day Twenty Four

Reflect over these two responses as you journal today. When you think of a time when you were stressed, can you think of ways you could have implemented either of these? If you are currently stressed, try implementing one or both of these today and write about how you feel afterward.

Day Twenty Five

The next response that Emily and Amelia talk about is *positive social interaction*. When you are stressed, talking with somebody who can comfort you and positively respond to you can signal to your body that you are safe. Remembering shame from Day 21, these are people that actively combat your shame. You feel safe opening up to them and know that they will hold your experiences with empathy and compassion.

The second response we will process today is *laughter*. Emily and Amelia state that this must be an authentic, full belly, out-of-breath kind of laughter. Not the kind of laughter you do to be socially polite or appease an awkward situation. When I find myself in the throws of the stress cycle I can usually look back and realize that I have gone days without genuinely laughing.

As you journal today, reflect on these responses you can have to your stress. When you think of a time when you were stressed, can you think of ways you could have implemented either of these? Who are people you consider having positive social interactions with? What are things that make you laugh? When was the last time you full-belly laughed? If you are currently stressed, try implementing one or both of these today and write about how you feel afterward.

Day Twenty Six

The next response Amelia and Emily discuss is *affection*. An example they give is the "20-second-hug." The time does not need to be exact, rather they are stating that you need to fully lean into the hug and be present. When engaging with this, you will find changes in hormones, lower blood pressure, lower heart rate, and improved mood.

The second response is having a *big old cry*. To cry in a manner that will help you complete the stress cycle, it is important to set the thoughts of the stressor aside, lean into the physical experience of crying, and try to minimize more thoughts about the stressor coming in. This will allow your body to work through the stress and eventually the crying will subside.

As you journal today, reflect on these two stress response options. When you think of a time when you were stressed, can you think of ways you could have implemented either of these? If you are currently stressed, try implementing one or both of these today and write about how you feel afterward.

Day Twenty Seven

The last stress response that Emily and Amelia discuss is *creative expression*. This can be a form of artistic expression and leaning into your imagination.

As you journal today, reflect on that recent experience where you have found yourself stuck in stress. Lean into your imagination today and write about that stressful experience creatively. Perhaps change the characters in the story, create a different ending, or add additional characters. If drawing, painting, or other artistic expressions in this realm is a better fit for you, feel free to lean into these expressions. Whatever it may be, lean into creative expression today and allow your imagination to flow.

Day Twenty Eight

On our last day with the stress cycle. I want you to reflect on times when you feel you have been stuck in stress. Briefly write down those times. Maybe at work, you feel you are under constant scrutiny from your boss. Perhaps you struggle to say no so you find yourself with an endless to-do list and always overwhelmed. Maybe you have a big sporting event coming up or a big project due at work/school and you are trying to not let those around you down.

Once you have written down your list, I want you to observe any patterns. Are there common emotions that are present when you get stuck in the stress cycle (overwhelm, shame, fear, etc.)? Are there common places (work, school, etc.)? Are there common people who are involved when you get stuck (friends, partner, boss, teacher)?

If you notice any patterns, do you feel there is anything within your control to start addressing these? Maybe you can lean into processing the persistent emotions that are there when you get stuck. Perhaps work and your boss are consistently involved in you getting stuck in the stress cycle and you can work on setting healthy boundaries and creating a work-life balance. Maybe you have a friend whom you realize is not as much of a positive social connection as you would like and you can work on having an open conversation with them and work on adding more social connections.

As you journal today, reflect over these patterns and reflect over things you feel you can do to address these patterns.

Day Twenty Nine

Maybe you have heard people compare mental health and physical health in terms of mental health requiring the same care and compassion that we give our physical health.

This comparison is also relevant when it comes to working on emotional growth. When you want to become more physically fit, you do not just go to the gym once and expect things to change. Nor do you stop going to the gym and expect your physical health to continue to improve.

The same goes for your emotional health. Emotional health needs tending to in the same way that your physical health does. While this was a 30-day journey, I encourage you to continue to engage in these practices regularly and consistently.

If you were able to stay consistent with the practices these past 30 days, what do you feel contributed to that consistency? Can these things be continued as you move past the journal experience?

If you find your engagement in these practices dropped off, be mindful of shame messages coming up (I shouldn't have stopped, I should be able to stick with this consistently). Then, be curious about what led to you disengaging from these practices. What were your emotional experiences when you disengaged? Were you stuck in the stress cycle? Were you experiencing an emotion you struggle to lean into?

Day Twenty Nine

Process your emotional experience either way. What emotions contributed to you missing days here and there, stopping for some time, or being able to stick with it?

Day Thirty

You have made it to the last day of this journal.

As I stated in the beginning, I am so thankful that you chose to embark on this. I hope you can sit in the courage and bravery it took to start, continue, and complete these practices.

As you journal today, reflect on the growth that has occurred over the past 30 days. What things have you learned about yourself? What practices, self-awareness, and emotional awareness do you hope to continue as you move past this journal experience?

Just as I left you when you started this journey, I similarly leave you today, with loving-kindness.

May you be alive, engaged, and joyful.

May you have love, warmth, and affection.

May you find the strength to lean in when things get hard.

May you experience inner peace and ease.

Warmly,
Kylie

Glossary

Anger: Brene Brown defines anger as *an emotion that we feel when something gets in the way of a desired outcome or when we believe there's a violation of the way things should be.*

Baseline level coping skills: coping skills that keep your baseline for managing your emotions steady; examples are sleep, diet, hygiene

Body scan: involves sitting or standing in a mindfulness posture and scanning from one end of your body to the other, while scanning, you nonjudgmentally attune to the physical and emotional sensations that your body is experiencing

Common humanity: reminding yourself of the shared human experience, that we all experience disappointment and feelings of inadequacy

Disgust: Brene Brown turns to emotions research pioneer Paul Ekman to define disgust as *an emotion that "arises as a feeling of aversion towards something offensive."*

Easy buttons: help you numb, avoid, and ignore your emotions

Fear: Brene Brown defines fear as *a negative, short-lasting, high-alert emotion in response to a perceived threat..."*

Glossary

Foreboding joy: waiting for the other shoe to drop, being afraid to lean into good moments and joy

Gratitude: Brene Brown defines gratitude as *an emotion that reflects our deep appreciation for what we value, what brings meaning to our lives, and what makes us feel connected to ourselves and others.*

Grounding: involves engaging with your 5 senses and bringing your awareness to the present moment

Joy: Brene Brown defines joy as *an intense feeling of deep spiritual connection, pleasure, and appreciation.*

Mindfulness: practices that assist in attuning to the present moment

Preventative coping skills: can also be called self-care, coping skills you implement to minimize your experience of stress and emotional overwhelm; examples include exercise, social interactions, hobbies

Progressive muscle relaxation: a form of physical activity that involves tensing and then relaxing muscle groups, helps complete the stress cycle

Glossary

Reactionary coping skills: coping skills you can turn to when you want to regain control over your emotions or allow yourself to be better attuned to your emotions; examples include deep breathing, grounding, and body scans

Reset buttons: help you lean into your emotions, name them, process them, and healthily move through them

Sadness: Brene Brown defines sadness as *a normal response to real or perceived loss and defeat*

Self-kindness: caring towards yourself as you care towards others

Shame: Brene Brown defines shame as *an intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging*

Sympathetic nervous system: a system that controls the fight and flight response

Resources

Brown Brené. (2021). *Atlas of the heart: Mapping meaningful connection and the language of human experience*. Random House.

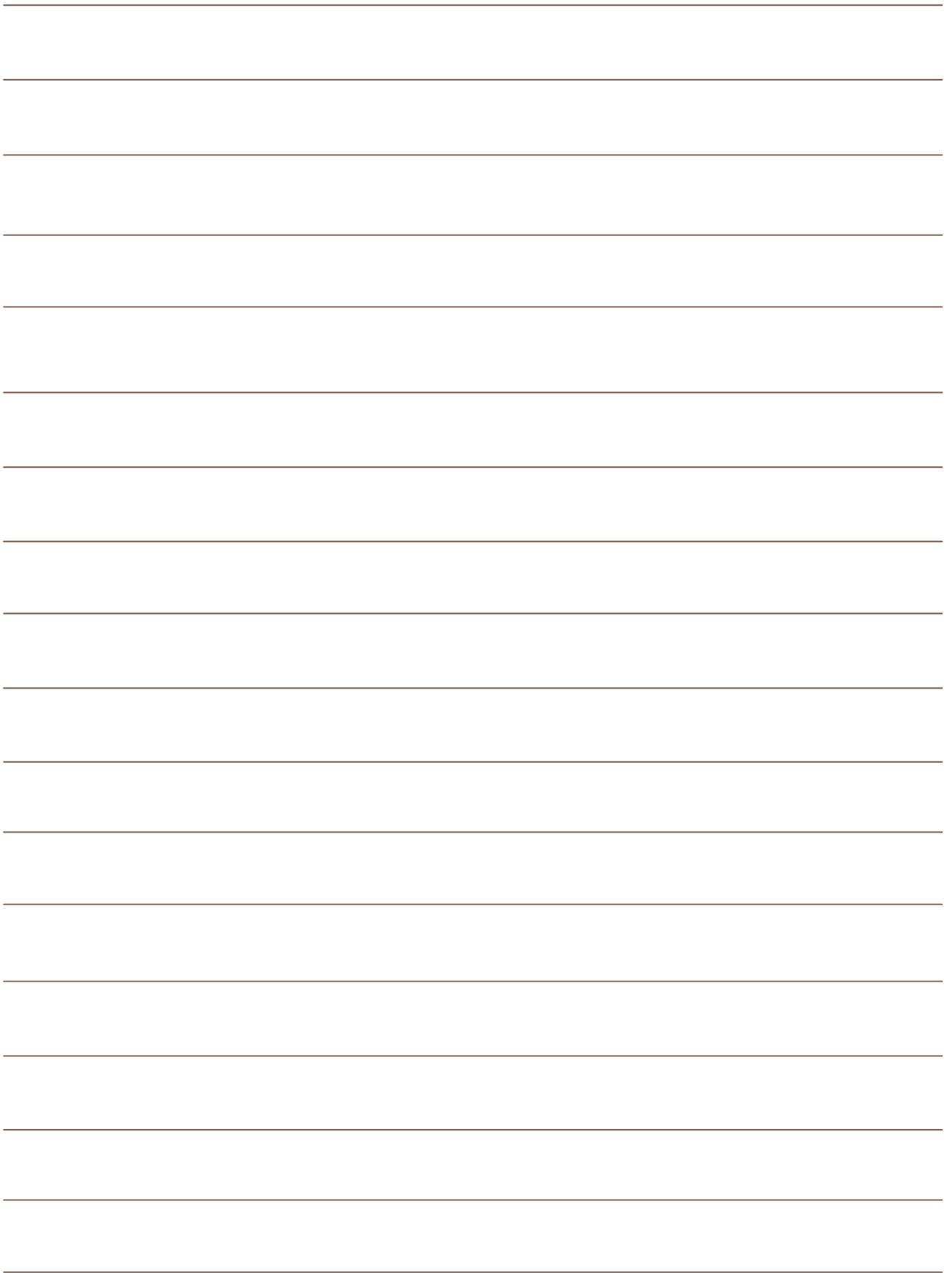
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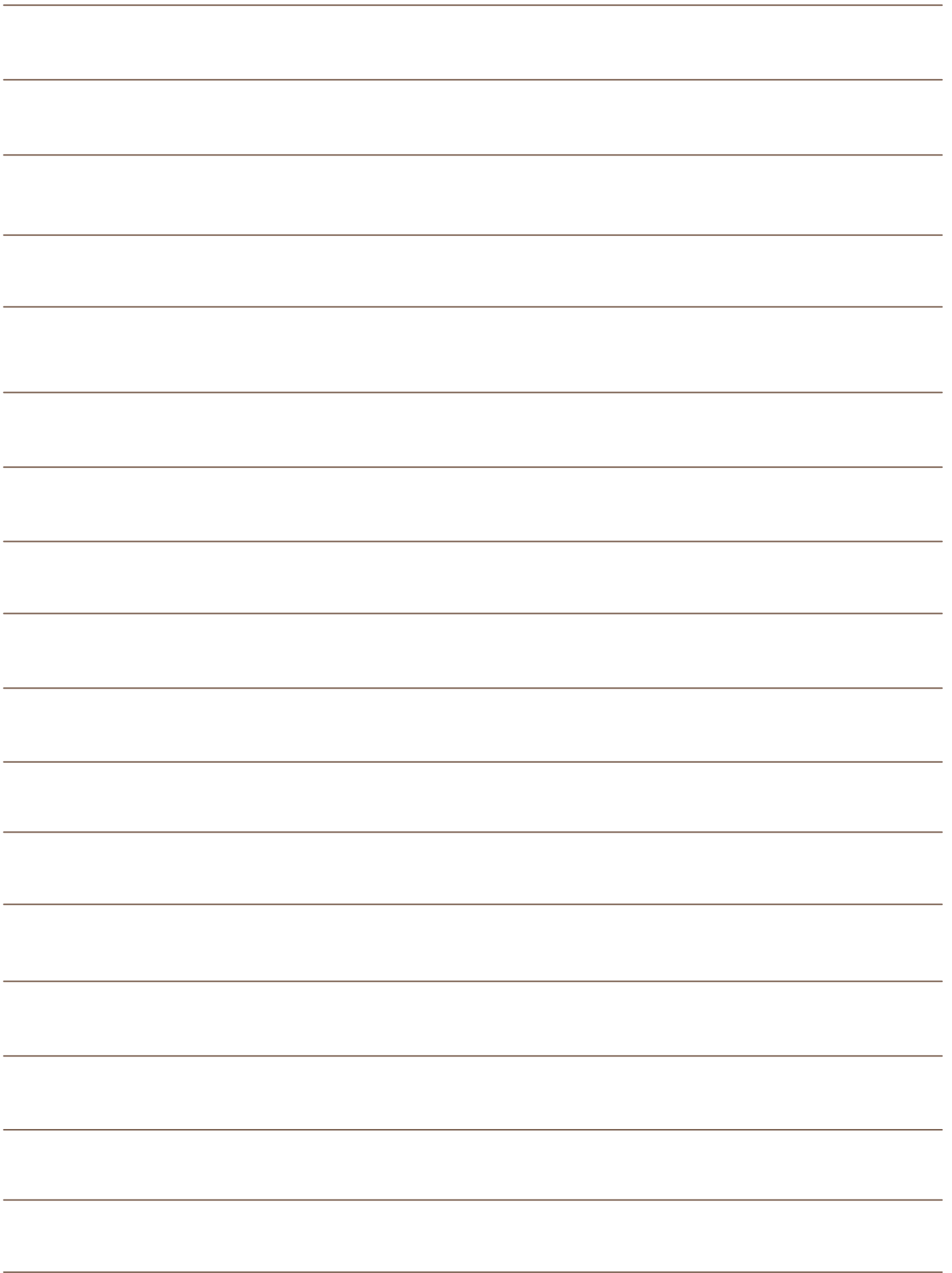
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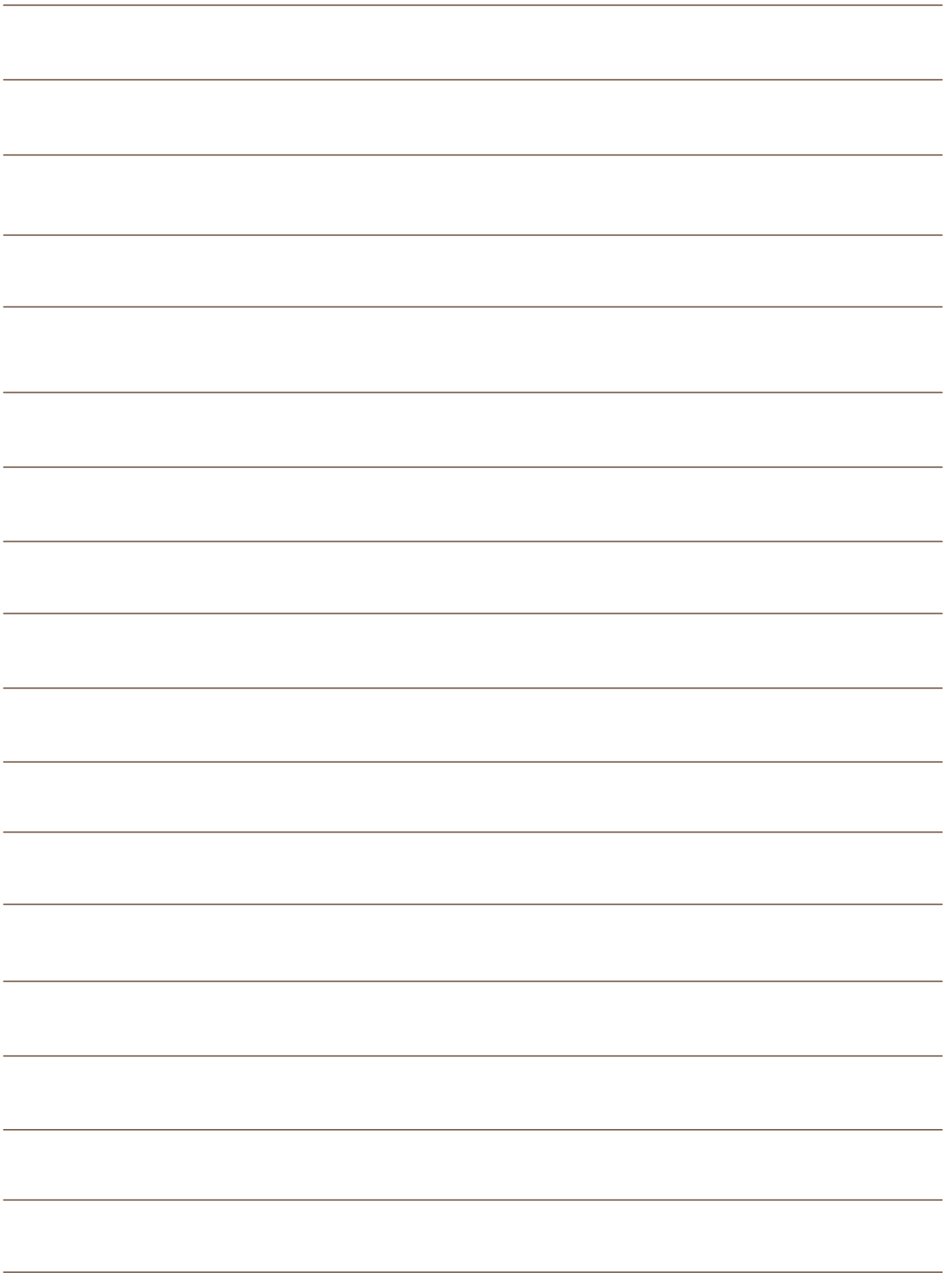
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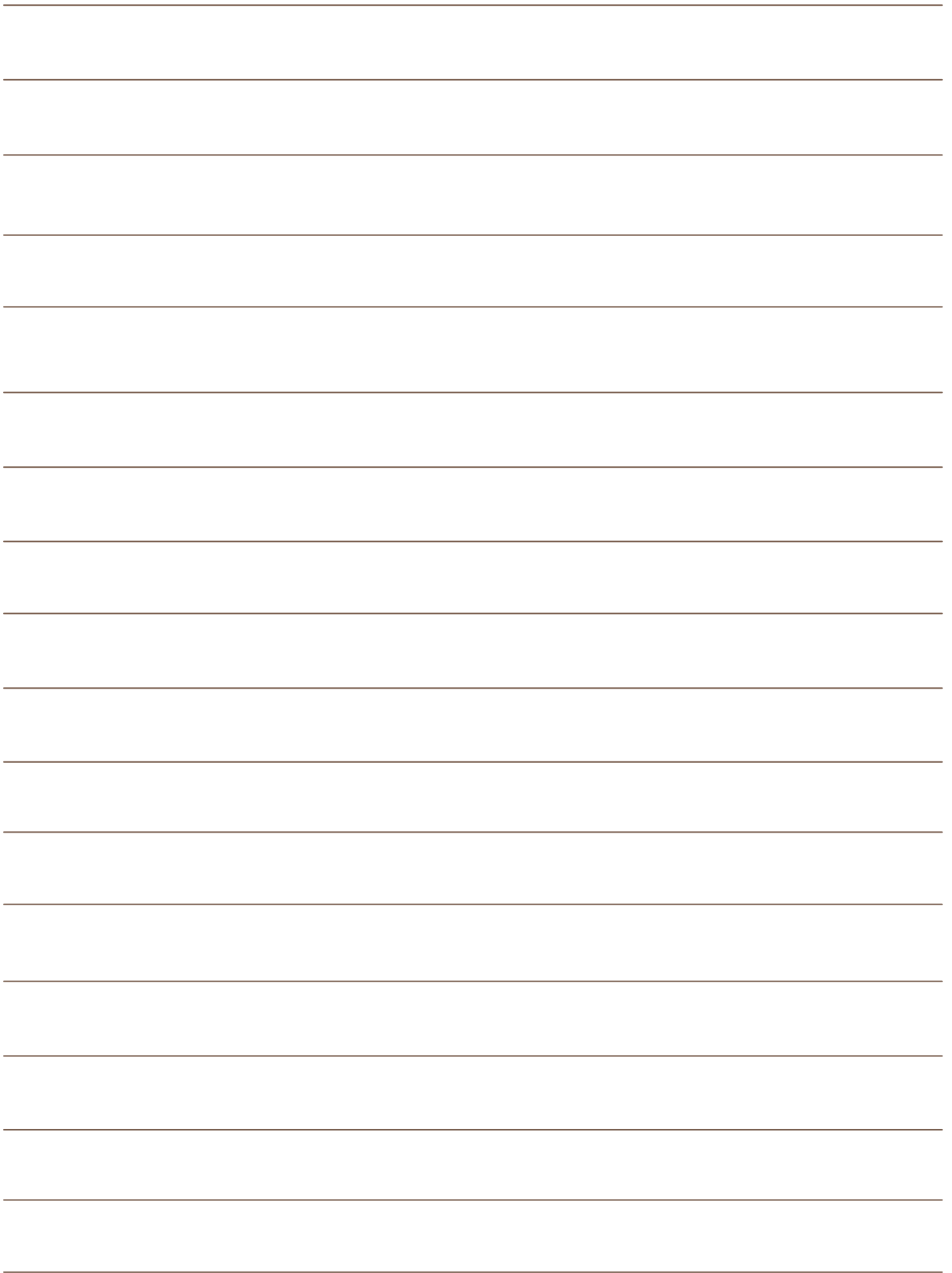
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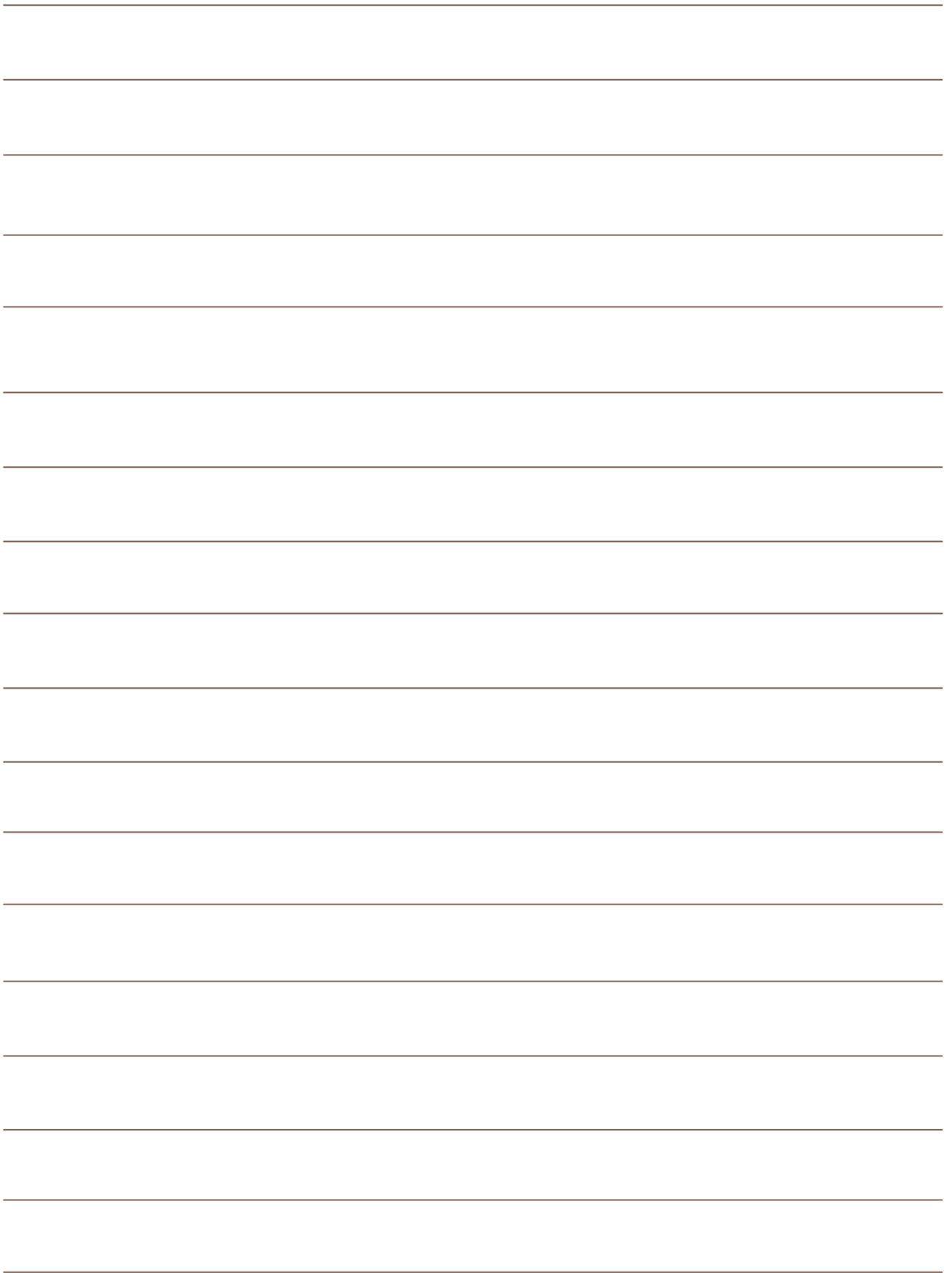
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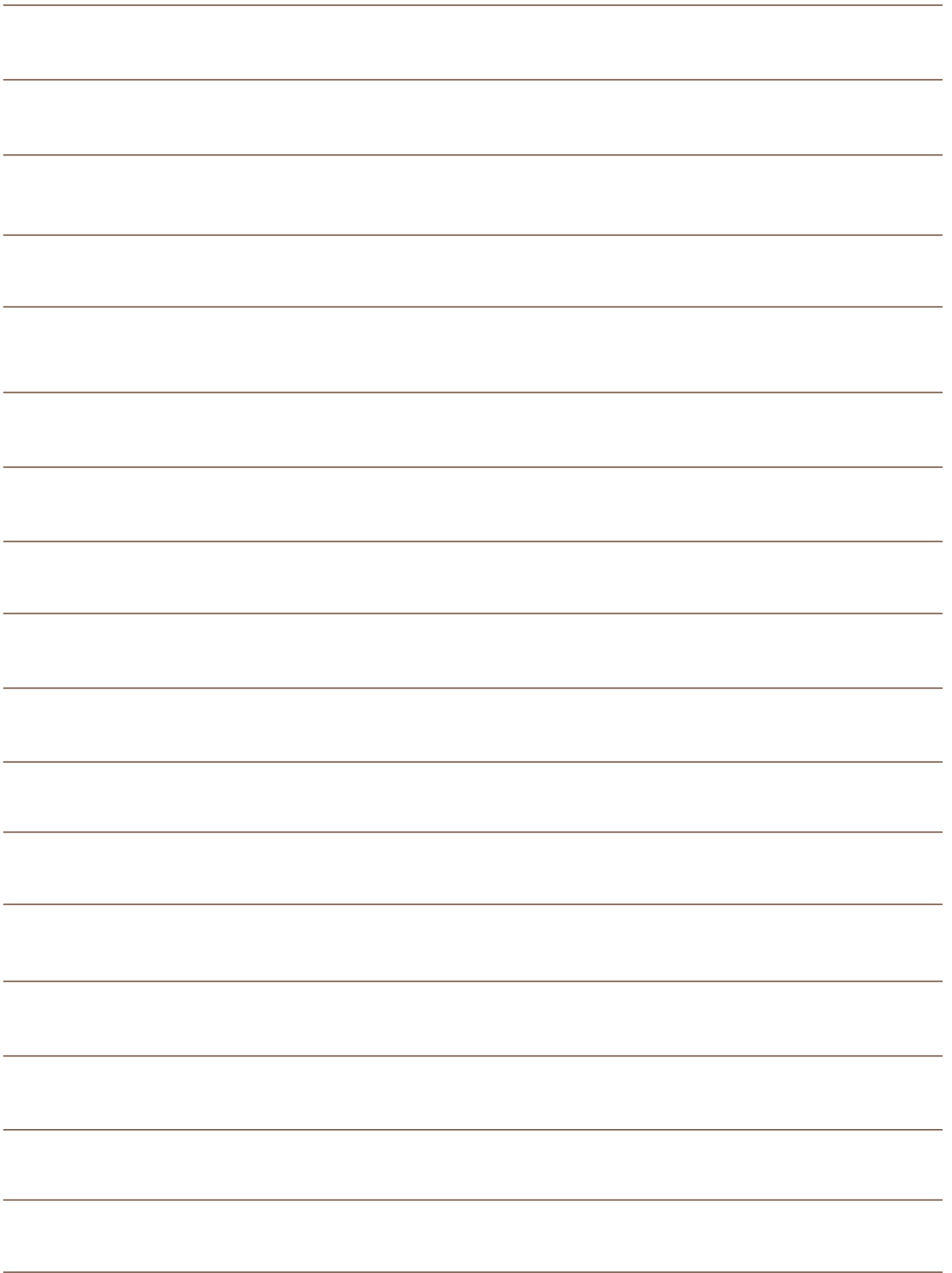
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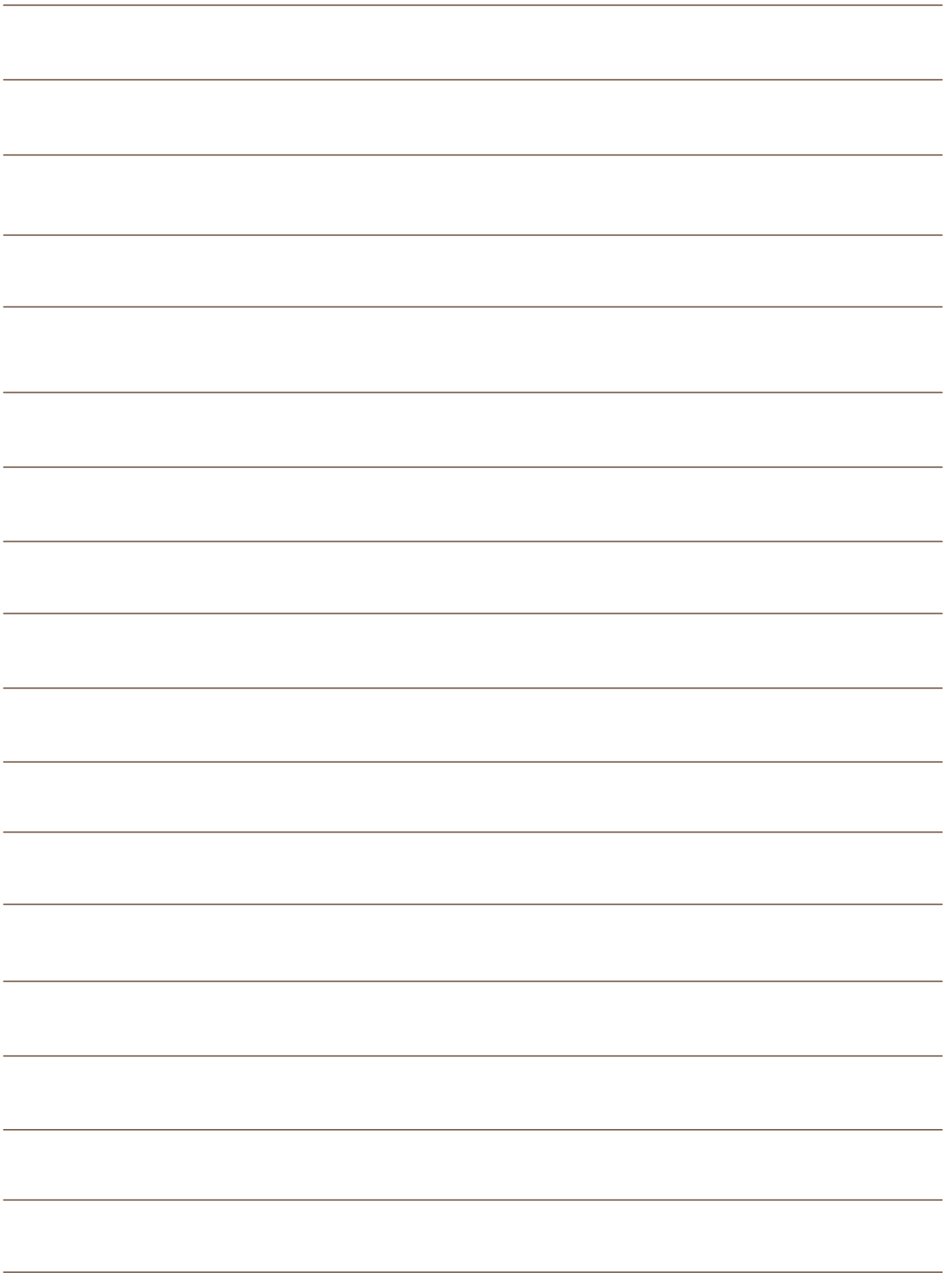
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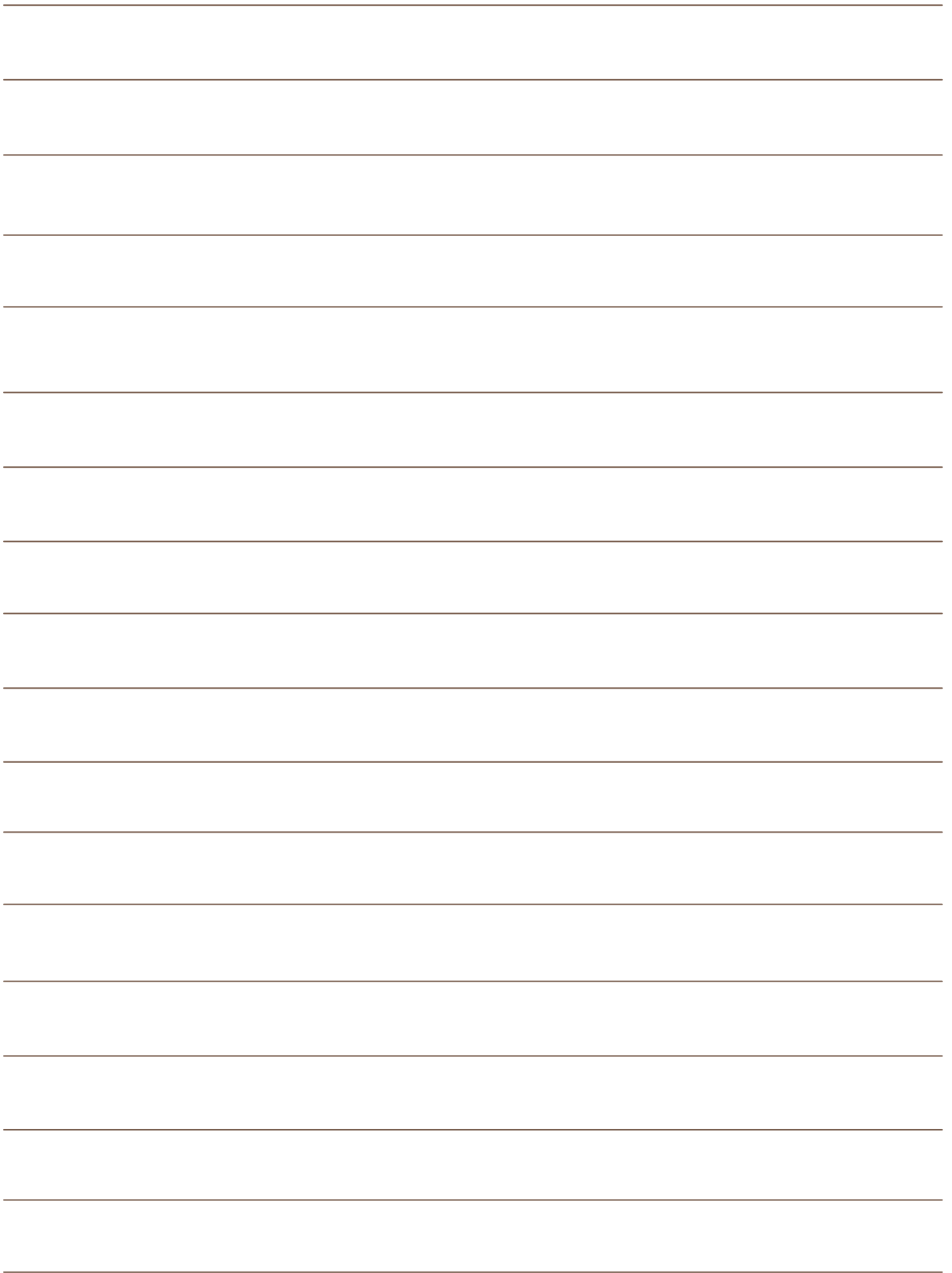
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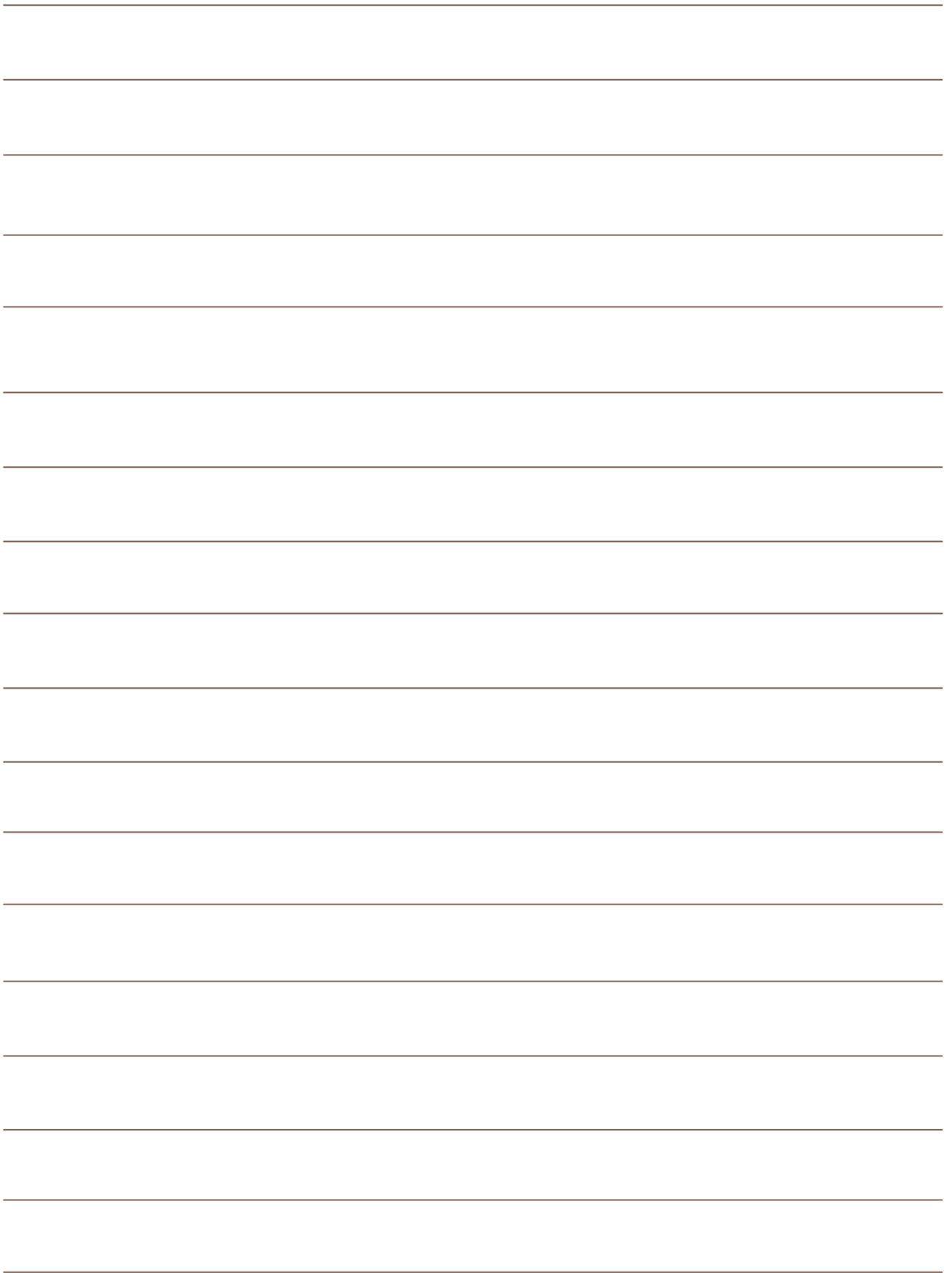
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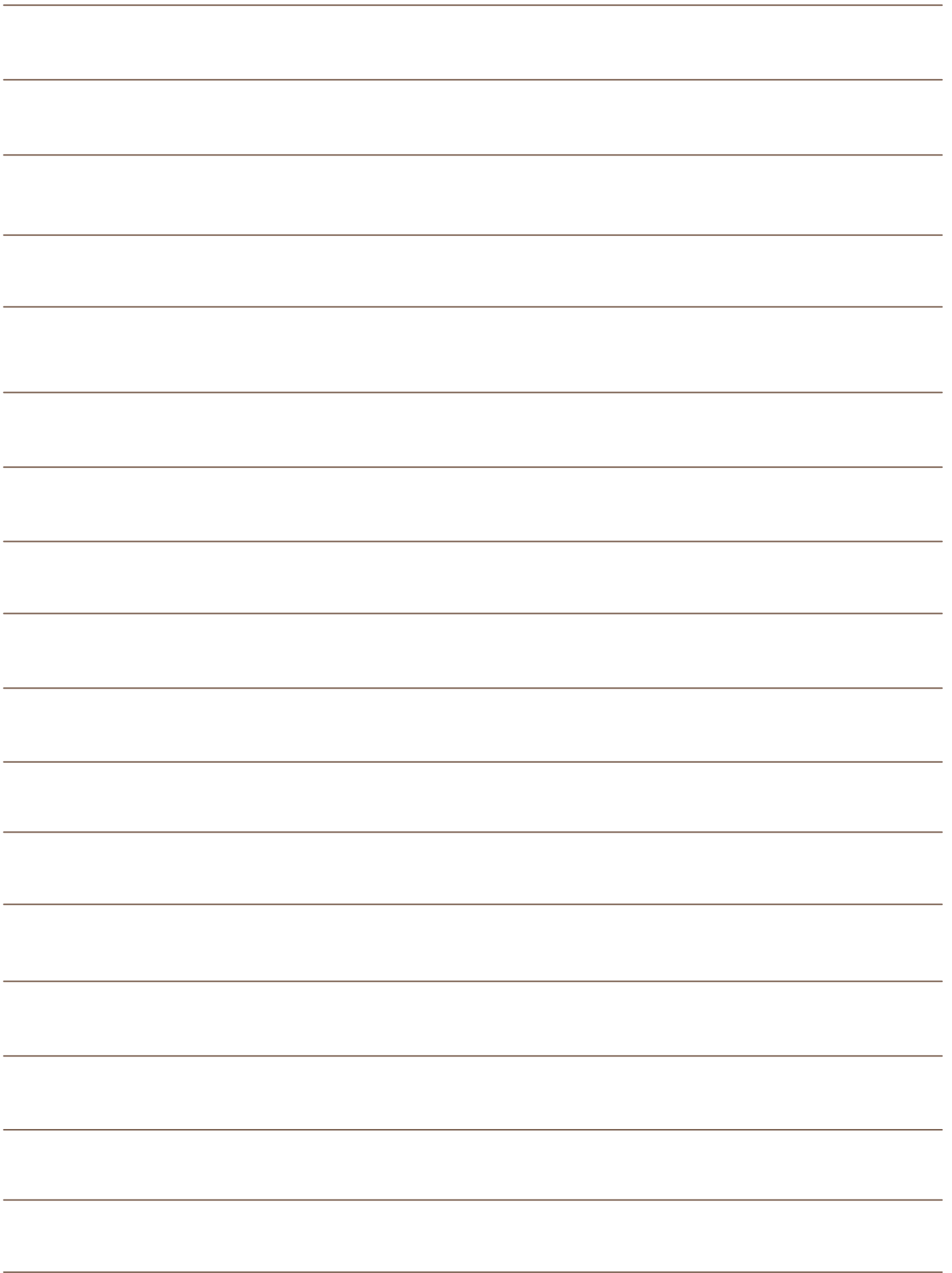
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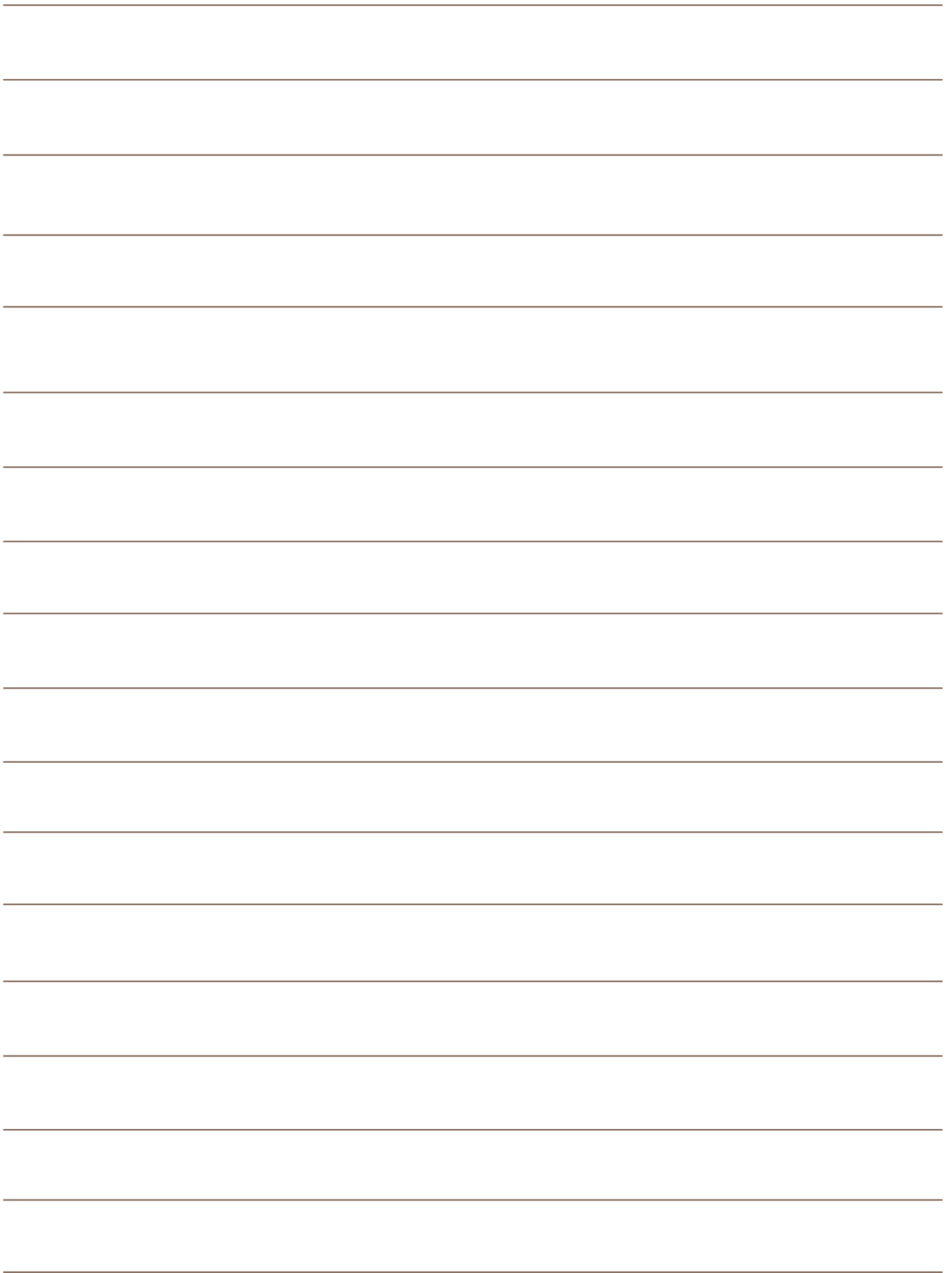
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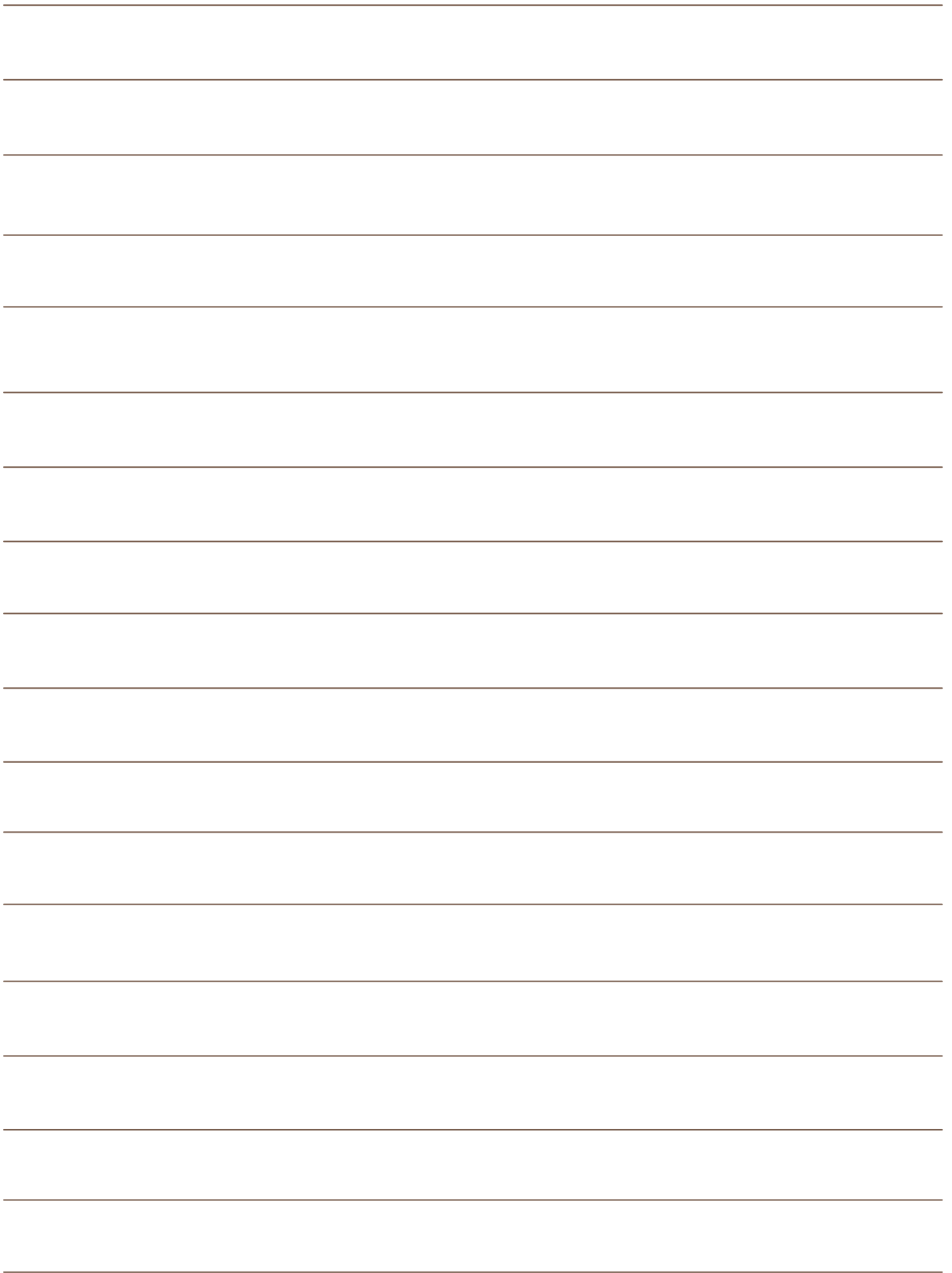
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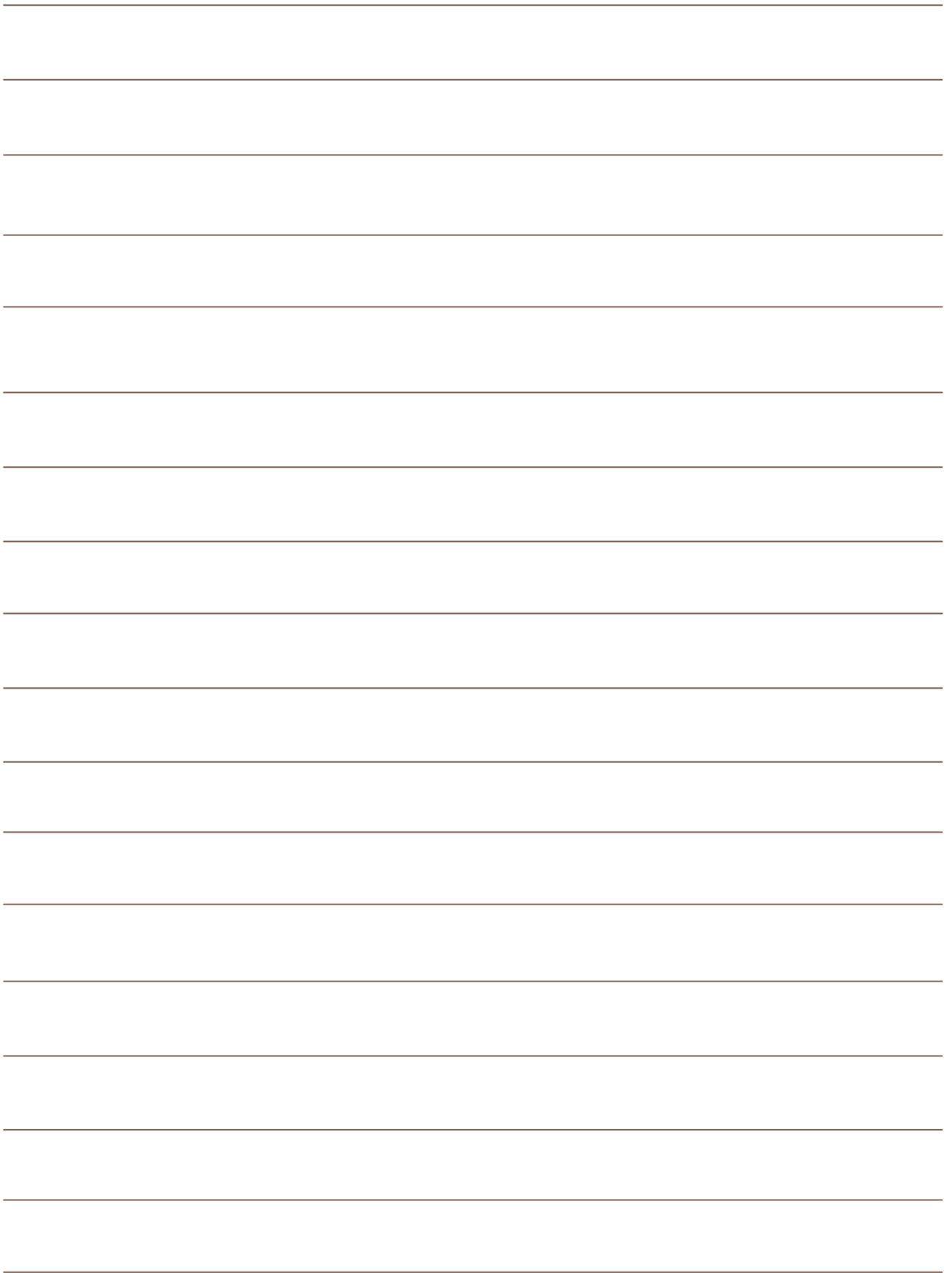
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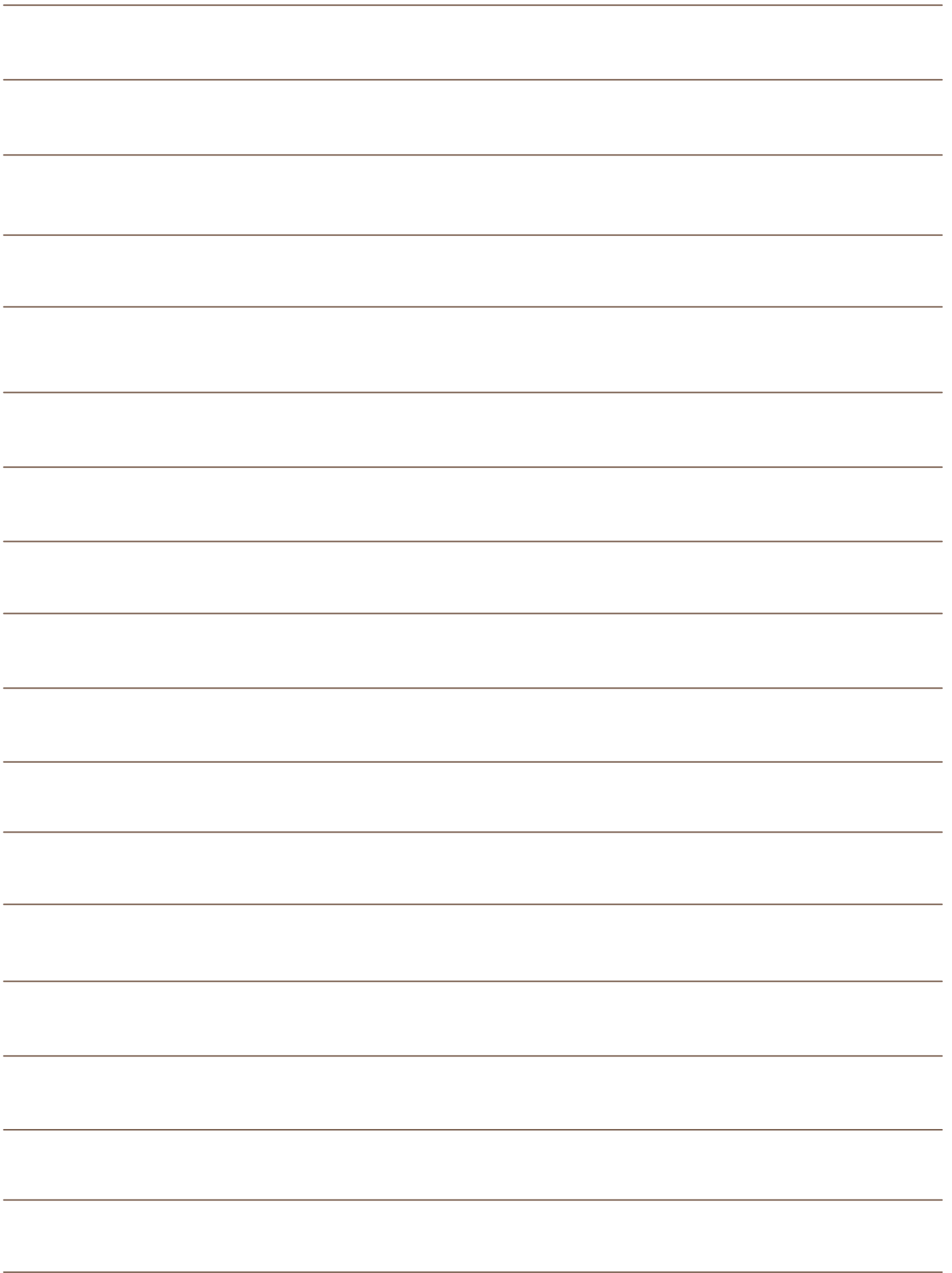
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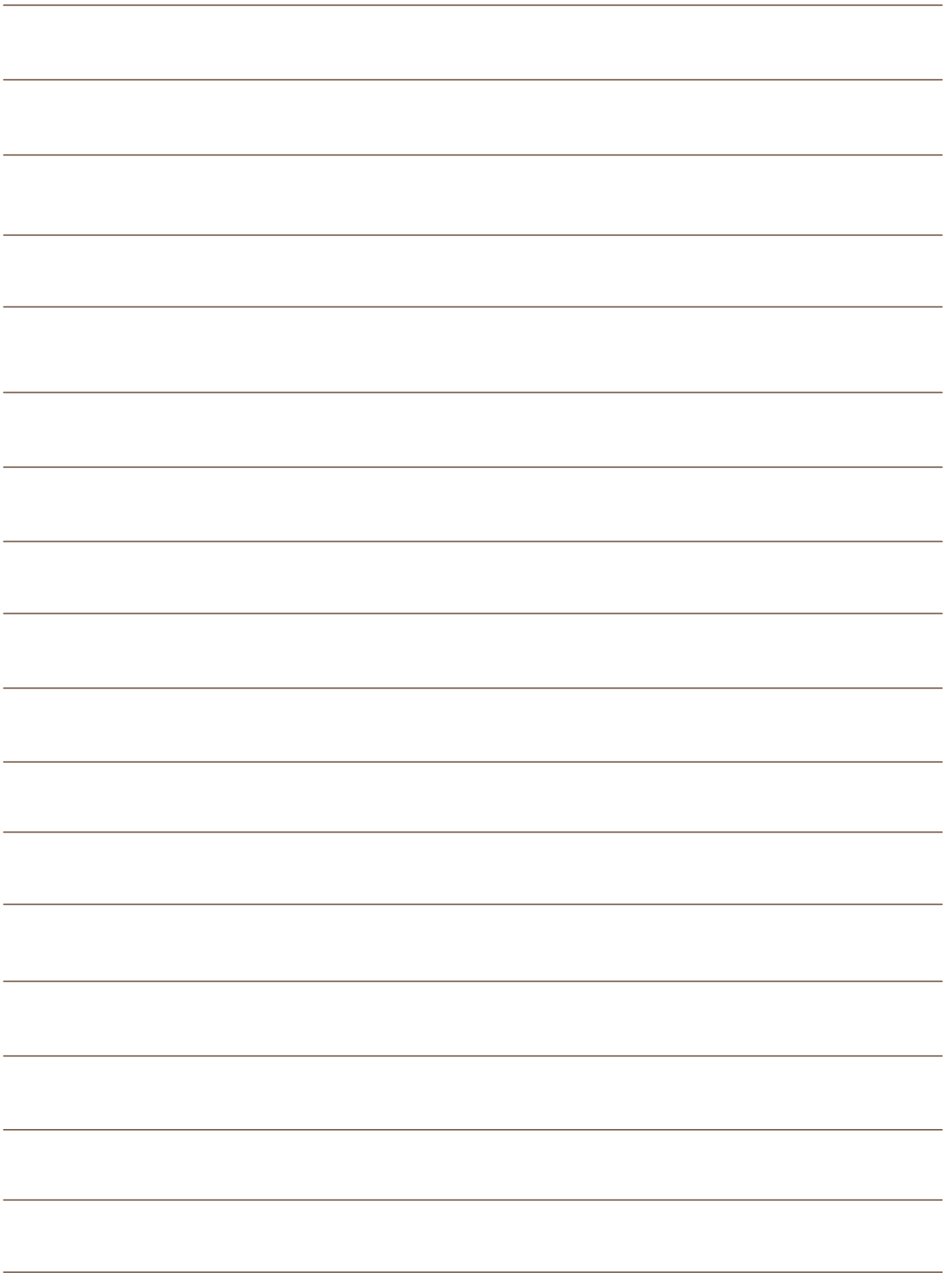
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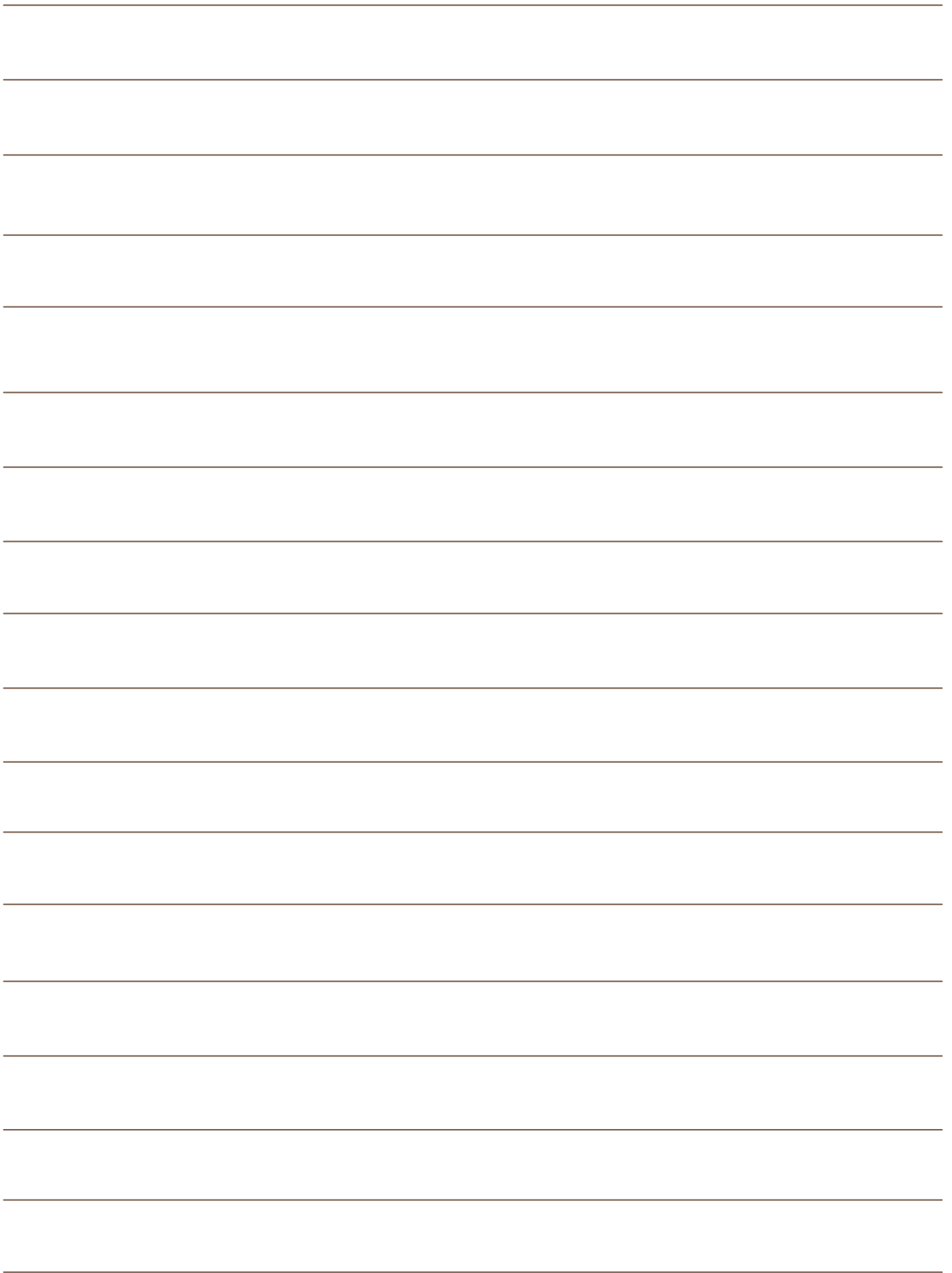
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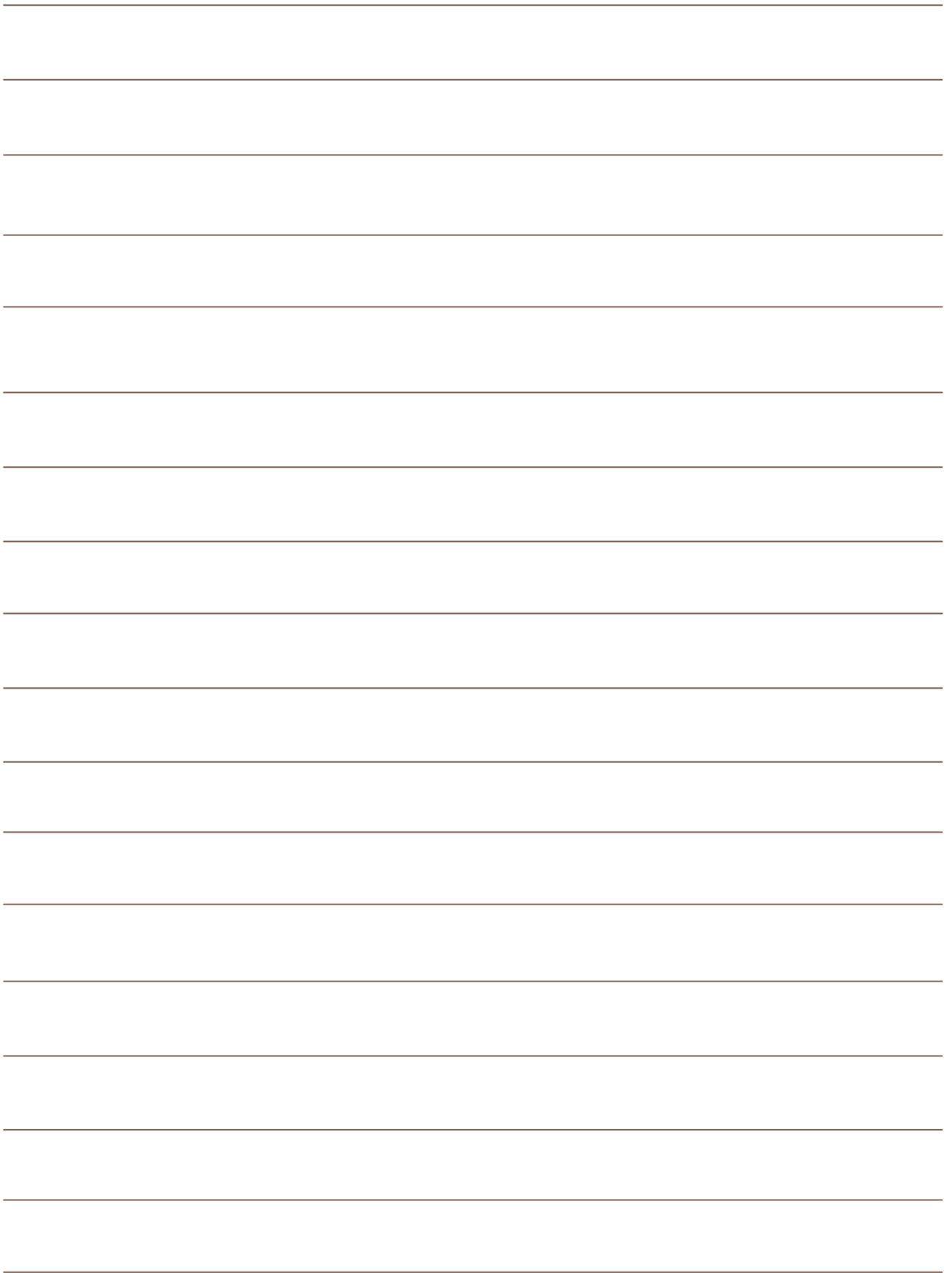
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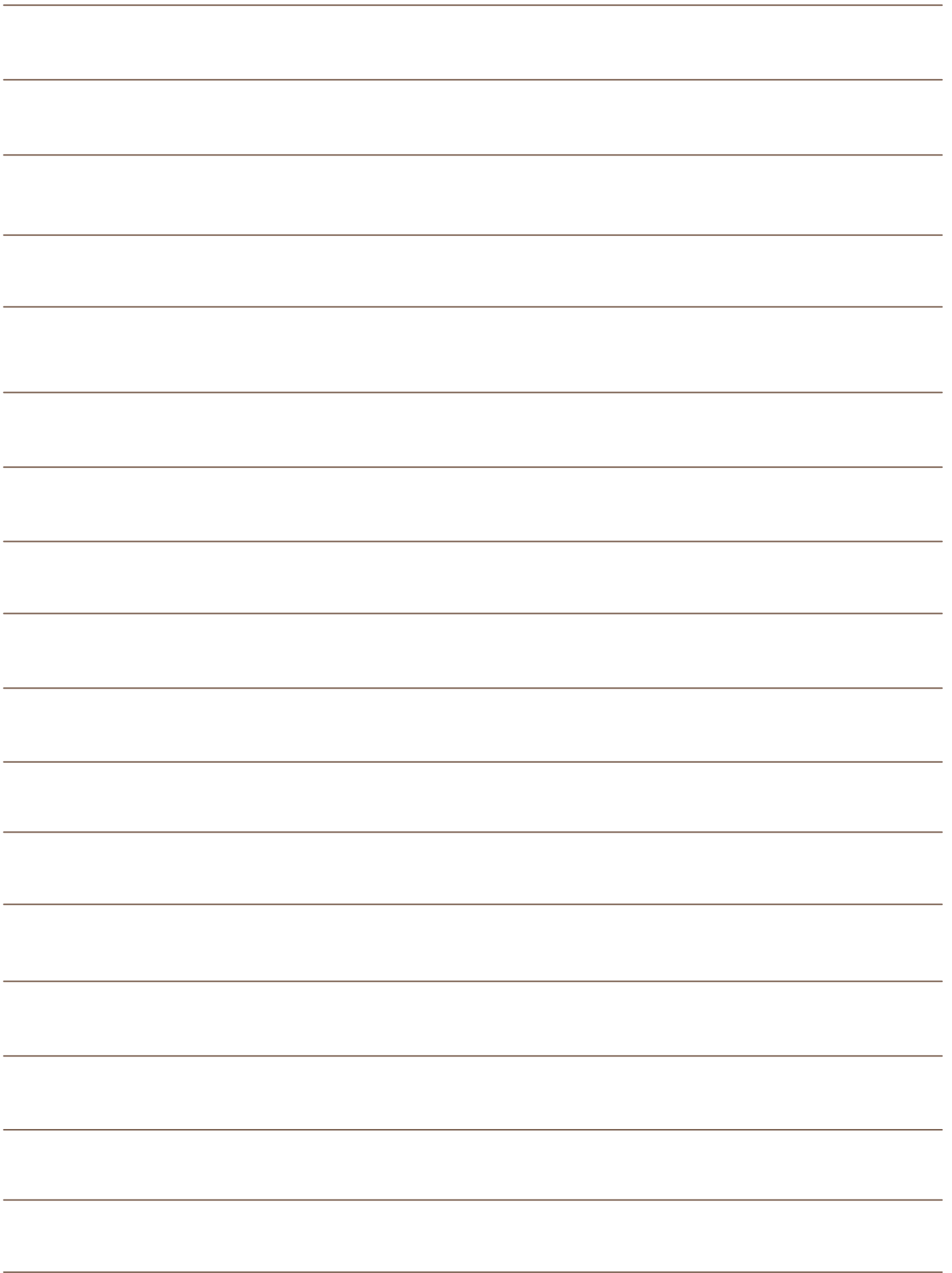
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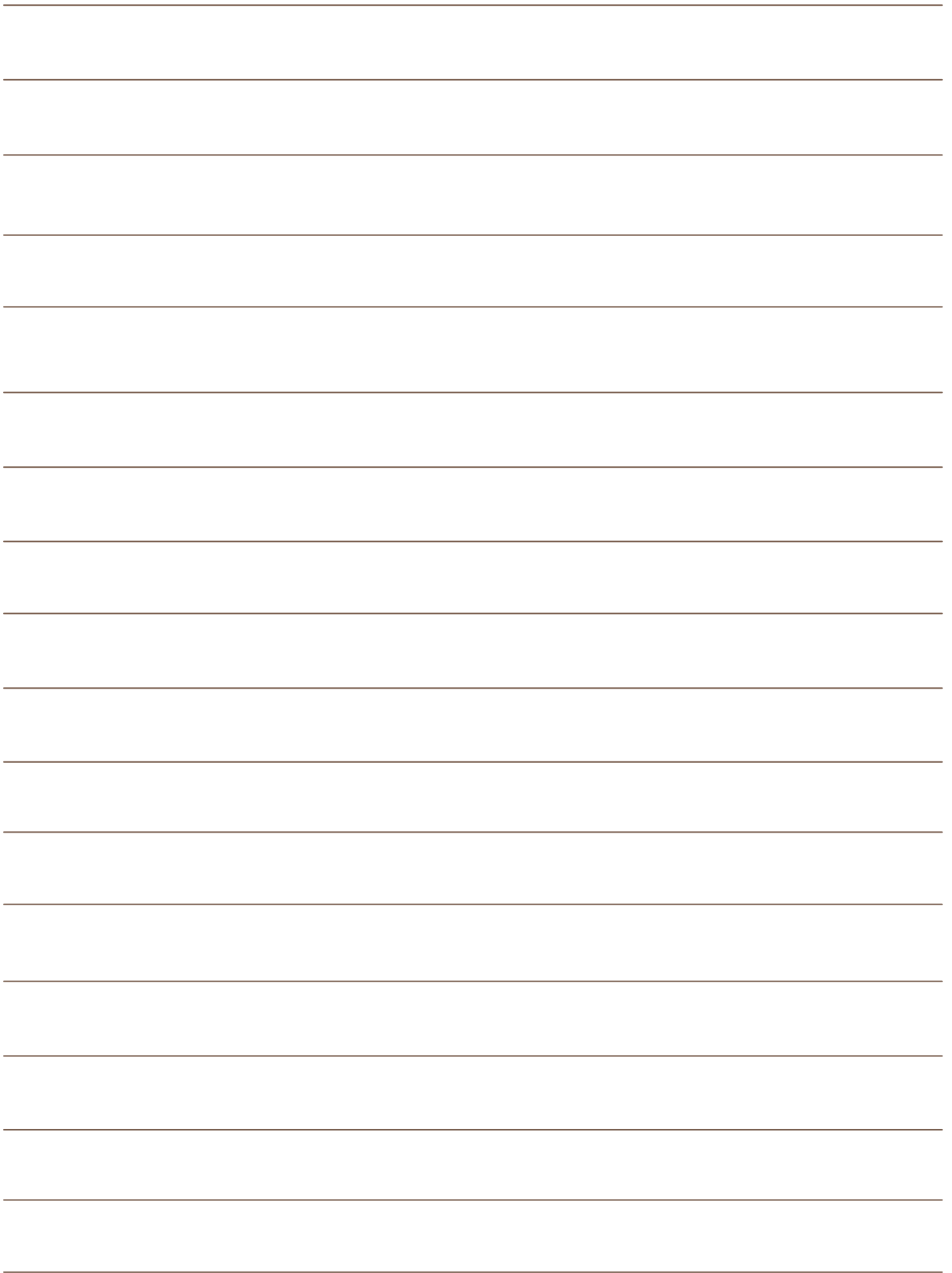


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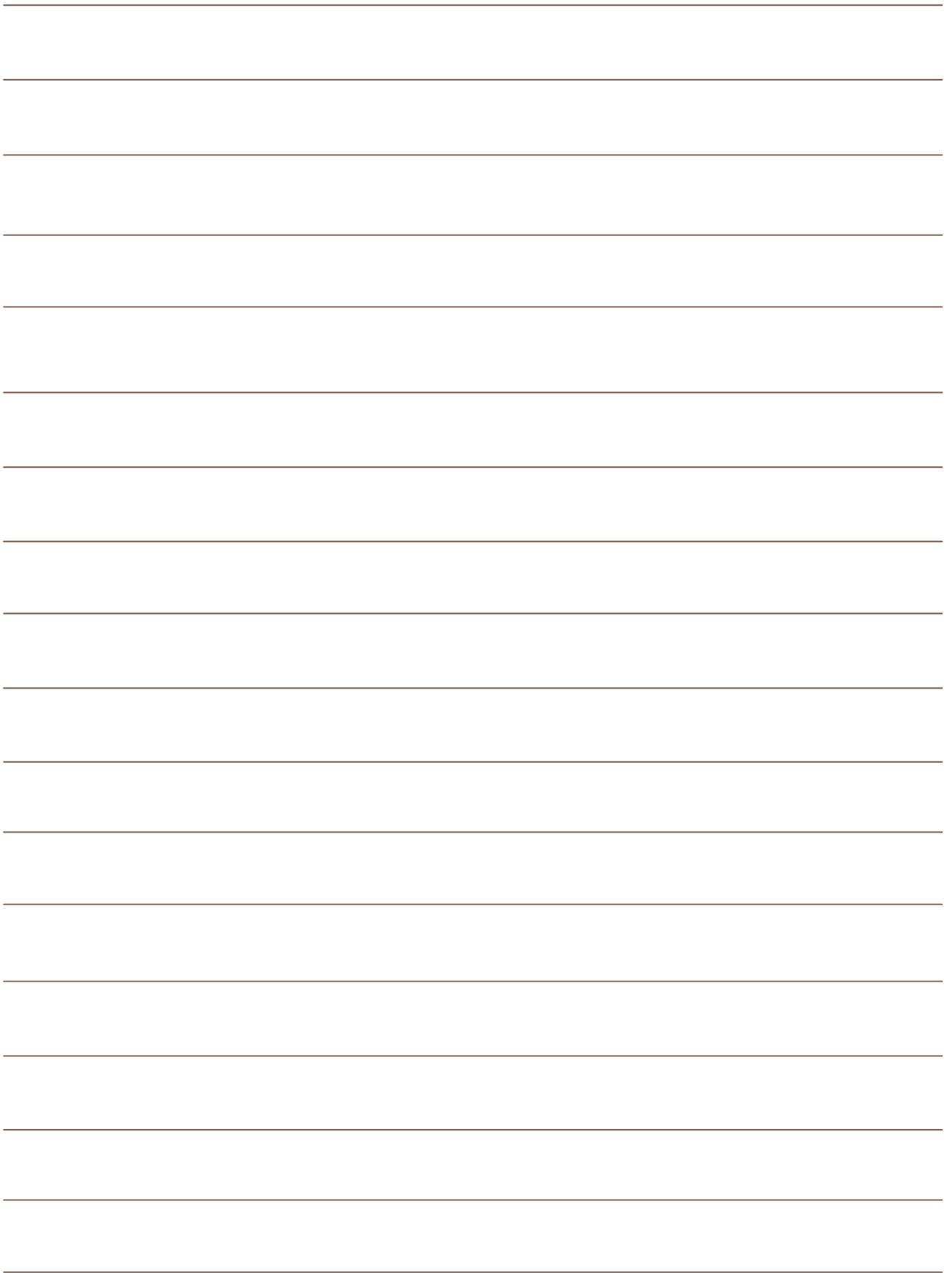
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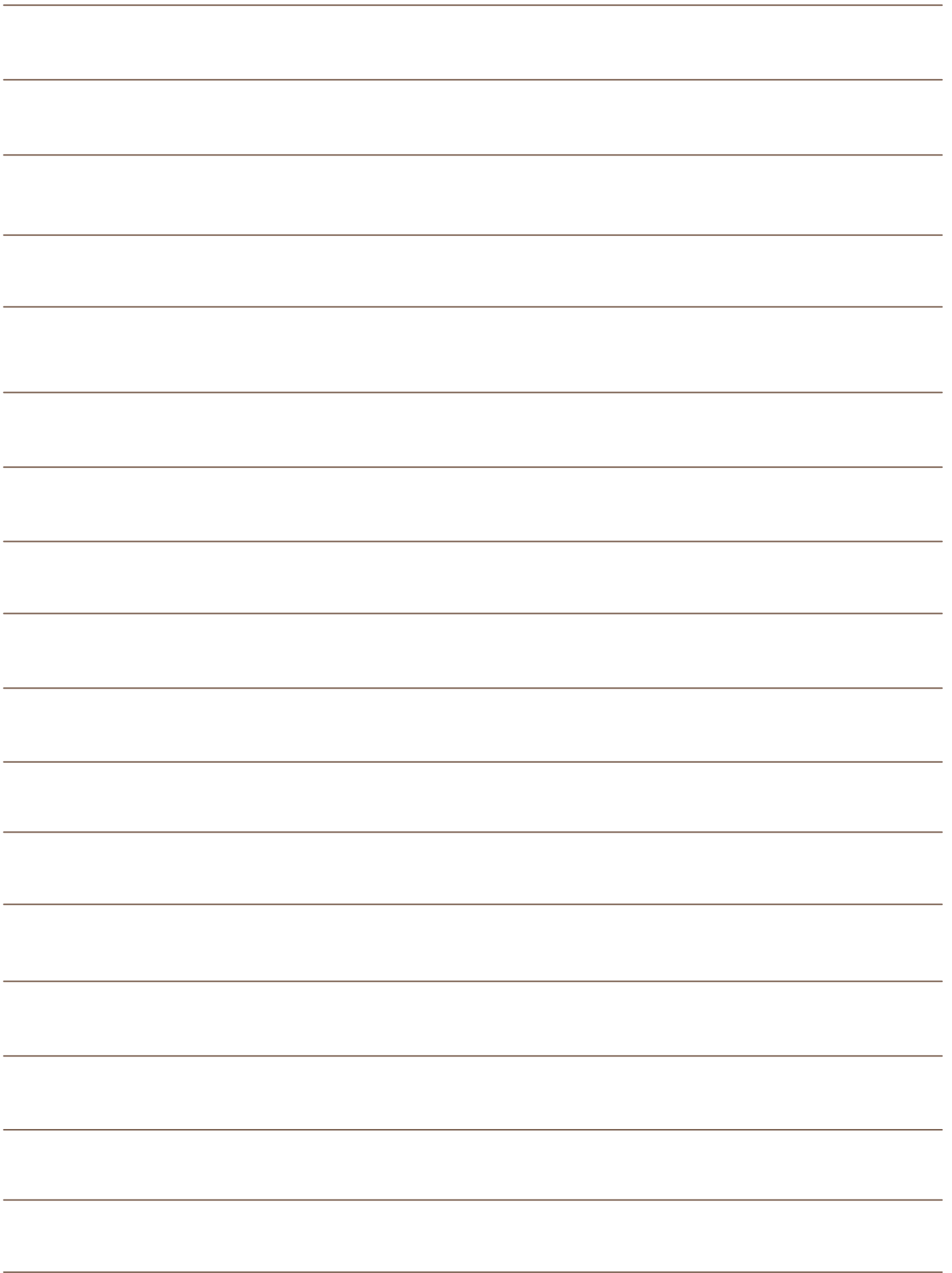
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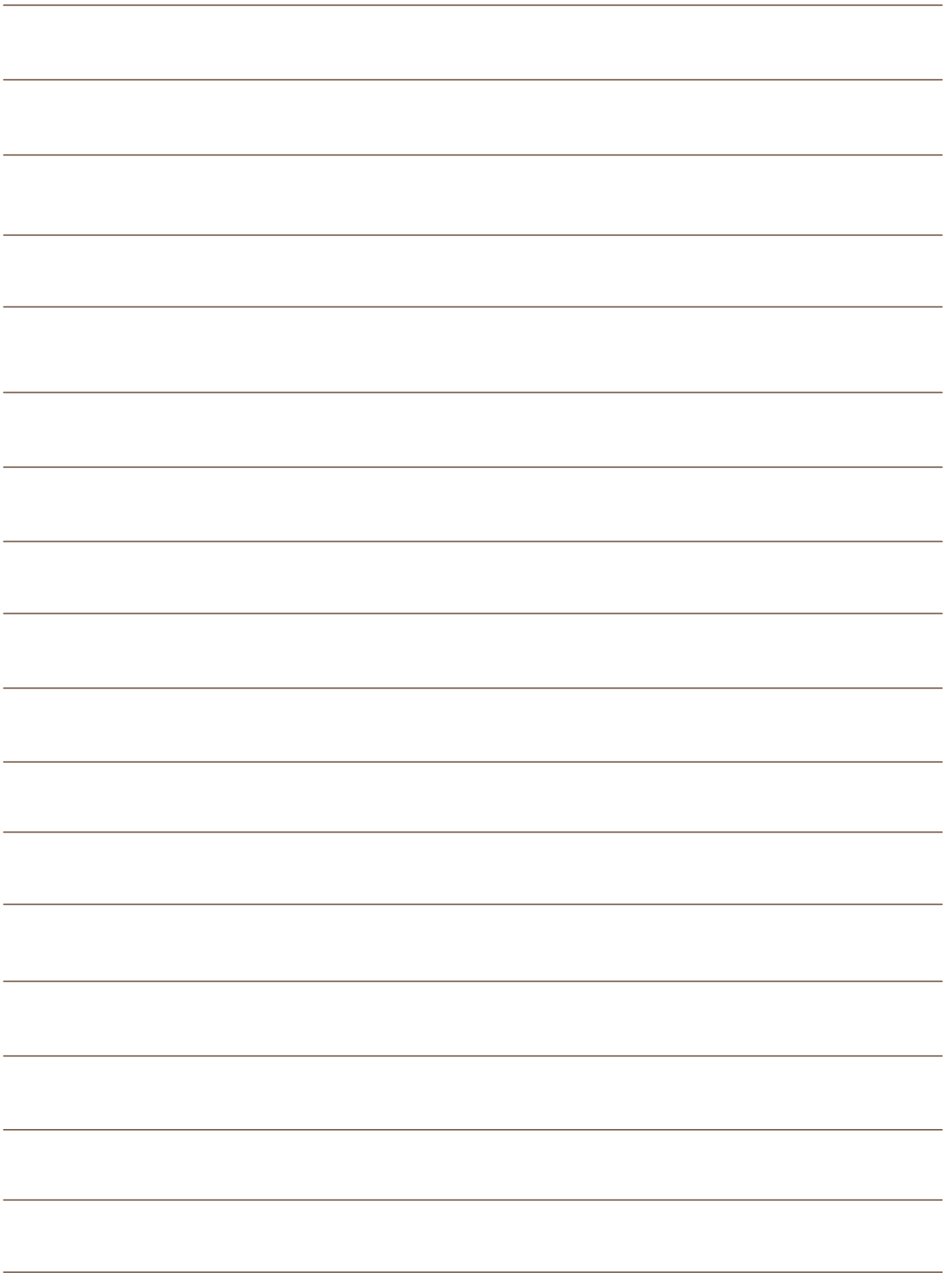
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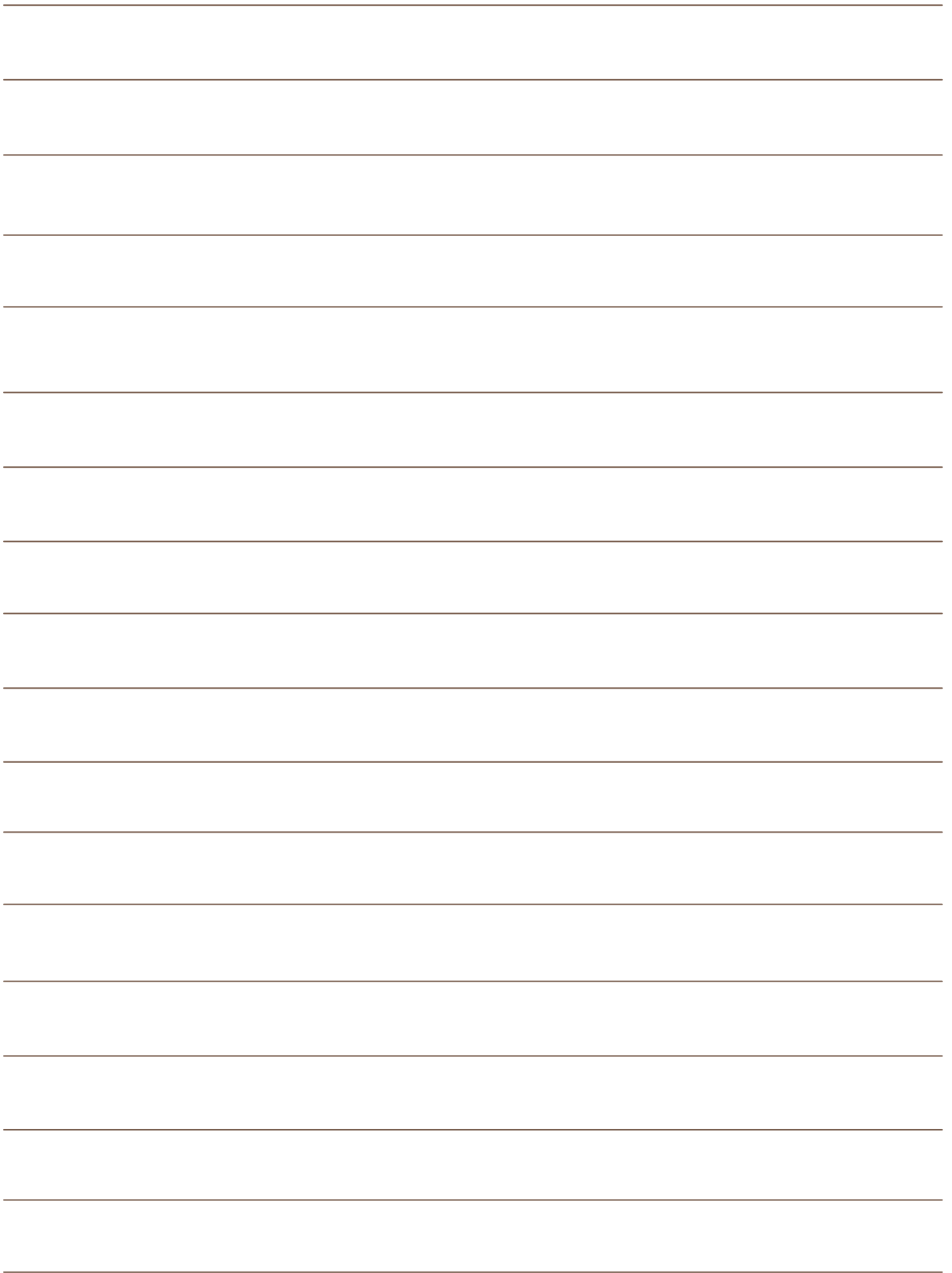
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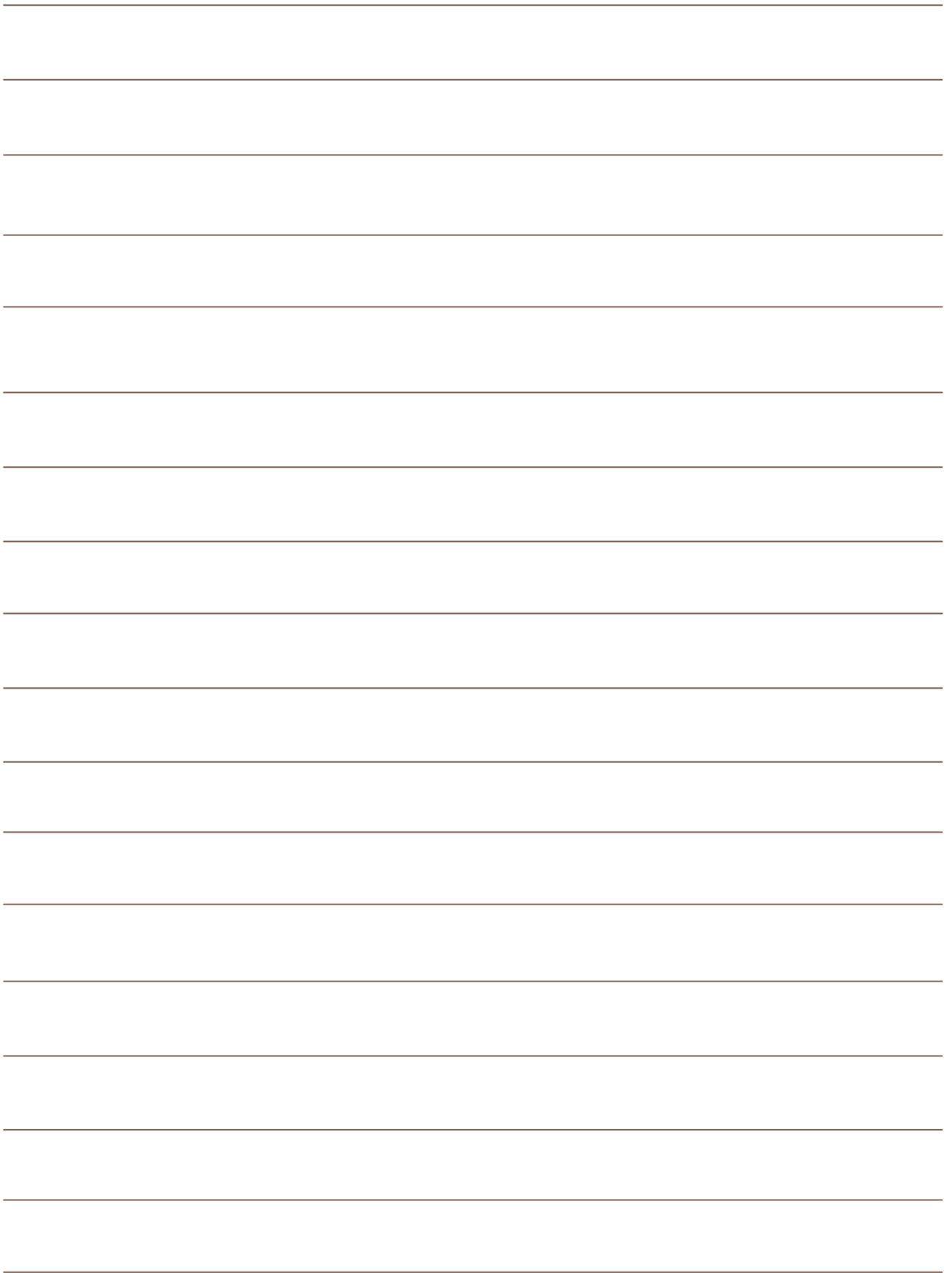
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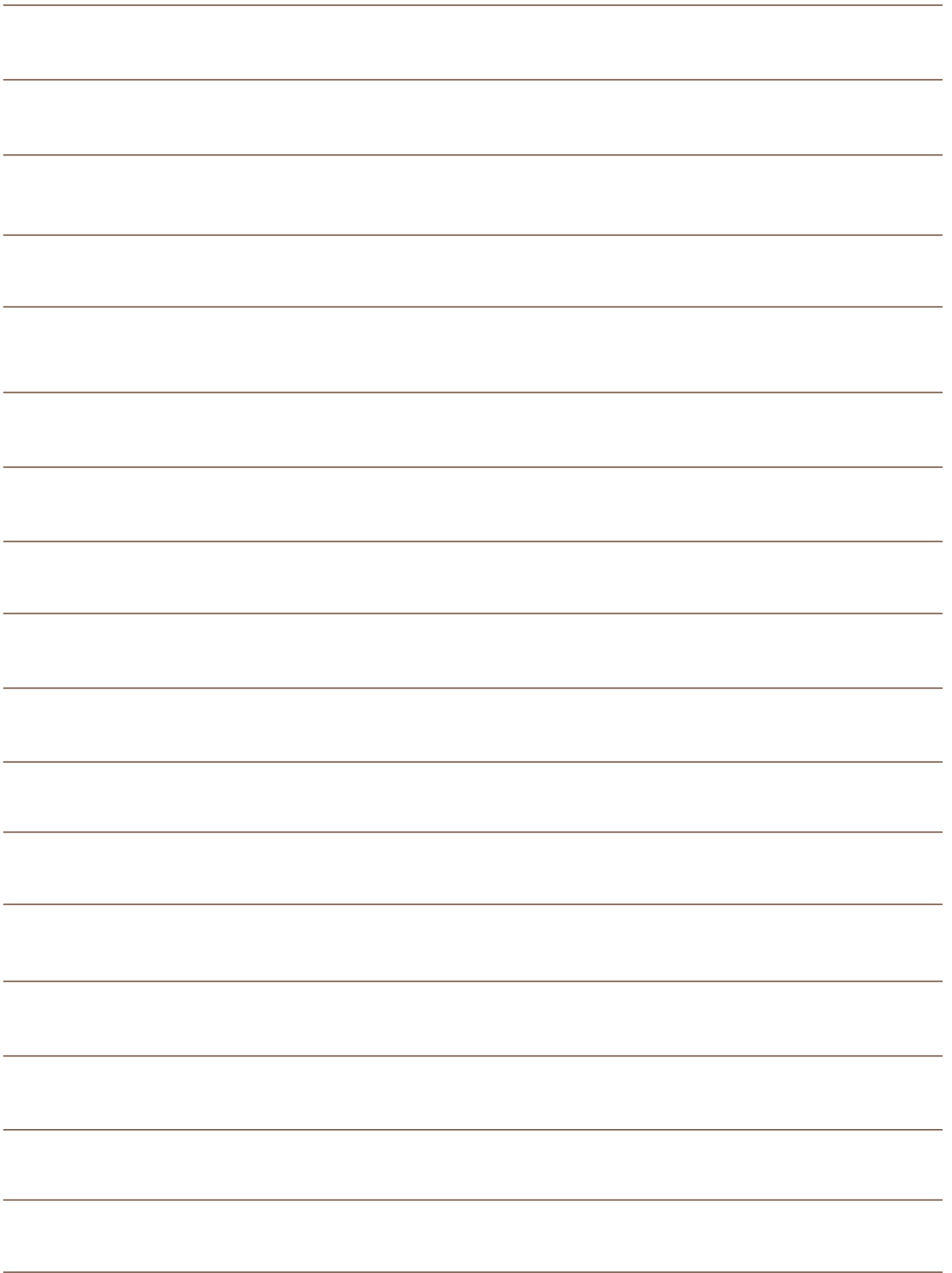
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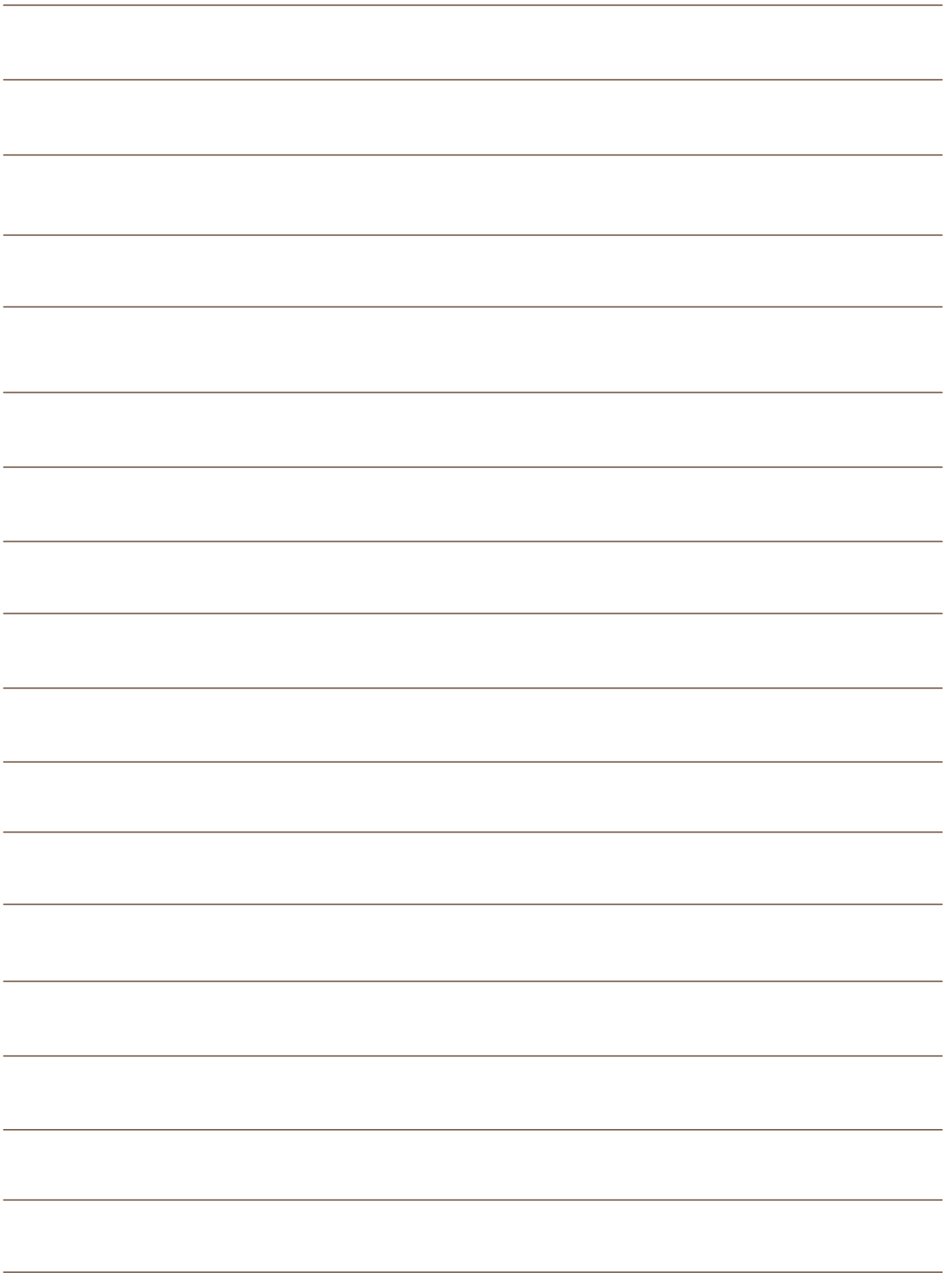
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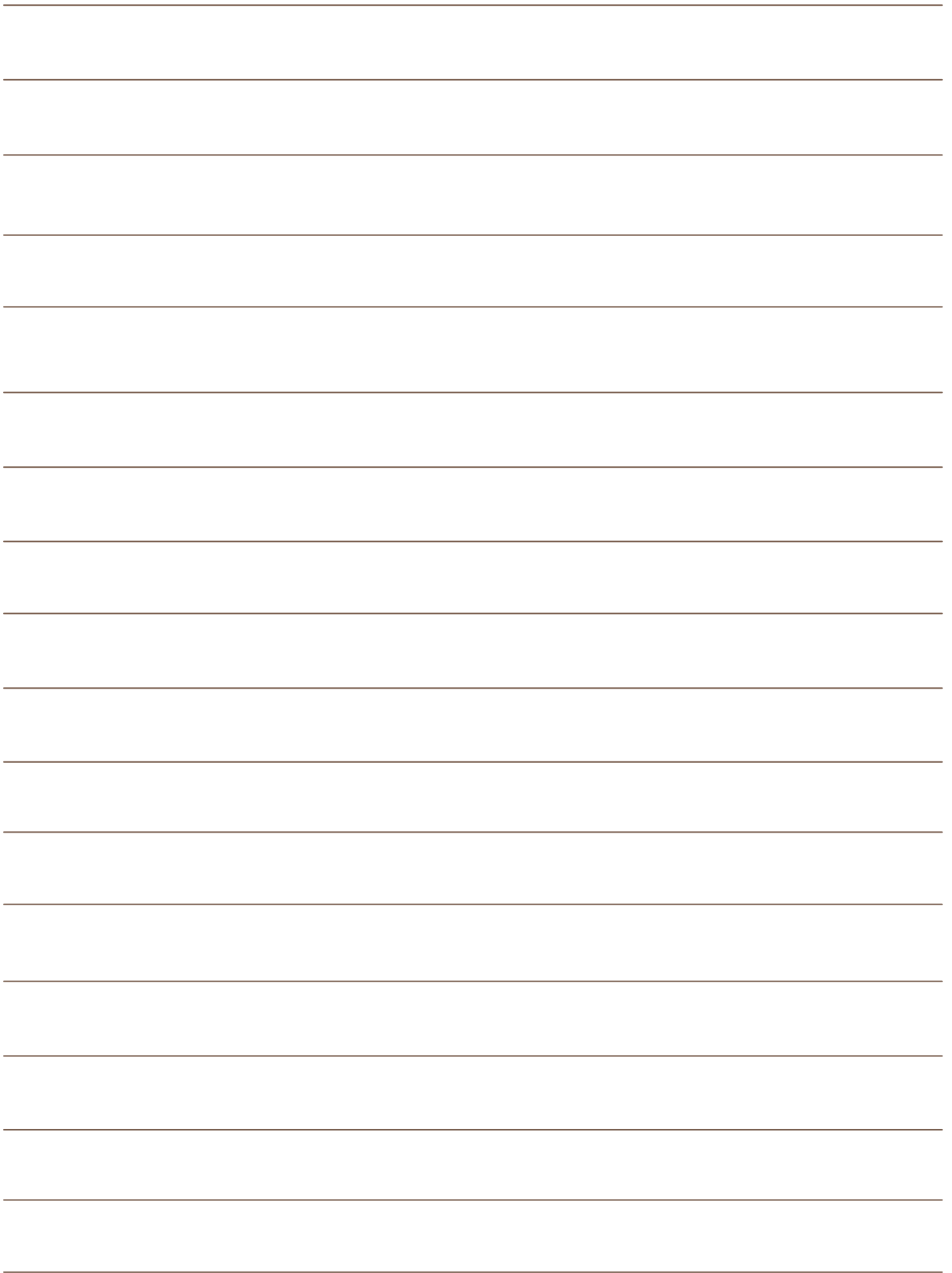
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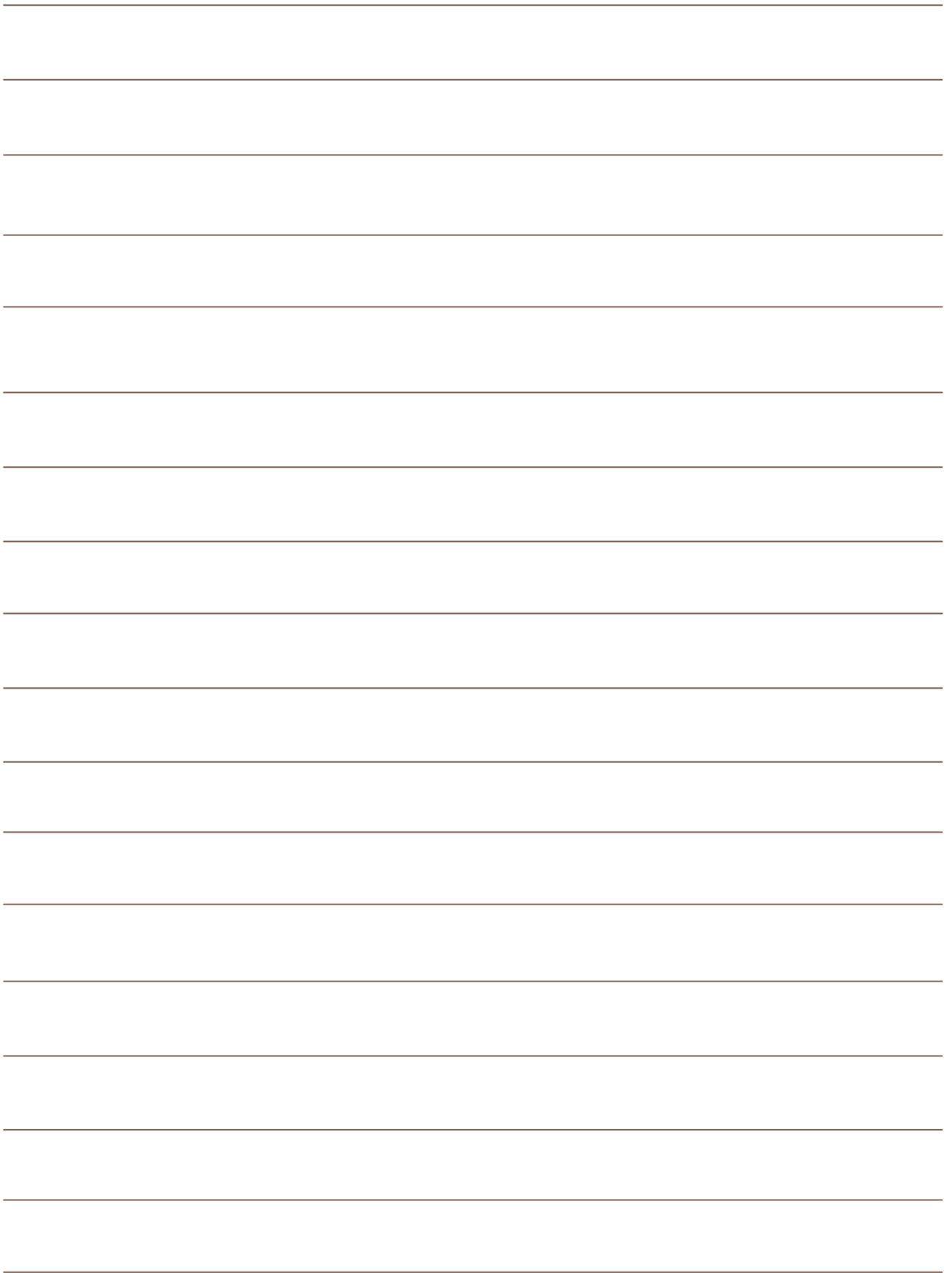
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