

Creative Exercises: Generating Ideas

Use these prompts to get your creativity flowing. They're ideal for someone battling writer's block or someone with an idea, but who doesn't know what to do with it. Writing prompts don't have to expand into something substantial; sometimes they're just a way to keep you writing every day or between projects.

Generating Material:

- Recall a very specific **place** from your childhood. List **five things** you remember using each of your **five senses** (25 details total). Be as descriptive as possible. Use these lists to write a description of the place.
 - Pick a **person** from your memories (the class clown, the outcast in school, the eccentric family member, etc) and write down as many **details** about them as you can recall that **shows**, rather than states, **how you feel or felt about them**. Also try writing similar descriptions from others' opinions (other family members, classmates, teacher, etc). For example, you can describe their clothing, their actions, anecdotes, etc.
 - Recall a time as a teen when you felt **vulnerable**. Describe how you felt without using abstract words like sad, lonely, etc. Strive for **concrete images and experiences**.
 - Make lists of **words** you **associate** with a **specific person** (mother, best friend) or **possession** (phone, trophy). Use that list to write a paragraph or poem.
 - Make a list of **ten small places** (desk drawer, inside an orange) and an **object** you'd be **unlikely to find in them**. Don't think too hard or long. Then go back and add adjectives. See which images inspire you and write a small passage or poem around it.
 - Pick a common place, such as a library. Write a list of **five actions** you'd be **likely to see there**. Then, write a list of **ten actions** you'd be **unlikely to see there**. Using these lists, write a short narrative about your trip to this place.
 - **Memorable characters** often produce **mixed feelings** in readers. Think of a character or person who you admire and list their positive qualities, then negative qualities. (Or, chose someone you dislike and do the same.) Then, freewrite about this person, moving between their negative and positive attributes.
- Begin with the turning point / character's conflict:*
- Make a list of **issues you can't make up your mind about**. Chose one and write a verbal picture of each alternative (if you do it or don't do it) using all five senses.

- o Make a list of **five tough choices** you've faced recently. Select one and imagine what would have happened if you had chosen differently. Write this in the third person, as if detailing who you would be right now under these new circumstances.

The Short Story

- o Pick one of your **characters** and compose a **monologue** in their voice **introducing and describing him/herself** (physical characteristics, likes and dislikes, habits, family, beliefs, hopes, etc). Let the character ramble and try to bring in specific details whenever possible.
- o **Protagonist and antagonist:** Write a brief list of their **major encounters** in the story (meeting, an argument, etc). Write a **vivid description** of one of these events from the protagonist's perspective, including impressions of the other character, perceived significance of events, etc. Then write the antagonist's perspective as a rebuttal, correcting or changing facts.
- o **Motives:** Pick a **character** in your story (preferably the protagonist or antagonist). Write a list of ten detailed facts ("she rides horses competitively, but rarely wins"). Then, next to each fact, list all the possible reasons why the character might do/dress/act in this way (she loves riding, she loves animals, her parents make her compete but she has trouble with competitions/pressure).

The Poem

Line Breaks:

- o Find a short passage from an ad, textbook, newspaper, syllabus, etc that can be viewed in several lights. Turn the prose into a poem by creating line breaks. Remember that a line break places emphasis on the last word of a line and first word of a line. Change where you place the line break to change the emphasis.
- o Using an existing poem, experiment with your line breaks back writing the same poem with long lines, very short lines, and alternating long and short.

The Essay / Creative Non-Fiction

- o **Authority:** Write a list of 5-10 areas you're an "**expert**" at (an activity, an action, an idea). Pick one and write a list of **10 facts or experiences** that you have regarding this expertise. What conclusion do these experiences and facts lead you to?
- o **Audience:** Pick one paragraph or section of your piece. Write a list of some things you would do differently if you were writing this to someone who is also an "expert" but would disagree with your opinion. Do the same thing but to someone who thinks this subject/activity is pointless. Consider other types of audiences you might write to and how you would approach the topic differently (all women/men, complete novices versus experts, etc).
- o **Transitions:** Start by creating a list of transitional phrases, avoiding the formal (therefore, furthermore, however). Then pick an area you're considered an expert at and/or the topic of your piece. Write one concrete sentence about the last time you engaged in this activity. Write 9-10 sentences following, using the list of transition words.