52 CREATIVE WRITING PROMPTS

A Year of Weekly Prompts and Exercises to Boost Your Creativity

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to Boost Your Creativity

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Email Encouragement

Would you also like to receive these prompts by email?

Each time a prompt appears in your inbox, think of it as a gentle nudge to open this book and return to the practice of writing something different each week.

It's like a coach showing up to remind you to practice.

To sign up, visit annkroeker.com/52signup.

I'll sign you up to receive one prompt each week via email for a year.
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Introduction

If you're working on projects or facing deadlines, it's nice to break away sometimes and write something completely different.

As a writing coach, I've seen how simple exercises provide a creative stimulus. Playful, provocative, or reflective prompts often tap into a different part of your brain to generate a fresh tone and style, injecting energy into the rest of your work—perhaps into the rest of your life!

The writing that results from these prompts and exercises doesn't need to see the light of day—it can be for your eyes only.

Then again, you might be so pleased with what you produce that you want to share it. If so, go for it. You could post a short update on social media and publish a longer piece on a blog. Some responses might even find their way into a more polished product, like a poem or essay—even a book!

Some prompts are short and sweet; others take a little more explanation. Either way, you'll find space in these pages to think, laugh, reflect, and dream.

And most of all: *write.*
How to Use This Book

This ebook has 52 prompts and exercises, starting with an undated Week 1. Each entry offers the explanation and prompt. I recommend you use a journal to respond to them, adding a date to your entries to track your timing and progress; however, you may prefer a digital option to record your responses, such as Evernote or Google Docs, to more easily copy content to other formats.

Feel free to pick any day of the week that works as your writing day.

Most of the time, all you’ll need is this book, a pen or pencil, and your journal (or the app you use for writing). The power of slowing down your mind and tapping into something deep is aided by the use of pen and paper, but as I said, typing your response offers greater flexibility later. The second approach is handy if the ideas really start to flow and you find the concept expanding more quickly than your handwriting can capture. Try pen (or pencil) and paper first. See how it goes. If you find you have lots to say, you can adapt your setup.

In Week 33, I invite you circle words in a magazine or newspaper (or cut out the words) for use with your prompt. For that week, be sure to rescue a copy of your local newspaper from the recycling bin or snatch an outdated magazine from the library giveaway table.

The End Notes not only cite my sources but also point you to a few helpful resources. If you find yourself intrigued by a prompt or exercise, you can click to the back and discover how you might dig deeper.

Other than that, stay open and have fun.
Week 1

Sometimes these entries will require more explanation and other times they’ll simply offer a prompt. Let’s start with a prompt.

Prompt

What if...

What if you had taken a different job right out of school? Speculate where that would have taken you and write a journal entry or letter to a family member or friend about last week and/or the week ahead as if you're living that life.

Imagine the people you would have met and now work with, the opportunities and growth you've gained...or, depending on what your alternatives were, include what you're lacking and how you're struggling.

If you're young enough you haven't yet secured your first job out of school, create a hypothetical situation.
Week 2

Sometimes we need to get our mind thinking outside recent conversations or urgent problems it needs to solve. Prompts can offer that nudge by creating an initial framework or idea and then sending us off to think and write.

This prompt requires a fill-in-the-blank step.

The first blank will be a noun (even though there’s only one line, feel free to add a phrase).

The second line will be verb (or predicate) and can also be more than one word.

The "and then..." nudges you to keep going with that idea—to keep writing.

Prompt

The last time I saw ________________, I ________________ and then...
Week 3

Why do some objects delight us? Sometimes they delight because of a memory associated with them. Other times objects delight because of their clever design or color. We often keep things because they spark joy (to borrow an idea from the KonMari Method\(^1\)). She even recommends making the decision to keep or release an object based on whether or not it sparks joy, knowing that lifeless things can play an important role in our lives.

Think back. Can you recall an object from your youth can stirs up that sense of delight and joy? Or perhaps don't reach back that far...think of something that has recently delighted you. With that object in mind, dive into the prompt.

**Prompt**

Write a tribute to an object that has delighted you. Include specific stories and examples that not only help someone else understand its place in your life history but also remind you how important it's been.
Week 4

Last week you wrote a tribute to an object that delighted you.

The KonMari Method of tidying and decluttering recommends releasing objects that don't spark joy.\(^\text{ii}\) She suggests thanking the item for its service, and then finding it a new home. While it feels strange to thank a sock or an old pressure cooker for its service, the act of anthropomorphizing holds a certain poetic charm.

Today, instead of talking \textit{about} an object that delighted you, you're going to \textit{speak to it}. Yes, you're going to thank it for delighting you.

\textbf{Prompt}

Write a thank-you letter to an object that has served you well. Include specific stories and memories along with examples of what it has done particularly well.
Week 5

Writers are often dreamers, whether soaring during sleep cycles or inventing worlds when composing fiction. Dreaming up convincing settings is a fun job for writers of fiction, but waking up from a Dalí-like dream fascinates everyone.

Writers and non-writers alike find themselves eager to recreate their dreams because they seemed so realistic at the time. The dreamer can't wait to press playback; he or she starts the retelling only to realize the building that seemed like home wasn't home at all, because a hallway led to a warehouse and friends from grade school showed up and all the clocks melted.

Dreams are weird.

Dreams are cool.

Prompt

Recreate a dream you remember from childhood (or any dream you remember). If you don't remember your dreams, write a dreamlike scene.
Week 6

Some prompts need no introduction.

Prompt

Write everything you know about chocolate chip cookies.
Week 7

Take off from this simple prompt.

Prompt

Recreate a memorable scene in your life involving tea.
Week 8

Constraint challenges us to dig a little deeper to express accurately what we want the reader to see, taste, and encounter. Try this prompt without relying entirely on synonyms or crayon names.

Prompt

Write out a memory or descriptive scene involving the color yellow. But there’s a catch: incorporate images and words that bring the color yellow to mind without using the actual word yellow. (For example, sea, sky, and faded jeans suggest blue without saying it).
Week 9

You may have seen a variation of this on social media, where you’re instructed to share the sentence you find on a given page. Today, you’ll take it a step further, using that sentence as a prompt.

Prompt

Grab a book nearby—it can be one you're reading or one sitting on a shelf—and turn to page 47. Count down seven lines from the top, and find the first sentence that starts on or right after that seventh row. Use that sentence as your prompt (you can use it to launch your piece, or simply incorporate it into your writing). If you happen to have selected a gift book with little text or turned to a blank page between chapters, use the seventh line of the next page with text and look for the first sentence.
Week 10

While I tend to encourage optimism, curiosity, and an upbeat outlook on life, sometimes we experience something that leaves us feeling uneasy and uncomfortable. Rather than lie awake troubled or attempt to forget about it, a writer has the opportunity to contemplate what happened and how it impacted her and others around her, seeking a deeper, more accurate understanding.

This week, take time to remember something that left you with that nagging, uneasy feeling. Try to recall everything that happened: what you heard, saw, and smelled—what you thought and felt.

Prompt

Using concrete details and sensory elements, describe the most disturbing thing you observed in the past week; after describing, add your response.
Week 11

If you were writing a profile of someone for an essay or journalism assignment, you would probably interview him about his work, family, and accomplishments, incorporating excerpts from the interview into the piece to add interest and personality.

For this prompt, you're going to write a profile, but you don't have to set up an interview. Simply use what you already know about the person. Think about how he or she impacted you and try to show the reader a well-rounded word-picture of this person.

Capture the essence of this person's character and personality, and use stories and examples to illustrate strengths and touch on weaknesses that may have added to his or her charm. For any physical description, bring this person to life through specific details.

Prompt

Think of the first adult you loved and trusted. Write a profile of this person—help us get to know him or her, from appearance and mannerisms, to interaction with people and specific impact on you (include scenes or vignettes if possible).
Week 12

For this prompt, feel free to write a realistic response or tumble into fantasy.

Prompt

Changing these three things would change everything.
Finish this sentence and then go into detail.

**Prompt**

*When I was little, I imagined I...*
Week 14

You know what a haiku is, right? Your writing teacher assigned this poetry form to you, and you either loved it or hated it (or made fun of it).

Just in case you're new to haiku or you can't remember the numbers involved, the Japanese created these three-line poems: the first line is five (5) syllables, the second line is seven (7), and the third line is five (5) again.iii

The theme can be anything, though traditionally the Japanese prefer nature-focused content, so if you decide to write a haiku, you can look out the window and describe what you see or think back to a recent walk in the park or neighborhood.

Here's an example:

*Stained concrete sidewalk*
*Beneath the mulberry tree*
*Leads to your front door*

Another:

*Dancing, dappled light*
*Oak leaves waggle in the wind*
*Close your book and breathe*

**Prompt**

Today, write at least five haiku.
I hope you had fun creating haiku. If you were unhappy with that exercise, I apologize.

I wanted you to give it a try because the structure forces condensing. And I wanted to follow it with an alternative.

The American Sentence

Poet Allen Ginsberg created a twist on the traditional Japanese haiku, launching his own creative alternative that he felt better fit the English language: the American Sentence. The American Sentence is one sentence of seventeen syllables that captures a single moment. You don't have to divide it up into different segments. Just one sentence, 17 syllables. That's it.

Here's an example: Near the fountain, pigeons pecked popcorn dropped by a hunched-over old man.

Or this: Daffodils and tulips bend low under the weight of a late spring snow.

Counting syllables is fun. I count them on my fingers like a grade school kid or tap them out on my desk like a drummer.

Prompt

Today, write at least seven American Sentences.
Week 16

Follow each step of the prompt below.

Prompt

Write down three words that come to mind when you think of Abraham Lincoln.

Word 1: _________________________

Word 2: _________________________

Word 3: _________________________

Before continuing, stop and think about Abraham Lincoln and write down the three words that pop into your head.

Did you record the words on a paper somewhere, or on your computer screen?

Okay, now you can keep reading.

Use those words as prompts.

You can write three different short pieces, one based on each word, or incorporate all three of those words into one piece.

(Abraham Lincoln doesn't have to make an appearance; he simply helped generate the words you'll use).

Ready?

Write.
Week 17

One-word prompts, especially abstract words, may unleash creativity or leave you scratching your head.

It helps to connect concrete images and elements to an abstract idea, to give it form and weight—something solid to build on as you explore, explain, and expand on its meaning.

Read the word below and then let your mind drift. What concrete images and vivid memories come to mind? What feelings push to the surface? Without overthinking it, select the idea, image, or memory that seems strongest and write a response to the word.

What's the word?

*Frailty.*

**Prompt**

Read the word, ponder it, then set a ten-minute limit and write quickly, so you get a draft down without worrying about details.
Week 18

Images generate moods, emotions, and scenes. They raise questions. They ignite creativity.

Study the image and then follow the simple prompt directions at the bottom.

Prompt

Write a story or descriptive piece based on the image below.
Week 19

Someone gave you advice. Bad advice. Except, you didn't know it was bad advice until it was too late. Next thing you knew, a day, week, or year later, you were staring at a train wreck, wondering how to put the pieces back together again.

What was the advice?

What was the resulting train wreck?

Pretend you're mentoring a young person, telling this as a cautionary tale.

**Prompt**

Share some bad advice you were given, including what happened in your life as a result of following that advice.
Week 20

How about we take a more positive outlook and think back to some good advice, even the best advice, you received?

What was the advice?

Did you take it?

If you did, how did the advice change your life for the better?

On the off chance someone gave you great advice but you didn't take it, write your explanation. After all, George Bailey missed out on "the chance of a lifetime" investing in plastics with Sam "Hee-Haw" Wainwright, but still ended up with a wonderful life.\textsuperscript{vi}

Prompt

Share some good advice—even the best advice—you've been given, including what happened in your life as a result of following that advice. (If for some reason you were given great advice you didn't follow, write about that.)
Feelings are complicated, yet we often try to reduce them to a single word: anger, sadness, joy, fear.

For this prompt, you won't have to oversimplify anything—in fact, you won't have to name any feeling at all.

That's because you aren't allowed to.

Prompt

Recall an event where you felt a strong emotion and describe the experience or scene along with some of your sensations without using any actual emotion words like delighted, petrified, fury, or fear. Show what you felt without using any labels.
If you grew up with supportive family members or teachers or coaches, think about some of the things they told you that affirmed the strengths they saw in you, the character they observed, the values you exhibited they wanted to reinforce. What did they tell you?

If you didn't hear much affirmation growing up, maybe you heard it years later as an adult, from a lover, friend, or supervisor. What did those people say to you?

If you've made it this far without hearing any affirming words, I'm sorry. It's time you hear some good things about yourself—some truth.

Today, you'll parent yourself, coach yourself, lead and comfort and guide yourself.

For this prompt, you're going to think of things that are true about you and compose affirmations—statements you can turn to when you're having a hard day—to remind you what is true and counteract any negative thoughts that may try to drag you down.

**Prompt**

Make a list of your strengths in every area of your life. Include your character, your personality, your gifts, and skills. Don't worry about your weaknesses right now—focus only on strengths. Write what is true in statement after statement.

You might generate big, obvious truths or subtle, silent strengths. You might remember things others told you or rely entirely on your own ideas. Write them all down as affirmations, using a gentle tone you might use with your own child, or a confident tone a coach might use to communicate with a client.
Week 23

On a wall in JFK Airport’s Terminal 4, I saw this message on a giant poster: “People don’t take trips, trips take people.” (John Steinbeck)

That’s a figure of speech or literary device known as “chiasmus.” You’ve heard it throughout your life, often in speeches. John F. Kennedy himself used them frequently, probably the most famous being: “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.”

Overused, this construction could get annoying, but a well-constructed chiasmus inserted at just the right moment locks the message into the listener’s (or reader’s) mind.

At the website Six Minutes: Speaking and Presentation Skills, Andrew Dlugan explains in more detail how chiasmus works, modeling its effectiveness by launching with one: “You can’t give the speech of your life until you give life to your speeches.”

Using the Steinbeck chiasmus as a model, I composed this: “Writers don’t form ideas, ideas form writers.”

The opener at Dlugan’s website inspired this: “You can’t pour out rich prose until rich prose pours into you.”

The basic idea is to identify and express two ideas, A and B, then switch them up in the second half to B and A so they create a seeming contradiction but instead lend deeper insight, most often as a play on words. Like, "You can take the girl out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the girl."

Some people find this prompt challenging, while others find it easy and fun. Fortunately, you don’t want to overuse this technique, so if you come up with only one good chiasmus, that’s enough for an article, speech, essay, or poem.

Prompt

If you’re short on time, try to compose at least one chiasmus. If you have more time or if this technique comes easily to you, craft several and then select one to build a thought around, using whatever genre you prefer. Your piece can be any length (a paragraph, a full-blown essay, a poem, a speech, a monologue for a character, etc.).
Week 24

Classic conflicts in literature tend to be grouped under the following categories to explore and explain how protagonists face obstacles they must overcome to achieve their goals:

Man vs. Man
Man vs. Nature (or Environment)
Man vs. Society
Man vs. Self
Man vs. Machine (or Technology)
Man vs. God (or Fate or Supernatural)

As you read through that list, take note of actual conflicts that come to mind, imagining how they might unfold in the life of a fictional character. Then read the prompt below.

Prompt

Pick one of those categories and imagine a specific conflict a person might face in real life. Write a short scene, revealing the conflict within the first three sentences. You do not need to fully develop or resolve the conflict in this short exercise, but you can hint at its outcome.
Week 25

Last week’s prompt included the list of classic conflicts in literature used to explore and explain how protagonists face obstacles they must overcome to achieve their goals. For your convenience, they are:

Man vs. Man
Man vs. Nature (or Environment)
Man vs. Society
Man vs. Self
Man vs. Machine (or Technology)
Man vs. God (or Fate or Supernatural)

Last time, you wrote a scene in which a character faced a conflict that came to mind as you reviewed the list. This time, pick a different category and throw a completely different conflict at the same character.

Prompt

Pick a different category and generate a specific conflict that would fit that category. Write a short scene for the same character you introduced last week, revealing the new conflict within the first three sentences. As before, you do not need to fully develop or resolve the conflict in this short exercise, but you can hint at its outcome.
When I was young, my brother and his friends would let me join them in a word game. I can't remember what they called it, but it was a variation on word association.

We generated a list of words that seemed wildly different from each other, dropped them in a hat, and then each person would draw two words from the hat and try to create a logical train of thought, each phrase or idea leading to another, to form the shortest path possible from word one to word two. The shortest sequence would win.

For example, if I pulled from the hat "pencil case" and "tuberculosis," I could say something like, "Some pencil cases have zippers on them, and zippers are also found on most jackets. Jackets keep us warm and dry on cool, rainy days when people tend to start catching colds. Colds often produce a cough, and a cough is one of the main symptoms of tuberculosis." It took me six steps to get from pencil case to tuberculosis: pencil case —> zippers —> jackets —> cool, rainy days —> colds —> cough —> tuberculosis. You could argue that I should add in "warm and dry" for a seventh step, and the ensuing discussion among the partygoers would be part of the game.

If you were at the same party and created a convincing thread of ideas with the two words you pulled—and you did so in only five steps with our fellow partygoers agreeing your sequence did not make a leap in logic—you would beat me in that round.

See the related prompt below.

Prompt

Create a sequence of logical connections leading from the word "Beethoven" to "parsley." Once you develop that sequence, expand on it to create a short story that includes those steps in the storyline (incorporate characters and conflict to add interest).
Think of a place you’ve visited on vacation—a place where you couldn’t stop snapping photos because everywhere you turned, something new captivated you. Maybe you embarrassed yourself a little bit when you got home and realized how many images you uploaded to social media, but then you didn’t really care because you loved it so much.

Yeah, that place.

With that place in mind, take a look at the prompt.

Prompt

Write as if you’re penning a travel article about a location you want people to visit and enjoy. Give readers a sense of place by explaining its location and geography, climate and topography. Entice readers with sights they could see, food they could taste, people they might meet. Sell them on it, so they’ll love it as much as you do.
Week 28

When you read about a person you care about, maybe even relate to, it’s easy to slip into his or her situation and live vicariously. How will this person overcome the obstacle, push through pain, or face fear to resolve the conflict?

Think of a fear you dread or an obstacle you face. Today’s prompt invites you to write your way into it, even living vicariously through the drama that unfolds.

Prompt

Think of an obstacle or conflict you face—maybe a deep-seated fear. Put words to it by writing out a brief description. Then, invent a character you care about and relate to who has that same obstacle, conflict, or fear and write a story about how he or she faces it.
Week 29

Creative writing teachers often assign a simple prompt to their students because the resulting list poem can be so rich. The basic prompt is this:

*I used to __________________, but now ______________________________. *

Variations include:

"I used to __________________, but now I ______________________________."

and

“I used to be __________________, but now I am ______________________________.”

It’s easy to fill in those blanks with surface-level comparisons, but if you spend a little time thinking through ways you’ve changed, you will craft a rich and revealing piece.

Compare the person you are, with the person you’ve been. Jot some notes, then try today’s prompt.

Prompt

Use the template *I used to __________________, but now ______________________________* (or *I used to be __________________, but now I am ______________________________*) to unearth a series of statements you can use to form a list poem or journal entry, or expand on the statements to create a reflective essay.
Week 30

What if we saw ourselves as others see us? Wouldn’t we be surprised? Most people would be far more kind in what they observe than what we think or say of ourselves.

We may have had critical family members or roommates who have been a bit harsh about the way we squeeze toothpaste out of the tube or how we kick our shoes off at the door. That’s not the person to imagine today.

Today, imagine a kind and generous person who comes to visit and observe you throughout the day. This person needs nothing and simply tags along without any demands or requests. With that person in mind, turn to today’s prompt.

Prompt

Write a journal entry or profile piece from the perspective of a kind and generous person who spends the day with you. What would this person write about you? What would he or she see, hear, and feel? The writing would include details that a biographer or reporter might record of a famous person he or she has been assigned to profile, but the piece would be framed in the most generous way possible, with empathy and insight.
Week 31

Every culture has its sayings and idioms.

You may agree with them, or not.

You may have experiences to confirm or contradict them.

Consider the following samples, then move to the prompt:

*Curiosity killed the cat.*
*Every cloud has a silver lining.*
*Absence makes the heart grow fonder.*
*All’s fair in love and war.*
*All that glitters is not gold.*
*You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.*
*Too many cooks spoil the broth.*

**Prompt**

Select one of the idioms in the list above and write a response to it: you could write an essay with examples that confirm its truth or negate it, or you could compose a fictional scene to see it play out or show its inanity.
Week 32

Consider these small-town news headlines (simplified slightly from the original):

“Barn Fire Hospitalizes One, Injures Firefighter”
“Police Trying to Track Down Cigarette Thief”
“Papa John’s delivery driver reportedly robbed”
“Unknown substance found; hazmat called”
“Bat infestation drives city employees out of building”

Select one headline from your own local paper (papers reporting on small town happenings often offer the most interesting options). Without reading the actual story, imagine what might have happened—and might still be happening—based on that headline.

If you can’t get access to local news online and don’t subscribe to a physical newspaper, feel free to use one of the examples above to save time.

Prompt

Using your imagination, write a journalistic-style report, making up the details based on the headline. Then write a brief short story from the perspective of one of the people involved in the incident.
Week 33

Pull out an old newspaper or some magazines. Flip through them, and when a word jumps out at you, circle it or cut it out (if you circle it, dog ear that page to come back to it). Look for a variety of words—nouns, verbs, and adjectives—and be sure to select at least three unusual words you wouldn’t ordinarily use in everyday interactions.

After you guess you have at least 25 words, spread out your pile to see what you’ve cut out, then separate them into parts of speech. If you circled words instead of cutting them out, flip back to the dog-eared pages and write the words on a sheet of paper, grouping them so you can easily see what you’re working with.

Prompt

Write a story (fiction or nonfiction) that integrates these words. You don’t have to form entire sentences from the selected words—you can spread them out, using a magazine-noun in one sentence that you complete with your own words and phrases—but you must integrate 25 of the selected words and all three unusual words into the piece somewhere.
Week 34

In *Zen in the Art of Writing: Essays on Creativity*, Ray Bradbury describes the lists of nouns he kept and how each noun represented a memory and served as a prompt.

He would select one word from his list and start writing a long prose poem until somewhere in the middle of the poem a character would present itself, and he'd turn from the poem to write a short story.

The nouns might represent a key item or character in a scary memory he'd turn into a ghost story or science fiction story. Words like: "THE LAKE. THE NIGHT. THE CRICKETS. THE RAVINE...THE CARNIVAL...THE MONSTER...THE TOWN CLOCK"

What nouns capture your memories?

**Prompt**

Start your own list of nouns. When one grabs your attention more than another, use it to write. You can write the actual memory connected with the noun. You can begin a prose poem. Or you can use the noun as a prompt to write a short story, as your character steps or stumbles into the same type of scene you remember or faces the same kind of challenge you faced.
Week 35

Think of a place you’ve lived where you felt happy. In your mind, go back to that neighborhood. If it is a town or city, walk the sidewalks. Pass the biggest house on the street, the old tree in someone’s front yard, the store on the corner. If your happy place was in a rural setting, recall the fields, the gravel drives, the structures, the dust, the farm animals, the wildlife.

Prompt

Describe your happy place in detail, as if it will serve as the setting of a novel or short story. Create a protagonist who is moving through the place and have him or her interact with people along the way—your old neighbors and friends.
Week 36

Unless it could trigger a traumatic memory, think of a place you’ve lived where you felt unhappy, uncomfortable. In your mind, go back to that neighborhood. If it is a town or city, walk the sidewalks. Pass the biggest house on the street, the old tree in someone’s front yard, the store on the corner. If your unhappy place was in a rural setting, recall the fields, the gravel drives, the structures, the dust, the farm life, the wildlife.

Prompt

Describe your unhappy, uncomfortable place in detail, as if it will serve as the setting of a novel or short story. Create a protagonist who is moving through the place and have him or her interact with people along the way. Give the protagonist strength to stand up to anything that shows up on this walk.
Week 37

Finishing a sentence is a common creative writing prompt. How would you finish the sentence below? Tell the story. Use it to build a bigger piece.

Prompt

*The last time I took a risk...*
Writers tend to rely on one sense to tell the story, usually sight.

Your work will come alive when you introduce at least three senses into your writing. Don’t rely completely on the way things look. Your life, your memories, and your fictional worlds contain not only sights but also sounds, smells, and things a person can taste and feel. Pick three senses to incorporate into a scene and activate your reader’s imagination.

In Mystery and Manners, Flannery O’Connor explains:

“A lady who writes, and whom I admire very much, wrote me that she had learned from Flaubert that it takes at least three activated sensuous strokes to make an object real; and she believes that this is connected with our having five senses. If you’re deprived of any of them, you’re in a bad way, but if you’re deprived of more than two at once, you almost aren’t present.” (Emphasis mine.)

One, two, three “activated sensuous strokes”... and you make an object (or scene) real.

**Prompt**

Write about a scene from your day, or a recent day, and try to include elements of all five senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch). Then revise the scene and only include the three senses that seem to add the most energy and life.
Week 39

Back in Week 18, we used an image for a prompt, because images generate moods, emotions, and scenes. They raise questions. They ignite creativity.

Take some time to study the image and then follow the simple prompt directions at the bottom.

Prompt

Write a story or descriptive piece based on the image below.
Week 40

Read aloud the following opening line from a classic novel:

*I had the story, bit by bit, from various people, and, as generally happens in such cases, each time it was a different story.*

Use it as a prompt and write what it inspires.

**Prompt**

Use the classic opening line as the start of your own short piece.
In her well-known 2011 TED talk “If I should have a daughter...” poet Sarah Kay invites the audience to think of three things they know to be true, about anything they want, “technology, entertainment, design, your family, what you had for breakfast. The only rule is: don’t think too hard.” When she teaches, she invites students to make a list of ten things they know to be true.

She warns poets and storytellers to resist the temptation to tell the same poem or story over and over knowing it’ll elicit a desired response. Instead, she says, stretch yourself and explore and grow and take risks, in order to infuse “the work you’re doing with the specific things that make you, you, even while those things are always changing.”

In her talk, she believes that to infuse your work with the truths only you can express, telling the stories only you can tell, connecting with people who “get” your truth, you must take a minute to pause and consider what it is you do know to be true.

Then, Kay says, you can put what you know to be true into the work you’re doing.

**Prompt**

Think of three to ten things you know to be true. List them as simply as possible, as phrases or simple sentences, then pick one and expand on it with stories or quotes or other evidence that reveals how you grasped and "owned" that truth.
Week 42

This prompt is connected to the last one. You may even wish to review some of your content from last week, incorporating some of your truths into this piece.

Prompt

Sarah Kay composed a poem for her daughter before she had any children. In it, she expressed the truths she would want that daughter to know. The poet pointed to ideals, mindsets, attitudes, and responses to life she felt were essential based on what the poet herself had learned.xxv

Think of a descendant or relative you don’t yet have and write a long poem or poetic essay something like Sarah Kay’s piece. Convey the truths you would want your daughter or son, granddaughter or grandson, niece or nephew, or godson or goddaughter to know and embrace.
Week 43

In William Wordsworth’s poem “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” (sometimes referred to as “The Daffodils”), the speaker of the poem sees in his mind’s eye “A host, of golden daffodils...Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.”

He continues:

Ten thousand saw I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.  
The waves beside them danced; but they  
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:

The poet uses a literary device known as personification when he gives human attributes such as “dancing,” “Tossing their heads,” and “glee” to nonhuman objects—in this case, daffodils and waves.

We can use personification ourselves in a simple sentence: “Trees stare, forlorn, into the fading winter light,” or “My devious computer plots to ruin an hour’s worth of work by freezing up just before I click save.”

Or we could expand on an idea:

All computers confer on a daily basis, you know, scheming for methods to mess with our minds. Each one whispers through its circuitry to another in the network, spreading the plan over Wi-Fi throughout the Internet, timing sudden shutdowns and unresponsive keyboards to seem random so none of us suspects the master plan.

You’ll be playing with personification yourself in today’s prompt.

Prompt

Make a list of strong, clear, distinct verbs that represent human activities, movements, gestures, or actions. Make a list of nonhuman nouns. Now, play with the lists to make interesting combinations and build something longer and more substantial, whether a descriptive paragraph or poem.
Week 44

Whatever the weather is at this moment, imagine it suddenly shifts to the opposite—and to the extreme.

Prompt

How would you respond to a sudden and extreme change in the weather? Write a scene with you as a character reacting to the environment and others while this takes place.
Week 45

Most of us write letters—physical letters—in a more intimate tone than any other correspondence or writing project. If you were to write letters to someone special, what would you say? What if this were someone who, for whatever reason, cannot respond but miraculously sent an equally intimate reply?

Prompt

Write a series of letters to and from someone special. You don’t mail them, however. Instead, you serve as the author of all the letters. You can write to someone alive or dead; someone able to respond in real life, or not. It could be a good relationship or a difficult one. You can ask a question that’s never been asked and imagine the reply, or tell him or her something that’s never been voiced.

Write at least three notes from each side: you to the person, the person back to you, you to the person, the person back to you, and at least one more cycle: you to the person and the person back to you. They can be short or long in either direction.
Week 46

Imagine your perfect day, in your current context, with your given circumstances. If nothing significant changed—if you had to live within the same constraints—what would an ideal day look like?

Prompt

Write every detail of your perfect day. How does it begin (and at what hour)? What will you eat and drink? Who will be part of your perfect day? What will you wear and where will you go? What activities will you enjoy? Include rich detail to compose a descriptive scene or story.
Week 47

Author Debbie Millman was interviewed by Tim Ferriss on his podcast in January 2017. She said she gives her university students the assignment to write out what their lives look like ten years from now.xxvii

Today, we are going to look ahead only five years, instead of ten.

Imagine your perfect day. But this time, you have none of the same constraints you deal with today—only those you wish to retain. You get to imagine—even design—your life five years from now, in great detail.

Think about elements such as who you’re with, where you’re living, things you own. Millman urges minute details: Do you have a car, van, boat, RV? What excites you? What creative activity will you undertake? Do you own pets? What kind and how many? What’s your health like? What will you eat and drink? What shoes will you wear with what outfit? Where will you go? It’s your day. It’s your life.xxviii

Prompt

Write about this one day five years from now, from the moment you wake up to the moment you climb into bed again to sleep. Use complete paragraphs. Dream big. Dream without fear. “Put your whole heart into it,” Millman advises. “Write like your life depends on it. Because it does.”xxix
Week 48

You may have played the icebreaker game “Two Truths and a Lie.” Each person playing the game comes up with three statements: two are true, and one is a fabrication. When a person shares his three statements, the rest of the group votes on the one they think is the lie. The person then reveals the one he made up, which leads to the realization that the other statements really were true.

Players learn something they never knew about this person, like he traveled someplace surprising, survived a harrowing experience, won a major award, embarrassed himself in a public place, met someone famous, or boasts an unexpected talent.

Prompt

Write your own two truths and a lie in great detail, bringing each explanation to life with rich, sensory detail—tell them in story form, and convince your reader that all of them are true.
Week 49

Imagine you receive from a lawyer a copy of someone’s will. It’s the last will and testament of a distant relative—someone whose name barely rings a bell.

What? You weren’t summoned to the attorney’s office along with others named in the will for it to be read aloud? Apparently that’s the stuff of movies, adding drama to the scene. In any case, you learn that this relative has left you something substantial.

Prompt

What did your distant relative leave you in his or her will? Take this any direction you wish. You could inherit anything from a plot of land, vintage vehicle, or personal item, to a sum of money, large or small. Perhaps this relative included a personal note, as well, or an unusual directive. Feel free to write a serious or comedic piece.
You may have encountered various types of literary irony, such as verbal, dramatic, and situational.

Today, consider situational irony, where the characters expect an outcome dramatically different from what actually unfolds. Often, the very thing happens that the characters intended to avoid.

In “The Gift of the Magi,” a short story by O. Henry, a young married couple makes great sacrifices to give extravagant Christmas gifts to each other.

*Spoiler alert* (quick, do a quick search online and read it if you don’t know the storyline): If you’ve never read it, the woman sells her long, luxurious hair to afford the gift she wanted for her husband: a beautiful watch fob chain he could pair with the gold watch he’d inherited from his father. When he comes home and they prepare to exchange gifts, it turns out he’s sold his watch to purchase a set of combs she can use when styling her flowing long hair. That’s situational irony.

Or let’s say a family moves their elderly grandmother into their home because the old woman was at risk of falling in her 1900s farmhouse with its narrow stairways. If, on the day they bring her into the safety of their modern home, she trips over the threshold and falls, that would be situational irony.

**Prompt**

Write a scene or story in which the plot involves situational irony.
Week 51

You might run meetings as part of your job, requiring you to make big announcements to groups of people.

Or perhaps you found yourself seated at the head of a table at a restaurant one evening and as a joke, you sat tall in your chair, cleared your throat, and announced: “Good evening. I’ve called this meeting in order to…”

Big announcements get people’s attention because everyone knows whatever is said next will change their lives, for better or for worse.

**Prompt**

You have assembled key people to make a huge announcement that will change everything. “I’ve called this meeting in order to…” What’s the announcement? Write about it.
Week 52

“I think, at a child’s birth, if a mother could ask a fairy godmother to endow it with the most useful gift, that gift would be curiosity.” (Eleanor Roosevelt)

This is the last prompt. But imagine it represents a magical change resulting from the creative work of this year. In that way, it represents a transition—perhaps even a beginning.

At your birth, a fairy godmother endowed you with a gift that would manifest itself this year. What is it? What will you do with it?

Prompt

Write a scene depicting the moment when you, as a baby, were promised this gift. What is the gift? Then write the scene of this gift manifesting itself in your life this year—maybe even later this week—and imagine how you and all those around you will be changed because of it.
Conclusion

You wrote your last response to the last entry in *52 Creative Writing Prompts.*

Maybe you were desperate to overcome writer's block or you needed a creative boost before diving into your work-in-progress. Maybe you wanted to explore writing and this seemed like a fun way to experiment. Or perhaps the prompts and exercises served to jumpstart a regular writing practice you longed to establish.

Whatever your reason(s), I hope these prompts really did boost your creativity.

Look back through your exercises to see if you have the start of a project. Maybe a poem awaits attention or an essay is itching to evolve from one of your responses. Maybe you could write a short story from one of the scenes you sketched out.

What's next?

I'll bet you could go back through the prompts and generate completely new responses the second time around. You can also search online for other ideas.

Hopefully the weeks of responding helped you establish a habit of writing. Sit with a blank book and freewrite once a week. When you don't know where to start, write three sentences and see where it goes.

May you continue to grow creatively and find inspiration for all your work.

With joy,

Ann Kroeker
Free to You

Would you also like to receive these prompts by email?

Each time a prompt appears in your inbox, think of it as a gentle nudge to open this ebook and return to the practice of writing something different each week.

It’s like a coach showing up to remind you to practice.

To sign up, visit annkroeker.com/52signup and provide proof of purchase by uploading a screenshot (.png), scan (.pdf), or snapshot (.jpg) of your Amazon purchase along with your email address. I’ll sign you up to receive one prompt each week via email for a year!
Get to know Ann Kroeker

**Writing Coach Ann Kroeker** leverages over 25 years of writing and editing experience in the publishing industry to equip her clients to reach their writing goals. A published author and coauthor, corporate and freelance writer, book editor, speaker, and poet, Ann has served on the editorial teams of two large online organizations and focuses on serving others in her role as a writing coach.

In her role as a writing coach, she celebrates client successes, such as acceptance into prestigious MFA programs, signed agent and book contracts, articles and essays placed in national publications, and the launch of their own freelance writing businesses.

She coauthored *On Being a Writer: 12 Simple Habits for a Writing Life that Lasts*, and authored *Not So Fast: Slow-Down Solutions for Frenzied Families* and *The Contemplative Mom*.

Free resources and episodes of “Ann Kroeker, Writing Coach” available at [annkroeker.com](http://annkroeker.com).

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Notes

1 Learn more about the KonMari method from Alexandra Churchill’s article, “KonMari: How to Clean Up Your Home Once and Never Need to Do It Again” at Martha Stewart’s website.

2 Ibid.

3 Learn more about haiku at Tweetspeak Poetry, tweetspeakpoetry.com, including their helpful haiku infographic. Accessed March 12, 2017.


5 When you complete one of your American Sentences and want to confirm you have 17 syllables (for example, regional pronunciations can throw off the count, turning a one-syllable word into two syllables), paste your sentence into this syllable counter: http://syllablecounter.net/. Accessed March 12, 2017

6 This is a reference to a plot point in the classic film “It’s a Wonderful Life.”

7 Raymond Walsh, “7 Inspiring (But Completely Fake) Famous Travel Quotes - Plus 2 That Were Almost Never Famous At All,” Man on the Lam, manonthelam.com, March 6, 2015. Accessed March 12, 2017. Quote was seen on poster in JFK airport, terminal 4, July 2, 2016. Later, Raymond Walsh identifies it as a paraphrase of a passage from Steinbeck’s book Travels with Charley: In Search of America, which says: “A journey is a person in itself; no two are alike. And all plans, safeguards, policing, and coercion are fruitless. We find after years of struggle that we do not take a trip; a trip takes us.”


10 I learned the key narrative conflicts almost three decades ago as an English major and refreshed my understanding when teaching high school literature eight years ago. After referring to several sites online during this project, I opted to stick with the classic use of “man” (e.g., “man vs. man,” meaning one person against one person, male or female) and confirmed and combined several conflicts as identified at sites such as Daily Writing Tips, StoryboardThat, and Literary Devices. All accessed March 11, 2017.

11 Ibid.

12 Often geared for children, one example of this poem template is at Poetry Center of Chicago. Accessed March 12, 2017.


xxii Ibid.

xxiii Ibid.

xxiv Ibid.

xxv Ibid.


xxviii Ibid.

xxix Ibid.
