

Junior High and High School Writing Prompts

Fiction

1. Lucy is *devastated*. Why?
2. Your character has a secret. It may not be a dangerous one, but it's a secret that, if found out, would certainly change things. Your character just made the mistake of telling someone who may not be trustworthy. What happens next?
3. Go to the newspaper (online or in print) and find a headline you think is interesting. Read the article, and write a story from the perspective of one of the people involved.
4. Write a story from the perspective of one of your parents when they were your age.
5. At a crazy/loud/huge family gathering, two cousins find themselves alone in the kitchen. One has something they *really* want to tell the other, but they're not sure where to begin. What happens next?
6. Write about a world where sadness is treated as a disease.
7. You just found out that the kid you're getting paid to babysit is actually a younger version of yourself. What do you do?
8. Go into a crowded place, like a coffee shop or a restaurant. Bring a notebook. Eavesdrop on a conversation happening near you, and write a story from the dialogue you overhear.
9. Sit somewhere public and people-watch. (Don't be creepy. Just have a look at the folks passing by.) Choose 1-3 people who seem interesting to you and write fake biographies for them. Then, include them in a story with each other.

10. So, there's that kid you totally hated in kindergarten. We all have one. What will that person be like when s/he's 16? Tell us the story.
11. Write an alternate ending to a story, book, or movie that left you unsatisfied. At birth, you are given a book that contains the full script of your life.
12. Everything you'll do, everything you'll say, everyone you'll meet. It contains
13. your likes and dislikes, your hobbies, your friends. All the choices have been made for you. Each newborn baby gets one of these books, and your parents hand you a small packet every morning, giving you directions for the day. What happens?
14. On the way home yesterday, you found an empty notebook on the sidewalk. You picked it up and brought it home. When you opened it up to begin writing in it, the notebook began to write to you. What did it say?
15. Your character has just found out that they have a really unusual superpower. What is it? What will they do about it?
16. The world is going to end tomorrow, and you're the only person who knows about it. What's causing the apocalypse? What do you do?
17. Write a 26-sentence story in which each sentence begins with a different letter of the alphabet.
18. Find a song without any words. Listen to it three times. Each time, just freewrite based on how the song makes you feel. Write a story whose theme song might be that music.
19. From the list below, pick one person and one dramatic situation.



Write the story surrounding it.

People

Batman

Harry Potter

Benjamin Franklin

Kanye West

Barack Obama

Little Red Riding Hood

Miley Cyrus

Your weirdest aunt

Dramatic Situations

wants tater tots but cannot have them

is considering cosmetic surgery

is addicted to Facebook

sitting behind a couple making out in a theater

accidentally runs over a squirrel

gets a tattoo

lives with 100 cats

gets the wrong food from a McDonald's drive-up window

20. Pick a family member and describe that person in as much detail as possible. Then, rewrite that description from that person's perspective.
21. Think of an argument you had recently. Write it out as a dialogue between two characters who are not you or the person with whom you argued. Then, write the story surrounding your characters' argument.
22. Write a story that begins with the following sentence: *"I think this thing is stuck," said Sally.*
23. Write a story from the perspective of someone at least five years older or younger than you.
24. Dream up two characters. Give them names. Describe what they look like, and pick three adjectives to describe their personality (fierce? weird? superstitious?). Next, figure out a relationship between your two characters: are they mother and son? Teacher and student? Cousins? Are they dating? Write a story in which your two characters are trying to discuss something important while cooking a really elaborate meal.



25. Who is your favorite author? Read five pages of a book by that author, then try to write a story in a similar style. What do you notice about the way your writer uses language? Is this person hard or easy to copy?
26. Let's say you have a dog. Let's say this dog's name is Jack. What does Jack think of you when you do the following things?
- a) Get ready for a date
 - b) Cook dinner
 - c) Work out
 - d) Read
 - e) Watch television
 - f) Celebrate your birthday
27. Write a two-page story that consists entirely of dialogue.
28. Write a story that takes place in a world where one—*just* one—element of the human experience is different from our reality. Do people have cheese for feet?

Nonfiction

1. Tell the story behind the kindest deed you've ever done. Tell the story behind the worst lie you've ever told.
2. What's the most interesting place you've ever been? (A church? Your grandma's house? The Taj Mahal?) Research it. This can mean anything from interviewing a family member to going to the library. Have fun with it! Then, write an essay describing your experience in that place alongside the place's history.
3. What's the hardest challenge you've ever faced? How did you overcome it? Describe a time when things changed.
4. Who's your hero?
5. Write a profile of someone you know well. You can love them or loathe them, but strong feelings are important. What does this person look like? What does s/he/they do? What passions define this person? How did they become the way they are?
6. Tell us about an object that means a lot to you. How long have you had it? How and when did you get it? How has its meaning changed for you over time? The year is 2066, and you have become incredibly famous. As such, you've finally decided to sit down and write your autobiography. What's on page 176?



7. What is your neighborhood like? Big, small? Urban, rural? Are there a lot of other kids there? How old or new is your neighborhood? Can you access its history and find out what types of people used to live there?
8. Remember a time in your life when you made a big decision, or when a big decision was made for you. What would have happened if you'd chosen to do something else? Write about that alternative universe.
9. Write a letter to someone you haven't talked to in a long time. Then, if you're feeling brave enough, send it.
10. What do you think is unfair? This could be something that happened to you, or just something that's an unfair condition in the world. Why is it unjust? What would you do to change it?
11. If you were elected President of the United States, what are the first three things you'd do in office? Why?
12. Write about something you consider deeply beautiful. Then, write about something you consider deeply ugly.
13. Think of something you do well. It can be something serious (like playing soccer) or something totally weird (like making your string cheese last a really long time by pulling off tiny tiny bits). Write a list of instructions for how to do that thing. This can be as serious or not-serious as you want.
14. Check your Google search history, and conduct an image search for the last thing you looked up. Write a story based on the thirtieth image you see.
15. You've hired a stunt double to act as you for the day. What sort of advice would you give to that person about living your life?

16. Write about a time when you were unfair to someone. What were the circumstances? Why did you do it? Now, write about the event from the other person's perspective.
17. Write about someone of whom you're jealous. Why are you envious of that person?
18. What's the thing you like most about yourself? Why?
19. What's one totally strange thing you believed as a small child? How did that belief work its way into your head? When and how was it finally shattered?
20. Write a letter to your future self. Sign and date it. Open it in a year.

Poetry

1. Write a poem in which the final letters of each line spell out your name.
2. Think of five slogans from commercials, ten famous people, and three idiomatic phrases (things like, "Don't sweat the small stuff" or, "I can't even"). Then, write a poem that contains at least two of your slogans, three of your famous people, and one of your idiomatic phrases.
3. Find a book **that you're willing to tear up a bit** and rip out a page at random. Use a marker to black out a bunch of words on the page, such that the remaining words become a poem.
 - a. *Example:* She was ~~too~~ tall ~~to look~~ like my sister, even though ~~she was, so everyone just assumed~~ she was my mom. ~~Folks who didn't know us always came up and said to her, "You have a lovely daughter."~~ I was too shy to correct them, and I understood how I really resemble her.
4. Open up a newspaper, book, or magazine and make a word bank out of interesting things you find in there. Write each of your words on a small slip of paper, and put the pieces of paper into a hat. Then, pick three words at random, and write a poem containing all three.

5. Make a list. Of things in your desk drawer, what you ate yesterday, what you brought on your last vacation, what you have to do before bed tonight. List anything. How does your list resemble a poem? What could you do to make it even more like a poem?

6. Make a list of words and expressions you hear a lot in songs you like (“playing games with my heart,” “keepin’ it real,” “you’re an angel”). Now, choose a mundane daily activity like washing the dishes or vacuuming. Using the list of language from the music you like, write a pop song about the activity you chose. The more ridiculous, the better.

7. Complete the following “poem recipe”:

- For **inspiration**, think of someone for whom you have strong feelings. This individual can be living or dead, but you must have a true, personal relationship with him/her.

good choice: grandpa

less good: 2Pac

- For a **title**, choose an emotion or color that represents that person to you.

- For the poem’s **first line**, *pick one* of the following sentence stems and complete it.

1. You stand there...
2. No one is here...
3. In this [memory, photograph, dream], you are...
4. I think sometimes...
5. We had been...

- To fill in the **remaining lines** of the poem, you will work according to this “recipe”:

Line 2 has a color in it.

Line 3 has a body part in it.

Line 4 has a simile.

Line 5 is over 25 words long.
Line 6 is under eight words long.
Line 7 has a piece of clothing in it.
Line 8 has a wish in it.
Line 9 has an animal in it.
Line 10 has three or more words that alliterate.
Line 11 has two commas.
Line 12 has a smell and a color in it.
Line 13 has a simile or metaphor.
Line 14 is an exclamation, written without an exclamation point.
Line 15 uses the word or words students chose for a title to help close the portrait.

8. Fill in the blanks in the following sentences twice. The first time, just use the first word that comes to your mind. The second time, think a bit harder about it and go for something more creative.
- A spider on an old man's beard is like _____.
 - The oars on the boat rowed as if _____.
 - Nothing was the same, now that it was _____.
 - The wind whispered like _____.
 - A child in _____ is like a _____ in _____.
 - Puffy clouds in your hot cocoa are _____.
 - My dream was like a _____.
 - Love is to open sky as loathing is to _____.
 - I won't forget the _____ of your _____ eyes.
9. Select an object at random from your house. Think of five nouns, five verbs, and five adjectives that you might associate with that object. Choose two of your words from each category and use them to write a poem about a family.
10. Write an unconventional ode. What small, weird thing in your life—your glasses, beets, your brother's shorts—are you thankful for? Write a poem singing its praises.
11. Write a poem whose every line begins, "I need you to know..."



IOWA

Magid Center for Writing

12. Find a poem online that you like. Then, choose two words or images from that poem and write your own.
13. Write a poem about your deepest secret, without revealing to your audience what the secret is.
14. Write a poem with the same title as your favorite song. The poem *cannot* be about the same thing that the song is.

Write a poem whose every line begins, “I am from.” Consult George Ella Lyon’s poem called “I Am From” for inspiration.

Write a poem that consists of the repeated phrase, “On the inside, I am _____. On the outside, I am _____.” Feel free to write literally or metaphorically.

Write a poem to someone who’s hurt you in the past. Write what you wish you’d said.