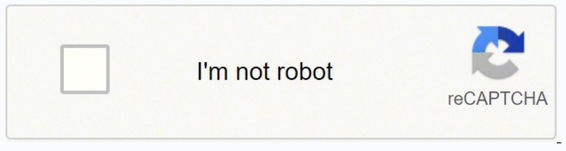

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Creative writing exercises for beginners pdf

Photo Courtesy: [Westend61/Getty Images] With everything you're juggling in your daily life, it's easy to feel a little off balance from time to time. From managing mishaps at work to making sure your spouse, kids, pets and hopefully yourself are all taken care of, it can feel like a luxury to stop and take a breath for a moment. But doing so in an intentional way — by practicing mindfulness meditation — may end up being one of the best decisions you make for your mental and physical health. From lowering stress and anxiety to helping you get more sleep, there are plenty of ways meditation can help — and plenty of reasons why it's been practiced for centuries. But it can sound deceptively simple. Read on to learn more about mindfulness meditation and some helpful ways you can start incorporating this practice into your life with ease. What Is Mindfulness Meditation? Photo Courtesy: [The Good Brigade/DigitalVision/Getty Images] Meditation is an ancient Buddhist tradition that focuses on clearing your mind — you can think of meditation as training for your brain in the same way exercise trains your physical body. Just as there are different workouts you can engage in to get your body fit, there are different types of meditation you can utilize to sharpen your mind. One of these types is mindfulness meditation. Like its name suggests, this meditation involves becoming more mindful of the feelings you're experiencing and the sensations your body is going through. But, instead of getting to the root of these feelings or actively analyzing them, you simply let yourself feel them without being judgmental about them or trying to figure out what they mean. Your goal is to become mindful of the present moment and aware of what's going on around you so that you're ultimately less reactive to or overwhelmed by what you're feeling — particularly when it comes to things like stress and anxiety. The Benefits of Mindfulness Are Numerous Photo Courtesy: [Westend61/Getty Images] While meditation may have once seemed like an esoteric practice whose measurable benefits were questionable (or at least unknown), it's undergone numerous clinical studies that are cluing scientists into the very real benefits this practice has. As it turns out, meditation is officially great for your mind and body. When it comes to the science behind meditation, different studies have investigated its relationship to a variety of different health conditions. While research remains ongoing, so far it's demonstrated evidence that meditation may promote an array of positive health effects, including: A natural reduction in pain levelsLower blood pressure in people who are at risk of developing high blood pressure "Help with psychological distress, anxiety, depression, anger/hostility and coping ability," according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Potential diminishing severity of irritable bowel syndrome symptoms after at least eight weeks of practiceImproved sleep for people with insomniaEnhanced self-esteemPossible reduction of widespread body inflammationBetter immune system functioning On another practical level, meditation helps your body — even your nervous system — relax. Other potential benefits of meditation and the relaxation it induces include the following: Your ability to relax has a profound effect on your bodily functions, and the relaxation meditation leads to can lower your blood pressure, improve circulation and lower your heart rate. You could see less perspiration, less strain in your breathing and lower levels of stress hormones in your body. One of the biggest benefits of meditation is mental. Being mindful can reduce your stress levels and anxiety and make you feel more relaxed. Regular mindfulness meditation becomes a tool you can use throughout your life to boost your mental and physical wellness. For many people, meditation is a spiritual practice. It can allow you to feel closer to a higher power and more connected to your faith. This transcendent state feels otherworldly. Meditation may also help kids learn to become more grounded and stable, too, and you can begin practicing mindfulness meditation with your kids. Children benefit from the act of relaxing and concentrating. Practicing mindfulness can help them with their emotions, stress, anxiety and feelings, just as it can for adults. Life is full of new feelings for children, and you may see an improvement in your child's wellbeing after introducing meditation. People meditate for different reasons. While some do it as a religious practice, others practice for self-development or a better sense of clarity. Many hope to feel more balanced and relaxed by lowering their stress levels. Whatever your reason, start by trying a few techniques to see which works best for you. Remember to give it time and have patience. Mindfulness Exercises for Beginners Photo Courtesy: [Francesco Vaninetti Photo/Moment/Getty Images] Mindfulness meditation allows us to embrace wandering thoughts that come into our brains at all times. Whether your mind is running through to-do lists or old memories, the practice of mindfulness encourages you to observe and embrace the thoughts that creep in, even if they're unpleasant or intrusive. Often, these types of thoughts can trigger your brain's stress responses. However, mindfulness counteracts this by activating your brain's relaxation response, effectively "retraining" your brain not to become stressed by those thoughts any longer. According to the University of Minnesota, "this response engages the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for restoring the body to base levels after a stress response, calming it down by lowering the heart and respiratory rate, blood pressure, and muscle tension." Let's say you're trying to clear your mind and relax. As you do so, you remember you need to take out the garbage. Over time, you'll begin to recognize how this makes you feel. You may feel stressed by this thought or worried about everything on your plate. The point of meditation isn't to focus and analyze the different thoughts, but more to recognize the feelings. Mindfulness means embracing your thoughts, worries and emotions to create better balance in your life. Get started by trying these helpful techniques. Concentration Meditation For beginners, concentration meditation is often a good place to start. This practice involves focusing on one single thing, often your breaths. Sit in a comfortable position that supports your body and provides stability. Let your gaze drop downward or close your eyes — whatever feels most comfortable for you. For a few minutes, only focus on physical sensations in your body; people often turn their attention to their breathing patterns. Your mind may start to wander away from your focus on physical sensations, and that's okay. When you notice a thought pop into your head, acknowledge it and gently redirect yourself back to your breathing. It's okay to start off slowly in practicing this type of meditation; even a minute or two can be beneficial. Eventually, you may be able to practice for longer durations. The goal here is to improve your clarity and ability to focus. Moving Meditations If you find that you want to incorporate some activity into your meditation, consider trying moving meditation. Many people use walking meditation to reshape their focus. This can be somewhat different from seated concentration meditation because you'll start by focusing on a variety of things in succession. You might start out by turning your attention to your breath, but you can also think about the sensations of your feet rising and dropping. After a few minutes of that, you might then take note of the sounds you're hearing outdoors and then the scents you're inhaling. Again, if your mind wanders, that's okay. Simply bring your focus back to the sensations you're experiencing in the present moment from the world around you to maintain your mindfulness. When you're ready to stop, pause and intentionally end the session mentally, even if you plan to continue walking. Resource Links: MORE FROM SYMPTOMFIND.COM This page contains a selection of fun writing exercises that can be completed solo, or with a group. Some are prompts to help inspire you, others focus on learning a specific skill. The sections are as follows: A note on running exercises remotely Intro Exercises: Extra info: How to run the writing exercises A note on running exercises remotely While you can enjoy the exercises solo, a lot of writing groups have gone online during the coronavirus pandemic and are using Zoom, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger or Skype to keep in touch with other writers during this time. If you're running such a group and following a 'Shut Up and Write' structure, I recommend connecting on WhatsApp (for example) first, doing the exercise together, with participants sending each other their writing samples where necessary as part of the exercise, then disconnecting to write in silence for an hour and a half, before reconnecting for a brief informal chat at the end. This works well with small remote groups and is a great way to gain some online support and stay productive! If you have a larger group, it's worth looking into Zoom, as this has a feature called Breakout Rooms. Breakout Rooms let you split different writers into separate rooms, which is great for group activities. The free version of Zoom has a 40 minute limit, which can be restrictive, but Zoom Pro is well worth it if you're going to use it on a regular basis. In my experience, Zoom has a better connection than Skype or WhatsApp. I hope you remain healthy and creative throughout this difficult time for us all. Intro I run a Creative Writing Meetup for adults and teens in Montpellier every week where we start with a 5 to 20 minute exercise, followed by an hour and a half of silent writing, where we each work on our own project. Each of these exercises has been used with the group and works well. Where the exercises below specify a number of people, if you have a larger group, simply split everyone up into smaller groups as appropriate. The solo exercises are ideal if you're working by yourself to help stimulate your mind before working on a larger project or to overcome writer's block, or can be used with a larger group, where you simply ask everyone to share what they've written in groups of 3 or 4 people afterwards. Looking for something quick to fire your imagination? Check out these creative writing prompts for adults. Solo exercise If your goal is to write a complete work of fiction, whether it be a novel, a play or a movie script, you will one day need to write to an agent or publisher to ask them to publish your work. In this exercise, we turn this around and ask you to instead spend 10 minutes writing a letter from a character in your novel to you, the author, explaining why you should write about them! This serves three purposes: If you're doing this exercise with a group of teens or adults, and some of the group haven't already started working on their masterpiece, they can instead choose any fictional novel that they love and imagine that a character within it wrote to the author in the first place to ask them to write their story. What did that letter look like? As you write, it helps you get into the mindset of the character. Ask yourself how they would language this letter and what they would consider important to include. It's motivating to know that your character wants you to write about them. It's good practice for when you will need to send a letter to an agent or publisher. Solo exercise The opening sentence has to grab the reader's attention and make them want to keep reading. Many authors achieve this by starting with an action scene and avoid starting with someone waking up, or a description of the weather. In this exercise the task is to write an opening sentence either to a book you're currently writing, or simply for an imaginary piece of literature. Here are some of my favourite opening sentences to get you going: It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. George Orwell, 1984 The Golem's life began in the hold of a steamship. Helene Wecker, The Golem and the Djinni All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina It wasn't a very likely place for disappearances, at least at first glance. Diana Gabaldon, Outlander You better not never tell nobody but God. Alice Walker, The Color Purple The cage was finished. Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Balthazar's Marvelous Afternoon Imagine that you are living your life out of order: Lunch before breakfast, marriage before your first kiss. Audrey Niffenegger, The Time Traveler's Wife Far out in the uncharted backwaters of the unfashionable end of the western spiral arm of the Galaxy lies a small unregarded yellow sun. Douglas Adams, The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy There are a plethora of ways that you can start a book, however two ways that help engage the reader immediately are: Spend 5 minutes working on your own opening sentence, then share it with the other participants. Set the scene in as few words as possible, so that the reader immediately knows what's happening and wants to know what happens next. The scene must be original and create a vivid image in the reader's mind. Surprise the reader with an unusual event or usual point of view. Exercise for 2 writers, or can be done solo. According to John Gardner: "Failure to recognise that the central character must act, not simply be acted upon, is the single most common mistake in the fiction of beginners." Spend 5 minutes writing a scene where the protagonist is passive in a conversation with one other character. It could be that the other character says something dramatic, and the protagonist just listens, or it could be anything else of your choice! Once the 5 minutes is up, swap papers with another writer. If you're using Zoom, or working online, send it to each other in a private chat. Now the other person spends 8 minutes rewriting the scene to make the protagonist as active as possible. This might include: Read both scenes together. Which makes you want to keep on reading? If you're doing this as a solo writing exercise, simply complete both parts yourself. Showing the emotion this evokes. Getting them to disagree with the other character. Showing how they respond physically (whether it's as a physical manifestation of how they feel, or a dramatic gesture to make a point). Small group exercise This exercise will help anyone who's experiencing writer's block with a particular piece of writing. If this isn't you, that's great, others will value your input! If anyone has a particular scene that they're stuck with (a pool of blood on the floor that they have no explanation for, a reason why the rich lady just walked into a particular pub, etc.) then at the start of the exercise everyone briefly describes their scenes (if working online with a large group, typing it into the chat might be best). Everyone then chooses one scene to use as a writing prompt to write a short story for 10-15 minutes. Afterwards, split into small groups if necessary, and read out how you completed someone else's writing prompt. Solo exercise There are several different types of character arc in a novel, the 3 most common being: Positive - Where a character develops and grows during the novel, perhaps starting unhappy or weak and ending happy or powerful. Negative - Where a character gets worse during a novel, perhaps becoming ill or giving in to evil tendencies as the novel progresses. Flat - In a flat character arc the character themself doesn't change much, however the world around them does. This could be overthrowing a great injustice, for example. For this exercise choose either a positive or negative character arc and spend 8 minutes writing a scene from the start of a novel, then 8 minutes writing a scene towards the end of a novel showing how the character has developed between the two points (obviously, we will have to imagine how this change has occurred). The point here is to capture the essence of a character, as they will be the same, but show their development. 3 to 5 people This is a fun writing activity for a small group. You've found a magic potion labelled 'Cat Chat' and when you drink it, you turn into whichever animal you're thinking about; but there's a problem, it also picks up on the brainwaves of other people near you! Everyone writes down an animal in secret and then reveals it to the other writers. The spell will turn you into a creature that combines elements of all the animals. Each person then spends 5 minutes writing down what happens when they drink the potion. After the 5 minutes is up, everyone shares their story with the other participants. If you enjoy this exercise, then you may also want to check out our Fantasy and Sci-Fi writing prompts full of world building, magic, and character development prompts.. Solo exercise Joe Brainard wrote a novel called: I Remember It contains a collection of paragraphs all starting with "I remember". This is the inspiration for this exercise, and if you're stuck for what to write, is a great way to get the mental gears turning. Simply write "I remember" and continue with the first thing that pops into your head. Spend 5 minutes writing a short collection of "I remember" stories. Here are a couple of examples from Joe Brainard's novel: "I remember not understanding why people on the other side of the world didn't fall off." "I remember waking up somewhere once and there was a horse staring me in the face." For small groups If you're running a workshop for more experienced adult authors and have at least half an hour, then this is a good one to use (this is the longest exercise on this page, but I felt it important enough to include). Give each member the option to bring a piece of their own work that should be double spaced and a maximum of 3 pages long. If you're running a workshop where not everyone is likely to bring a manuscript, then ask everyone who wants to bring one to print two copies each (If someone forgets but has a laptop with them, the reader can always use their laptop). Print out a few copies and hand them around to everyone in the workshop of the guide on: 'How to give constructive feedback to writers' Each author who brought a sample with them then gives them to one other person to review. They write their name on the manuscript in a certain colour pen, then add any comments to it before passing it to a second person who does the same (commenting on the comments if they agree or disagree). Then allow 5 minutes for everyone to discuss the feedback they've received, ensuring that they are giving constructive feedback. Exercise for 2 authors Painting by Giovanni Battista Manerius - The Five Senses Choose a scene and write it for 5 minutes focusing on one sense, NOT sight. Choose between: Hearing Taste Smell Touch This can be internal as well as external (I heard my heartbeat thudding in my ears, or I smelt my own adrenaline). After the 5 minutes stop and everyone reads it out loud to each other. Now write for another 5 minutes and continue the other person's story, but do NOT use sight OR the sense they used. You can use any sense to communicate the essentials, just focus on creating emotions and conveying the story with the specific sense(s). If you need some writing prompts, here are possible scenes that involve several senses: Climbing through an exotic jungle Having an argument that becomes a fight A cat's morning Talking to someone you're attracted to 2 or 3 people A lot of writing guides will advise you to, "Show, don't tell," but what does this actually mean? If you want to evoke an emotional reaction from your reader, then showing them what is happening is a great way to do so. You can do this in several ways: Split up into pairs and each person writes down a short scene from a story where they "tell" it. After this, pass the description of the scene to your partner and they then have 5 minutes to rewrite it to "show" what happened. If there are an odd number of participants, make one group of three, with each person passing their scene clockwise, so everyone has a new scene to show. After the 5 minutes, for small groups everyone reads their new description to everyone else, or for large groups, each person just reads their new scene to their partner. Avoid internal dialogue (thinking), instead have your protagonist interact with other people, or have a physical reaction to something that shows how s/he feels. Does their heart beat faster? Do they notice the smell of their own adrenaline? Do they step backwards, or lean forwards? Instead of using an adjective like creepy, e.g. "Mary entered the creepy house", show why the house is creepy through description and in the way the protagonist responds - "The light streamed through the filthy skylight, highlighting the decomposing body of a rat resting on top of it. As Mary stepped instead, she felt a gust of freezing air brush past her, she turned, but there was nothing there..." Solo exercise World building is the art of conveying the magic of living in a different world, whether it's a spaceship, a medieval castle, a boat, or simply someone's living room. To master world building, it's not necessary to know every intricate detail, rather to convey the experience of what it would be like to live there. Choose one of the above images as a prompt and spend 10 minutes writing a scene from the perspective of someone who is seeing it for the first time. Now, move your character six months forward and imagine that they've spent the last six months living or working there. Write another scene (perhaps with an additional character) using the image as a background, with the events of the scene as the main action. Click the above image for a close-up. Group exercise Judy Blume says that she tells her family about her characters as if they're real people. Chris Claremont said, "For me, writing the 'X-Men' was easy - is easy. I know these people, they're my friends." Today's exercise has 2 parts. First, spend 5 minutes jotting down some facts about a character you've invented that might come up if you were telling your friends about them. Either choose a character in something you've already written, or invent one from scratch now. Answer the questions: What are they up to? How are they? What would you say if you were gossiping about them? Then split up into groups of 4 to 6 writers. 2 volunteers from each group then role-play talking about their character as if they were a friend (perhaps another character in the story). The other participants will role-play a group of friends gossiping about the character behind their back and ask questions. If you don't know the answer, invent it! Groups of 3 or more This is based on an acting game, to help actors understand how to perform with different degrees of emotion. Ask everyone to write the following 4 emotions: For groups of 5 or less, write down numbers starting with 1 and going up until everyone has a number, then give them out in order. For groups of 6 or more, divide groups into 3's, 4's or 5's. Each person has to write a scene where the protagonist is alone and is only allowed to say a single word, e.g. "Banana". The writer with number 1 should write the scene with a very low level of the emotion (e.g. happiness), number 2 increases the intensity a bit and the highest number writes a scene with the most intense emotion you can possibly imagine. Once each writer has written about happiness, rotate the numbers one or two spaces, then move onto anger, then fear, then sadness. It can help to give everyone numbers showing the intensity of the emotions to write about at the start of the exercise, in which case you may wish to print either the Word or PDF file, then use the ones corresponding to 3, 4 or 5 writers. Everyone shares their scene with the other course participants. Happiness Anger Fear Sadness Solo exercise The first paragraph of a surprising number of best-selling novels serves multiple purposes. These are to: Establish a goal Set the scene Develop a character Nearly every chapter in a novel also serves all three purposes. Instead of establishing a goal though, the protagonist either moves towards it, or encounters an obstacle that hinders them from achieving it. Some books manage to meet all three purposes with their opening lines, for example: Mr and Mrs Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone A little more than one hundred days into the fortieth year of her confinement, Dajeil Gelian was visited in her lonely tower overlooking the sea by an avatar of the great ship that was her home. Iain M. Banks, Excession "We should start back," Gared urged as the woods began to grow dark around them. George R.R. Martin, A Game of Thrones For this exercise write a sentence or short paragraph that serves all three purposes. If you're already writing a novel, then see if you can do this for the first line in a chapter. If not, choose any combination from the following table: Establish goal Set the scene Develop character Escape Penthouse suite Reckless Succeed in love Castle Cowardly Survive Graveyard Greedy 2 people Here's a Valentine's Day themed writing exercise that you might enjoy, it doesn't require any romantic attachment between writers, but is probably best for adults. In pairs one writer spends a minute or two describing a character they're writing about, or alternatively they can describe a celebrity or someone from a work of fiction. The next writer then describes their character. The story is that these 2 characters (or in my case, person and alien, as I'm writing a sci-fi) have accidentally ended up on a blind date with each other, perhaps the waiter seated them in the wrong location, perhaps it's an actual blind date, or perhaps they met in some other fashion that the writers can determine. Now spend 10 minutes discussing what happens next! Small or large groups This exercise works best for online groups, via Zoom, for example. The instructions to give are: "In a few words describe a success in your life and what it felt like to achieve it. It can be a small victory or a large one." Share a personal example of your own (mine was watching my homeschooled sons sing in an opera together). "Once you have one (small or large), write it in the chat. The writing exercise is then to choose someone else's victory to write about for 10 minutes, as if it was the end of your own book. If you want to write for longer, now imagine how that book would start, and write the first part of the book with the ending in mind." In this difficult time, this is great for reminding people of a success in their lives, and also helps everyone connect and discover something about each other. 3 to 4 people You're going on a dream holiday together, but can't stand conflict, so rather than discuss what you want to do, you've decided that each of you will choose a different aspect of the holiday as follows: Decide who gets to choose what at random, then each of you write down your dream holiday destination/activity/travel/food & clothes in secret. Next spend 5 minutes discussing your dream holiday and add any other details you'd like to include, particularly if you're passionate about doing something in real life. Finally, everyone spends another 5 minutes writing down a description of the holiday, then shares it with the others. Choose where you'll be going – your favourite holiday destination. Choose what your main fun activity will be on the holiday. Decide what mode of travel you'll use to get there. If there's a 4th person, choose what you'll eat on the holiday and what you'll be wearing. Solo exercise A haiku is a traditional Japanese form of non-rhyming poetry whose short form makes it ideal for a simple writing exercise. They traditionally are structured in 3 lines, where the first line is 5 syllables, the second line is 7 syllables, and the third line is 5 syllables again and tend to focus on themes of nature and deep concepts that can be expressed simply. A couple of examples: A summer river being crossed how pleasing with sandals in my hands! Yosa Buson, a haiku master poet from the 18th Century. And one of mine: When night-time arrives Stars come out, breaking the dark You can see the most Martin Woods Spend up to 10 minutes writing a haiku. If you get stuck with the 5-7-5 syllable rule, then don't worry, the overall concept is more important! See How to write a haiku for more details and examples. Solo exercise Unlike a haiku, which is profound and sombre, a limerick is a light-hearted, fun rhyming verse. Here are a couple of examples: A wonderful bird is the pelican. His bill can hold more than his beli-can He can take in his beak Food enough for a week But I'm damned if I see how the heli-can. Dixon Lanier Merritt, 1910 There was a young lady named Bright, Whose speed was far faster than light; She started one day In a relative way, And returned on the previous night. Arthur Henry Reginald Buller in Punch, 1923 The 1st, 2nd and 5th line all rhyme, as do the 3rd and 4th line. The overall number of syllables isn't important, but the 3rd and 4th lines should be shorter than the others. Typically, the 1st line introduces the character, often with "There was", or "There once was" and the rest of the verse tells their story. Spend 10 minutes writing a limerick. Any size group Imagine that your future self as an old man/woman travels back in time to meet you, the adult you are today. Alternatively, you as a child travels forward in time to meet yourself as an adult. Or perhaps both happen, so that the child you, adult you, and senior you are all together at the same time. In story form write down what happens next. Participants then share their story with other writers either in small groups, or to the whole group. Solo exercise One challenge writers face is describing a character and a common mistake is to focus too much on the physical features, e.g. "She had brown eyes, curly brown hair and was five foot six inches tall." The problem with this is that it doesn't reveal anything about the character's personality, or about the relationship between your protagonist and the character and your reader is therefore likely to quickly forget what someone looks like. When describing characters, it's therefore best to: Here are 3 examples of character descriptions that leave no doubt how the protagonist feels. "If girls could spit venom, it'd be through their eyes." S.D. Lawendowski, Snapped "And Ronan was everything that was left: molten eyes and a smile made for war." Maggie Stiefvater, The Dream Thieves "His mouth was such a post office of a mouth that he had a mechanical appearance of smiling." Charles Dickens Spend 5 minutes writing a character introduction that is animated, uses metaphors or similes and involves your protagonist. If working with a group, then form small groups of 3 or 4 and share your description with the rest of the group. Animate them - it's rare that someone's sitting for a portrait when your protagonist first meets them and whether they're talking or walking, it's likely that they're moving in some way. Use metaphors or similes - comparing physical features to emotionally charged items conjures both an image and a sense of who someone is. Involve your protagonist - if your protagonist is interacting with a character, make it personal. How does your protagonist view this person? Incorporate the description as part of the description. Only give information your protagonist knows - they may know if someone is an adult, or a teenager, but they won't know that someone is 37 years old, for example. Solo or group exercise Today's session is all about sound. Several authors recommend reading your writing out loud after you've written it to be sure it sounds natural. Philip Pullman even goes as far as to say: "When I'm writing, I'm more conscious of the sound, actually, than the meaning. I know what the rhythm of the sentence is going to be before I know what the words are going to be in it." For today's exercise, choose the name of a song and write for 10 minutes as if that's the title for a short story. Focus on how your writing sounds and aim to include at least one onomatopoeia, rhyme or alliteration. At the end of the 10 minutes, read it out loud to yourself, or to the group. Alliterations An alliteration example from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew, The furrow followed free; We were the first that ever burst Into that silent sea. Onomatopoeias Buzz, woof, quack, baa, crash, purr, beep, belch,... Any number of people – Great for a larger group This is a novel way to write a story as a group, one word at a time. The first person starts the story that begins with any word starting with "A", the next person continues the story with a word starting with "B", and so on. Keep going round until you have completed the alphabet. Ideally it will all be one sentence, but if you get stuck, start a new sentence. Don't worry if it doesn't make complete sense! It can be tricky to remember the alphabet when under pressure, so you may wish to print it out a couple of times, so the storytellers can see it if they need to, this is particularly helpful if you have dyslexics in the group. A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z Here's an example of an alphabet story: A Band Can Dance Each Friday, Ghostly Hauntings In Jail Kill Lucky Men, Nobody Or Perhaps Quiet Rats, Still That Unifies Villains Who X-Ray Your Zebras. As I mentioned, it doesn't need to make sense! Small or large groups The standard format in our group is a short writing exercise followed by an hour and a half of silent writing on our projects. At one point I felt like we'd done a lot of small group exercises, and wanted to gain an insight into what everyone was working on, so we did the following exercise instead: Go round the table and ask everyone to briefly talk about their writing. Each person then asks one or two yes/no questions. Everyone responds either by raising their hand for 'yes' or shaking their heads for 'no'. You can also leap up and down to indicate a very strong 'yes'. Questions can be about anything, and you can use them either to help guide your writing or to help find other people in the group who have similar interests. Here are some random examples you might ask: This works best when you give participants some advance notice, so they have time to think of a question. I want to write a romance novel and am considering setting it in Paris, a traditional romantic setting, or Liverpool which is a less obvious setting. Who thinks Liverpool would be best? I need to know more about the life of a farmer. Has anyone got farming experience who I can interview in exchange for a drink? My character gets fired and that night goes back to his office and steals 35 computers. Does that sound realistic as the premise of a story? Groups of 3 or 4 This exercise takes 20-30 minutes and allows participants to create a murder mystery outline together. Phase 1 (3 minutes) Phase 2 (10 minutes) Each person then writes a police report as if they are either describing the scene of the crime, or recording the notes from their interview with a single suspect: Victim: Write the following: Suspects: Write the following (from the perspective of the investigator): Phase 3 (5 minutes) See more ideas on creating murder mystery party games Split into groups of 3 or 4. Decide as a group where the murder occurs (e.g. the opera house, a bar, a casino). Decide one person who will write the details of the victim and the murder itself. Everyone else writes the details of one suspect each. The 'victim author' then invents a few extra details about the scene of the crime, who the victim was (a teenage punk, an adult opera singer, etc.) and the murder weapon and summarises this to the others. 1 line description of the victim. When they were last seen by a group of witnesses (and what they were doing). How the murder occurred in more detail based on the evidence available. 1 line description of the suspect. What they said during the interview (including what they claim to have doing when the murder occurs). A possible motivation (as determined by the police from other witnesses). Each person reads out their police reports to the other members of their small group. As a group, decide who the murderer was and what actually happened. 3 to 6 people Pick a famous movie and spend 5 minutes writing a scene from it from an unusual perspective. Your aim is to achieve a balance between being too obscure and making it too obvious. Feel free to add internal dialogue. At the end of the 5 minutes, everyone reads their movie scene to the others and all the other participants see if they can guess what the movie is. Solo exercise Write a scene with 2 people in a group, where you hint that one is romantically interested in the other, but the feelings aren't reciprocated. The goal of this exercise is to practice subtlety. Imagine you are setting a scene for the future where the characters feelings will become more important. Choose a situation like a work conference, meeting with a group of friends, etc. How do you indicate how the characters feel without them saying it in words? Some tips for hinting at romantic feelings: Make the characters nervous and shy. Your protagonist leans forward. Asks deeper questions and listens intently. Finds ways to be close together. Mirrors their gestures. Gives lots of compliments. Makes eye contact, then looks away. Other people seem invisible to your protagonist. 2 or 3 people Take it in turns to tell everyone else about a current project that you're working on (a book, screenplay, short story, etc.) The other writers then brainstorm ideas for related stories you could write, or directions your project could take. There are no right or wrong suggestions and the intention is to focus on big concepts, not little details. This whole exercise takes around 15 minutes. Exercise for groups of 3-5 If you're in larger group, split up into groups of 3 or 4 people. Everyone writes the first line of a story in the Zoom chat, or on paper. Other people can then choose this line as a writing prompt. For this exercise: Do NOT: Once everyone's written a prompt, everyone chooses a prompt (preferably someone eles's, but it can be your own if you feel really inspired by it.) Then write for 10 minutes using this prompt. See if you can reveal who the protagonist is, what their motivation is (it can be a small motivation for a particular scene, it doesn't have to be a huge life goal), and introduce at least one new character. Take turns reading out your stories to each other. Write in the first person. Have the protagonist interacting with an object or something in nature. The challenge is to create intrigue that makes the reader want to know more with just a single line. Say who the protagonist is. Reveal their motivation. Introduce any other characters 4 to 8 people Cut up a piece of paper and write one word on each of the pieces of paper, as follows: Robot Castle Longing Ice cream Happy Scream Guard Evil Whirlwind Cactus King Chaos Angry Desert Laugh Heart Give each participant a couple of pieces of paper at random. The first person says the first sentence of a story and they must use their first word as part of that sentence. The second person then continues the story and must include their word in it, and so on. Go round the group twice to complete the story. You can also do this creative writing exercise with story dice, your own choice of words, or by asking participants to write random words down themselves, then shuffling all the cards together. Solo or Small Group exercise Every Christmas adults tell kids stories about Santa Claus. In this exercise you write a Christmas story from an alternative dimension. What if every Christmas Santa didn't fly around the world delivering presents on his sleigh pulled by reindeer? What if gnomes or aliens delivered the presents? Or perhaps it was the gnomes who are trying to emulate the humans? Or some other Christmas tradition entirely that we humans have never heard of! Group writing exercise If you're working with a group, then give everyone a couple of minutes to write 2 possible themes for the new Christmas story. Each theme should be 5 words or less. Then simply shuffle the paper and distribute them at random (or everyone types the themes into a Zoom or group chat, if you're working online). Everyone then spends 10 minutes writing a short story for children based on one of the two themes, or their own theme if they really want to. Solo exercise If working alone, choose your own theme and spend 15 minutes writing a short story on it. See if you can create the magic of Christmas from another world! Small or large group exercise In a murder mystery story or courtroom drama, there's often conflicting information and lots of links between characters and a mind map is an ideal way to illustrate how everything ties together. Split into groups of 3 or 4 people each and place a blank piece of A3 paper (double the size of A4) in the middle of each group. Discuss between you who the victim is and write their name in the middle of the piece of paper. Then brainstorm information about the murder, for example: Feel free to expand out from any of these, e.g. to include more information on the different characters involved. The idea is that everyone writes at the same time! Obviously, you can discuss ideas, but anyone can dive in and write their ideas on the mind map. Who was the victim? (job, appearance, hobbies, etc.) Who did the victim know? What were their possible motivations? What was the murder weapon? What locations are significant to the plot? Solo or small group exercise If you're writing a piece of fiction, asking yourself how your protagonist would react to an everyday situation might help you to gain a deeper insight into who they are. One way to do this is to imagine what their New Year's resolutions would be! If completing this exercise with a group, limit it to 3 to 5 resolutions per person and if some participants are non-fiction writers, they can instead pick a celebrity and either write what their resolutions will be, or what their resolutions should be, their choice. Solo or group exercise Stephen King said, "I believe the road to hell is paved with adverbs, and I will shout it from the rooftops." He also said, "Take any noun, put it with any verb, and you have a sentence. It never fails. Rocks explode. Jane transmits. Mountains float. These are all perfect sentences. Many such thoughts make little rational sense, but even the stranger ones (Plums deify!) have a kind of poetic weight that's nice." In this fiction writing exercise, start by brainstorming (either individually or collectively) seven verbs on seven different pieces of paper. Put those aside for later. Now brainstorm seven nouns. Randomly match the nouns and verbs so you have seven pairs. Choose a pair and write a piece of fiction inspired by it for ten minutes. Avoid using any adverbs. 1 to 6 people It's the end of the world! For 5 minutes either: If working as a team, then after the 5 minutes is up each writer reads their description out to the other participants. Describe how the world's going to end, creating evocative images using similes or metaphors as you wish and tell the story from a global perspective, or Describe how you spend your final day before the world is destroyed. Combine emotion and action to engage the reader. How to run the writing exercises I've always run these as part of a creative writing group, where there's no teacher and we're all equal participants, therefore I keep any 'teaching' aspect to a minimum, preferring them to be prompts to generate ideas before everyone settles down to do the silent writing. We've recently gone online and if you run a group yourself, whether online or in person, you're welcome to use these exercises for free! The times given are suggestions only and I normally get a feel for how everyone's doing when time's up and if it's obvious that everyone's still in the middle of a discussion, then I give them longer. Where one group's in the middle of a discussion, but everyone else has finished, I sometimes have a 'soft start' to the silent writing, and say, "We're about to start the hour and a half of silent writing now, but if you're in the middle of a discussion, feel free to finish it first". This way everyone gets to complete the discussion, but no-one's waiting for ages. It's also important to emphasise that there's no wrong answers when being creative. Still looking for more? Check out these creative writing prompts, or our dedicated Sci-Fi and Fantasy creative writing prompts. If you've enjoyed these writing exercises, then please share them on social media, or link to them from your blog.

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