

1. Atmosphere Absorbing

Atmosphere is everything. At least, most writers I know are all about the *atmosphere* in which they write. While it is remarkably productive to have a coffee on your desk and your favorite pjs on, this can lead to stagnant thinking occasionally. So, I'm sorry, but you will have to get some clothes on for this one.

Now...dressed? OK. Here is the exercise for you to try:

Grab a notebook and pen or your favorite dictation tool and pick a location that you are unfamiliar with OR one that is similar to the scenery you intend to write in and go there. Park yourself right in the middle of your *there* and just close your eyes.

What do you hear? Jot these things down, and if you want...a feeling or a few words that come to mind.

Now what do you smell? Jot them down...what feelings or words come to mind?

What do you see around you? This last one can take time. Maybe you want to people watch, watch the trains or cars as they go by, or watch a rabbit digging around in the grass. Make short notes, and make sure to put what feelings, words or thoughts come to mind. Do not overthink this. It is meant to be an exercise of the senses.

Often when we are writing the senses get a bit flat. This exercise is to refresh those senses so that they may feed your story, article, or poem. Getting out and collecting these thoughts will give you a grab bag of material from which to draw when you return home to your trusty desk and cue up that cursor. Sometimes, a few moments or half a day away from your writing is the best thing to fuel it.

2. Atmosphere Building

(this one builds off exercise one)

While you are in your away-from-the-cursor location, consider the genre you need to be writing in and do the following...

- What if something *completely out of the ordinary happened in this place, right now?*
What do you visualize? See these thoughts through. Jot down your thoughts.
- What if something *horrific happened right now in this place?*
What do you visualize? See these thoughts through. Jot down your thoughts.
- What if someone *unexpected or impossible came and sat next to you right now?*
Who is it? What conversation would you have? Jot down some ideas.

You may repeat these atmosphere exercises for any writing on which you are working and may find it becomes a regular tool in your wheelhouse. The point of these is to connect what is happening with your senses to what is going through your mind, and then capitalize on those thoughts. Don't toss out these jotted-down nuggets. You never know when they may be just the sensory input you need for a piece you are working on.

3. Perspective

Another writing prompt and exercise tool is to do what I call “ask me a question” and also involves a bit of visualization.

First make a list of 3 “settings.” Here are a few examples, or you can create your own.

- ◆ At the kitchen table
- ◆ In the car
- ◆ On the beach

And now a list of 3 characters:

- ◆ An old lady
- ◆ A dog
- ◆ A child

OK now pair them up in various combinations and try to fully develop the setting and the character in it.

What does the setting look/smell/feel like? Is it night or day? Weather? Etc. And the same for the character. What do they look like? What are they wearing? Any oddities about them?

Now, this character asks you a question. What do they ask? How do you answer?

Can you develop this scene into a few paragraphs? Hold onto this material for further development later or see it through. You are sure to get at least ONE nugget of inspiration and dust off the old blinky cursor a bit with some fresh perspective(s).

4. Inspiration

You knew this one was coming, right? Inspiration. What normally inspires you? For me, as a poet I am big on imagery. So, when I need inspiration, I look through pictures, art, poetry anthologies, or play music and really tap into it with my eyes closed or the lights off. (Also, I am truly inspired by nature so that is where I go when I am working with the first exercise that I shared with you.)

This one is really quite simple. Don't doubt your talent. Don't doubt your vision or your future. Simply, add in more time to actively SEEK inspiration. You can't always churn our material and never fill the tank.

And with that, I will give you a short list of simple one or two-liner writing prompts to inspire you to get to writing:

- Finish this sentence...when I was a child, the one thing that really got on my nerves was...
- If your "insert pet here" could tell you something to just STOP doing, what would it be? Why?
- Write a journal passage from the perspective of a famous person you admire.
- You are homeless and the weather is "insert your idea here" – write about your experience in this condition.
- Write about a crazy dream you once had, but... change the ending.
- Your pet has a pen pal and is about to write them a letter...what would it say?
- Write for 10 minutes straight without stopping no reason to include punctuation just write whatever comes to your mind and don't stop...Now edit.
- Pick a random animal. Pick a random object. Now, give the object to the animal...write what happens.
- Give yourself a new name. A new job. A new car. A new location. Who are you and what is this new you up to?
- An alarm goes off in the middle of the night...what is happening?

- You hear a whispering. You are on a train...yet, whispering? Write what is happening.
- Pretend you are a newspaper reporter and tell of an event (or fabricated event) in your town.
- Light a candle, turn on classical music. Close your eyes for a few minutes, then begin writing. Write where the music leads you.
- Pretend you are a baby in a womb (or an egg.) What are you thinking? Experiencing?
- Imagine you wake up to complete chaos on all news channels. What is happening?
- What will grocery stores be like in 50 years? Will they still exist? How will we get our food? Develop your ideas.
- What would life be like for you tomorrow morning if you woke up in a jungle? Are you alone?
- Write something from the perspective of someone you hate (or dislike very much.)
- Write something from the perspective of someone who is very different from you.
- You wake up in the trunk of a car. What is happening to you?
- There's a knock at the door...who is there and what is happening? Answer these 5 times and each time, get a little more bizarre and thorough than the last answer.
- Lastly, write about your day, no matter how mundane. No rules, no purpose...

just

write.