

# **Writing Prompts**

**by Emily Hanlon**

**Open Doorways to New Characters,  
and Deepen the Writer's Process**

## Please respect intellectual property!

As writers, we all know the importance of protecting our intellectual property. I prepared these prompts and suggestions in this form for purchase at a modest price. Tell your friends and writing group about them, but do not pass them on. Instead, please direct them to my website and ask them to purchase the ebook as you have done.

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Writers supporting other writers is a win-win proposition!

Thanks for *your* support!

Emily

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“As a writing coach, my main goal is to help your creativity to take root and flourish...”



EMILY HANLON is a novelist and creative writing coach. I have seven works of fiction published, including *Petersburg* (G.P. Putnam's) a story of love and betrayal set against the Russian Revolution of 1905. *Petersburg* became a best seller in England. I have also written a book on writing, *The Art of Fiction Writing or How to Fall Down the Rabbit Hole Without Really Trying* (Labyrinth Press), which is a course in writing that comes with a workbook and two audio tapes.

As a writing coach, my main goal is for your creativity take root and flourish. To this end, I guide you into the passion of your writing, then help you to develop your story, whether it is a novel, short story, memoir or creative nonfiction. My teaching follows a two-pronged approach of *honing craft* and *unleashing creativity*. This is different from many writing teachers, who put emphasis on words and structure without leading their students into the fullness of the creative process. Although words and structure are crucial to fiction writing, a great writing experience demands more – it demands journeying into the unknown, where your exciting, passionate characters and stories live. This kind of writing makes for great reading, too!

I work with writers of all levels, from beginners to published novelists. I live in Yorktown Heights, NY, but I work with people all over the world on the telephone. I also lead weekly workshops as well as weekend and weeklong retreats in the U.S., Europe and Central America.

My private coaching, workshops and weekend retreats can be explored at [www.thefictionwritersjourney.com](http://www.thefictionwritersjourney.com).

My weeklong retreats, which are for women only, can be found at [www.awritersretreat.com](http://www.awritersretreat.com).

*Emily*

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# Emily Hanlon

## Books Published

### Fiction

*Petersburg*, G.P. Putnams, 1988, paperback Fawcett, 1989, Literary Guild and Doubleday Book Club alternate, foreign rights to: England, Germany, Italy, Greece. *Petersburg* reached Best Sellers list in England, where it was published in both hardback and paperback. Reissued by Writeread Press, 2001

*Love Is No Excuse*, Bradbury Press, 1982

*Circle Home*, Bradbury Press, 1981

*The Wing and the Flame*, Bradbury Press, paperback Bantam, 1980. Author's Guild Back-in-Print reissue, 2001

*The Swing*, Bradbury Press, paperback Dell, 1979. Author's Guild Back-in-Print reissue, 2001

*It's Too Late For Sorry*, Bradbury Press, paperback Dell, 1978

*How A Horse Grew Hoarse on the Site Where He Sighted a Bare Bear*, Delacorte, 1976

*What If A Lion Eats Me and I Fall Into a Hippopotamus' Mud Hole?*  
Delacorte Press, 1975

### Non-Fiction

*The Art of Fiction Writing or How to Fall Down the Rabbit Hole Without Really Trying*, Labyrinth Press, 1996

*Messages from the Muse, an Ebook Journal*, Labyrinth Press 2005

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# How to Work with Writing Prompts

Are you looking for ways to jump start your writing? Prompts can be just the thing! The prompts in this Ebook challenges the adage that you should “write from what you know.”

*Write what you know?*

How boring! Especially for the fiction writer. Instead, I ask that you unleash your imagination. And the prompts help you do so.

As Gertrude Stein said, “*What will be best in your writing is what you really do not know now. If you knew it all it would not be creation but dictation.*”

Passionate, creative, exciting writing (for both writer and reader) demands that the writer get out of her conscious mind and *go deeply into the unknown source of being*. Another way of saying this in terms of fiction writing is for the writer to *become* his character, the one who rises up out of the writer’s own unconscious.

This concept is quite paradoxical. For while your characters *are* you because they are born of your creativity, *none* of them *are* you ... They have stories and life forces that are often beyond your own experience. Why? Because writing taps into deeper, often hidden aspects of self. This is true even if you are writing a memoir.

Why? Because memoir is based on memory, which itself is subjective ... filtered through your point of view. Did you ever discuss an incident from your childhood with a parent or sibling only to discover that she has a *completely* different memory, even of the incident’s actual outcome? So, your memoir is based on the point of view of the person you *were*, filtered through the experiences of the person you *are!*

Phillip Roth, whose fiction is so often considered memoir, said, “By the time the imagination is finished with fact, believe me, it bears no resemblance to the fact.”

And so, as a creative writer, you must leave the limiting bounds of self; you must become the character waiting to be born. I call this writing from the *inside out*; such writing ignites the emotional life of your characters.

To this end, many of the prompts in this book invite you to leave behind your own skin – your experience and perception of life – and invite you into the skin (the point of view) of *imagined* characters and situations.

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There are several different types of prompts, running the gamut from tenderness and love to fear and rage. Some will bring you deeply into the emotional life of the characters; others set up dramatic action that offer you plot and story-line. Others ask you to draw upon your own memories; and finally, there are prompts that lead you to explore what drives you to write.

Each prompt is followed by suggestions and hints, which either explore writing techniques or suggest ways to expand character and plot. Write the first draft without much thought – in fact, the less you think, the better. You do not even need to read the suggestions and hints the first time round. Then write a second and third draft – not by simply fiddling around and changing words and struggling to write the perfect paragraph – rather, look at the suggestions and hints and see if they open you to *new* and *deeper* layers of character and story line. Let each new draft build upon what you have learned of your character in the previous draft, until the character is fully formed and is herself driving the story.

This concept of opening characters until they, not you, are writing your story, is explored in great detail in my book, *The Art of Fiction Writing*. To explore and purchase *The Art of Fiction Writing*, go to:

[http://www.thefictionwritersjourney.com/A\\_book\\_on\\_writing.htm](http://www.thefictionwritersjourney.com/A_book_on_writing.htm)

Along with your purchase of *The Art of Fiction Writing*, you will receive a free 1/2 hour private coaching session with me on the telephone. You may explore my coaching at:

[http://www.thefictionwritersjourney.com/Writing\\_coach\\_and\\_novelist.htm](http://www.thefictionwritersjourney.com/Writing_coach_and_novelist.htm)

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# How To Use These Prompts

1. There is no innate order to these prompts – intentionally so. Prompts are used to jumpstart your imagination, and there’s no telling which one will work best. They are also meant to help you look at things differently. When you delve into the imagination, *no order is a good order!*
2. Three ways of choosing a prompt:
  - Scroll through these pages and suddenly stop at one. Use that prompt regardless of whether you are drawn to it. Begin to write.
  - Read through the pages and begin with the first prompt that inspires you.
  - Look through the prompts, and if one unnerves you – “I’d never write about *that!*” – this is the prompt for you!
3. Do not be slavish to the suggestions. They are here to *support*, not dictate.
4. Give yourself at least 15 minutes to write from the prompt. If you use a timer and you’re on a roll, don’t let the timer stop you!
5. The prompt is only a starting point. If your imagination takes you in a direction that has nothing to do with the prompts, go where *your* imagination takes you. Do not listen to the voice inside your head that says, “Oh, no! I shouldn’t be writing about this!” or “I’m not doing this right!” There are no “shoulds” or “should nots” in this process. The only thing you can do wrong is to *not* write.
6. Don’t worry about getting the right words. Don’t second guess or judge the character. Don’t stop him from doing something that you judge as wrong or immoral. Remember, your character isn’t you. Don’t worry about what your mother or father or spouse or child might think about this character.
7. Write fast. Trust your imagination. You can go back and rewrite later.
8. *Always* name your characters, even if the name never appears in the story. Why would a character tell you her story if you don’t care enough to learn her name?
9. Write dialogue. If you think you can’t, consider this: you talk so you can write dialogue. Once you get going, you’ll find that dialogue is as easy and fun to write as it is to read. In twenty-five years of teaching writing, I have never worked with anyone who couldn’t write dialogue – only with people who thought they couldn’t!

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10. Allow your characters to change. Characters are *never* who you think they are. In a first draft a character might be fifteen and skinny, in a second draft, she might be forty and voluptuous. In a first draft a character might be a man. In a second draft he might turn out to be a woman -- really! You might think the character has a heart of gold and he can turn out to be dark and devious. In the landscape of the imagination, anything can happen!
11. Be a risk taker. Write from your passionate core. Risk and passion are the essence of the creative journey.
12. Have fun!

# The Writing Prompts

## THE PROMPT

“Nobody loves you like I do,” he said  
as ....

## SUGGESTIONS AND HINTS

This prompt can be an introduction to a love scene or a horror scene. Who is the “he” and to whom is “he” talking?

The other person can be a lover, a spouse, a child... even a victim!

What is his tone of voice?

Where is he -- physically and emotionally?

How does he feel about the other person? Does he adore? Feel jealous? Hate? Is he protective? Possessive? Imploring? Impassioned?

Is the other person a man or a woman?

Don't forget to name these characters; however, don't wait to write to get the names. Just start writing and the names will most likely come. If they don't, when you are finished with your first draft, give them names.

## THE PROMPT

He stood in front of the mailbox a long time, unable to decide whether or not to mail the letter. He must have rewritten it ten times. Still it wasn't right and before he mailed it, he had to read it one more time. Maybe that's why he hadn't sealed the envelope yet. Taking it out, he read:

## SUGGESTIONS AND HINTS

Before you begin to write the letter, think about who "he" is. Is "he" really a "she"? Characters are great shapeshifters when they first appear. Go with the shifts. Don't try to pin down a character too soon.

Think about the character's age. How old is he or she?

To whom is he writing?

Where is he standing? Is it summer? Winter? Raining? Snowing?

Is the letter to a lover, parent, boss, friend, child?

What if he is adopted and has just found her birth mother and is writing to her for the first time.

What if he is quitting a job? A relationship?

Consider the character's emotional state. Alternately, just ask your character come forth, then put your pen to paper or fingers to the keyboard and begin to write without a thought in your head!

The point is, this story can be about anything! It's up to you, your imagination and your character!

## THE PROMPT

“Doris May, please let me keep my baby,” Annie begged as she stared into the old woman’s eyes. Doris May was the only mamma she’d known, the only person she’d loved, but now, there was another person to love growing inside her. “Please, Doris May, please... I gotta have this baby, I just gotta.”

Doris May looked at that poor little girl, more a girl than a woman and thought....

## SUGGESTIONS AND HINTS

This prompt suggests a strong story line about a young girl who finds herself pregnant. It brings forth sadness, longing, fear, mothering and different kinds of love.

This prompt also encourages dialogue. If you’ve never written dialogue, consider this. Most novels are anywhere from fifty to eighty percent dialogue. Why? Dialogue is as easy and fun to write as it is to read. You talk, you can write dialogue. Promise! Write lots of dialogue between Doris May and Annie. If you are *new* to dialogue writing, don’t worry about the “he said” “she said” tags. Consider them stage directions so that the reader doesn’t get confused.

Here’s a What If! What if you change Doris May’s name? What if you change point of view? Write the first draft from Doris May’s point of view and then start *fresh* and write the story from Annie’s (you can change her name, too, if you want) point of view. Most likely these will be two very different stories.

When you are writing from Annie’s point of view, don’t hold onto *anything* that you wrote from Doris May’s point of view. Remember, point of view is very, very subjective. First let Doris May be your guide and then let Annie be your guide.

## E-Book Introductory Offer

Order a copy of *Writing Prompts* by Emily Hanlon for only \$7.95 and, in addition to the 31 page e-book, you will receive *Messages from the Muse*, an E-Journal FREE!

Offer good through February 28, 2005

To Order Your Copy of *Writing Prompts* by Emily Hanlon

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## A Contest

Would you like *your* writing prompt to be in my next Writing Prompt E-book?

All you have to do is come up with a prompt followed by suggestions and hints on how to use the prompts to develop character and story line. Then send them to [contests@thefictionwritersjourney.com](mailto:contests@thefictionwritersjourney.com).

In my next *Writing Prompt E-book*, I will use a selection of best writing prompts submitted. If your prompt is chosen, you will receive a by-line and a free copy of the ebook. But best of all, you will have to chance to delve into the technique of writing and using prompts -- there's no better way of deepening your understanding than explaining the process to someone else.

Tell your writing friends about this contest. They can purchase this E-book or download a this free sample at:

[http://www.thefictionwritersjourney.com/writing\\_Prompts\\_Ebook\\_Introductory\\_Offer.htm](http://www.thefictionwritersjourney.com/writing_Prompts_Ebook_Introductory_Offer.htm)