

## How to Make Sure That You'll Always Have Something to Write About

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For many people the hardest part of writing is thinking of something to write about. This problem can be bypassed if you stockpile ideas ahead of time instead of waiting to think of an idea when you need it.

### **Keeping an Idea Bank**

An idea bank enables you to collect and organize your ideas so that you can find them when you need them. Although an idea bank might take a number of forms (a spiral notebook, a card file, file folders), a loose-leaf notebook has several advantages. It allows you to categorize your ideas more easily than does a spiral notebook (where you might run out of space for a topic). It also enables you to include pages that you've printed from a computer or acquired from another source. Pages are held firmly in place, yet you can easily move them to other locations. You might even use different means for cataloguing different kinds of ideas.

What should you deposit in your idea bank? Anything that might help you in your future writing: possible topics (perhaps with a few notes for development), intriguing questions, observations or descriptions of people or nature, character sketches, conversations, your reactions to personal or public events, your ideas about things you're learning in your studies. Keeping an idea bank not only provides you with ideas when you need them, it also sharpens your awareness of the world around you.

In addition, it's worthwhile to collect other people's writing that appeals to you: figures of speech, descriptions, sentences, melodic prose, systems of organization, etc. When you find something that you especially like, analyze it to try to figure out why it appeals to you. Then try to apply those qualities to your own writing. (Don't use the other author's words.) When you put something that was written by another author into your idea bank, be sure to include that author's name and the complete source (book and page, for example). You should include enough information so that you could easily find the quotation again. Also be sure to copy the quotation without introducing any errors—in wording, spelling, punctuation, etc.

Putting a date and place (if you're not at home) on each "deposit" will provide a context that might later help you remember more about that entry. Many of your idea bank entries will be written in complete sentences and paragraphs. As the following analogy shows, however, sometimes a brief note is sufficient.

**grain of sand → pearl**  
**idea → poem, story, speech, invention, etc.**

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**Working from a List of Prompts**

While an idea bank helps you keep track of possible writing topics from your own experience, a list of prompts might remind you of an event that you've forgotten. The two tools can work well together: When a prompt reminds you of a potential topic (even something that is different from the prompt stated on the list), add it to your idea bank, perhaps with a few notes.

A brainstorming session is a very efficient way to generate ideas for writing. You're likely to think of dozens of topics in less time than it would take you to think of *one* topic when you *need* it. Brainstorming in *categories* helps to increase the number of possible topics, because each broad area may yield many specific possibilities. Brainstorming with a group of other writers is likely to further multiply the possibilities.

As you generate a prompt list, avoid using superlatives ("best," "worst," "most," etc.). Superlatives are restrictive. Not only would they cause you to spend valuable time debating which of several potential topics merited top billing, once you decided, you would probably dismiss the other topics—and meaningful compositions might never be written.

The following list of prompts will get you started—but generating your own will be even better.

### **Feelings**

I felt embarrassed when . . .

I felt ecstatic when . . .

I felt furious when . . .

I felt devastated when . . .

I felt frightened when . . .

I felt proud when . . .

I often worry about . . .

The thing that irritates me most is . . .

### **People**

Someone I admire for his/her generosity is . . .

Someone I admire for his/her honesty is . . .

Someone I admire for his/her sense of humor is . . .

Someone I admire for his/her creativity is . . .

Someone I admire for his/her courage is . . .

Someone I admire for his/her kindness is . . .

Someone I admire for his/her faith is . . .

Someone I've met whom I admire a lot is . . .

A person in the Bible I admire a lot is . . .

A historical figure I admire a lot is . . .

I'd like to spend a day with . . .

Someone in the Bible I'd like to spend a day with is . . .

A historical figure I'd like to spend a day with is . . .

A stranger who created a lasting impression on me was . . .

### **Places**

A place I especially enjoy is . . .

A place I never want to visit again is . . .

A place where I feel especially comfortable is . . .

A place that was very exciting was . . .

A place I'd like to visit is . . .

My room . . .

My house . . .

A place where I like to be alone is . . .

### **Goals**

When I'm twenty-five years old . . .

When I'm thirty-five years old . . .

When I'm fifty years old . . .

When I'm seventy-five years old . . .

Someday I'd like to . . .

Someday I'd like to learn how to . . .

Someday I'd like people to think of me as . . .

I hope to live . . .

### **If I**

If I were an animal, I'd be . . .

If I were a car, I'd be . . .

If I were a food, I'd be . . .  
If I were a color, I'd be . . .  
If I were a month of the year, I'd be . . .  
If I were a sport, I'd be . . .  
If I were a musical instrument, I'd be . . .  
If I were a number, I'd be . . .  
If I were eight feet tall . . .  
If I were four feet tall . . .  
If I were invisible . . .  
If I could have any superpower I wanted, I'd . . .  
If I could change one thing in the world, I'd . . .  
If I could spend a day doing anything I wanted, I would . . .

## **If**

If the world were flat . . .  
If the wheel had not been invented . . .  
If the printing press had not been invented . . .  
If German had been chosen as the official language of the United States . . .  
If the South had won the Civil War . . .  
If the light bulb had not been invented . . .  
If there were no advertising in the world . . .

## **God/religion**

I knew God was with me when . . .  
I became aware of my need for Jesus when . . .  
I had to rely on God the day . . .  
I experienced an answer to prayer when . . .  
I felt I had met an angel the day . . .  
I helped to be an answer to prayer the day . . .  
I praised God for a long time when . . .

I felt angry at God when . . .  
I have been praying a long time for . . .  
I feel close to God when . . .  
God seems far away when . . .  
A hymn I always enjoy is . . .  
A sin I have trouble confessing is . . .  
If Adam and Even hadn't eaten the apple . . .  
If Jesus hadn't died on the cross and risen from the dead . . .  
If God didn't love me . . .  
Something in the Bible that confuses me is . . .  
A question I have about God is . . .  
A question I have about my religion is . . .  
I wish I had taken a stronger stand for Jesus the time . . .  
I would like to share the gospel with . . .  
I think I'd grow closer to God if . . .

### **Miscellaneous**

I wonder . . .  
A story I enjoy hearing again and again is . . .  
An important lesson I learned is . . .  
A special gift I received was . . .  
A special gift I gave was . . .  
One of my favorite books is . . .  
One of my favorite authors is . . .  
One of my favorite movies is . . .  
I am especially good at . . .  
My life changed a lot the day . . .  
I wish I had . . .  
A good friend . . .  
I need help with . . .  
My family . . .

One of my favorite family traditions is . . .

I am pleased with myself when . . .

I am not happy with myself when I . . .

I can't understand why . . .

I'll know I'm grown up when . . .

One of my greatest accomplishments was . . .

My favorite subject is . . .

One of my favorite pets was . . .

One day I found . . .

One day I lost . . .

### **How to Use the Prompts**

The prompt provides the main idea for your composition. Although you may use the prompt as your opening sentence, don't feel that you need to do so; another sentence may get your composition off to a better start.

Consider how you will develop or support your main idea. Young or inexperienced writers may limit their support to a single paragraph. Other writers will probably write several paragraphs. You might support your main idea by giving reasons or examples, by providing a description, by relating a story, or in some other way.

After you have provided support, you will probably conclude your composition with a paragraph that reinforces your main idea. Remember that your conclusion will determine your reader's final impression. Carefully consider what you want your reader to know or feel or do when he or she finishes reading your message. Then be sure that your words will convey the information, evoke the feeling, or spur to the action that you desire.

While the list of prompts above includes many ideas for writing, it is by no means exhaustive. During a brainstorming session—alone or with a group—expand this list, adding to the present categories and creating new ones. Establish your idea bank. Then you'll always have a head start when you receive a writing assignment.

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### **Biographical Information**

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*Fran Santoro Hamilton's thirty-five years as teacher, writer, and editor have enabled her to distill the English language to its essentials. Fran is the author of Hands-On English, an English handbook that makes grammar visual, and she cosponsors The Grannie Annie Family Story Celebration. Fran provides many free resources at [www.GrammarAndMore.com](http://www.GrammarAndMore.com).*