

reminder that writing is meant to be fun. Had I not read this book (about 10 times), my writing would almost certainly be less engaging.”

—Brian A. Klems, online community editor

❸ “Nobody’s perfect in real life, and *London Fields* by Martin Amis made me see that they shouldn’t ever be in fiction, either. It was the first time I sat down with a book and realized that every character in its pages was amazingly and wonderfully flawed, creating something like nothing I’d ever read—a novel hilarious, real, grotesque and gorgeous all at once.”

—Zachary Petit, managing editor, WD

❹ “Probably the best example of epistolary writing, Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* shows writers that a protagonist can move and drive the plot of a story through written letters, giving the protagonist her own voice without the help of a narrator.”

—Tiffany Luckey, assistant editor, Writer’s Market

❺ “The screenplay for *Singin’ in the Rain*. Crazy, I know, but here’s why: The story structure shouldn’t work. It breaks pretty much every ‘rule’: Shortly after beginning, it dives into a lengthy flashback. Then it establishes the main conflict. However, this conflict is resolved midway into the film and replaced with an entirely different one. . . . Toward the end, the second conflict is resolved and a new one is created. This one is resolved in about 10 minutes. None of this should work. In a writing 101 course, the screenplay would be torn up. The reason I keep this in mind when I write is so I remember the value of breaking the rules. You have to be good to pull it off, but when it works, it can be classic.”

—Phil Sexton, publisher, WD

## 10 Prompts Worth Taking 10 For

Grab a kitchen timer and kick-start your creativity with these 10-minute freewriting prompts.

BY SCOTT FRANCIS

1. Turn on the TV or radio—the station doesn’t matter—and listen for just a few seconds. Write down the first phrase you hear, and let that serve as your prompt. How you use it is up to you: It can be the first line of your story, a bit of dialogue for a character, or whatever you wish.
2. You discover a loose floorboard in a corner of your attic or the back of your closet. Without too much effort you’re able to pry the board loose. What do you find underneath? Something frightening? Something nostalgic? Let your imagination delve into the details—what it looks or smells like, reasons you think it might be there, emotions it stirs in you, etc.
3. Imagine the best (or worst) possible thing you could receive as a gift from someone. Write about opening the package and discovering what’s inside.
4. Think of a favorite accessory or piece of clothing from your past—a hat, scarf, glove, belt buckle, or something else that evokes vivid memories. Freewrite based on images that come to mind.
5. Recall a place from your childhood that always intrigued or frightened you. Describe the details you remember about that location—were there things about it that you always wondered about? An unopened door, an untaken path or a darkened patch of woods? Write about what might have awaited you there.
6. Your phone rings in the middle of the night. Reveal what happens in the next 10 minutes.
7. Pick a minor character from a favorite movie or TV show, and explore the main plot from that character’s point of view. Write about aspects of the story only he would know about.
8. Plan the perfect crime. You have 10 minutes.
9. Describe the first time you drove a car (or the first time you remember riding in one). What kind of car was it? Who was with you? Include sights, smells and sensations.
10. You find a bomb in an unlikely place. The timer says—you guessed it—10 minutes. Now what?

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