



# *100 Writing Tips & Prompts*

To Keep You on the Writing Path

By Jan Fishler



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## DEDICATION

*100 Writing Tips & Prompts* is dedicated to writers everywhere, especially those who have the courage to speak their truth and write their stories.



## INTRODUCTION

Whether you are relatively new to writing or a seasoned professional, this eBooklet will provide you with tips and prompts to help jump-start your writing and keep you on the writing path. Some of these tips and prompts come from my own experience or from classes and workshops I've taught and attended. Others come from published authors, or from such classics as *The Elements of Style*. All are short and to the point.

If you are an experienced writer, you might want to read through the entire list in one sitting and use the tips as a refresher. If you are a new or newer writer, you might want to spend a day or more on each tip, taking all the time you need to digest the information—perhaps even doing additional research of your own.

Regardless of whether you are writing in a journal, posting to your blog, writing poems and short stories, or working on “the great American novel,” the idea is to enjoy the writing process as you improve your skills. After all, writing is a craft and, like anything, the more time you put in, the better you are likely to get.

Because writing can be a solitary activity, I hope you'll take a moment and let me know what you're writing and how the tips and prompts have helped you. You can email me: [jan@janfishler.com](mailto:jan@janfishler.com). I will write you back!

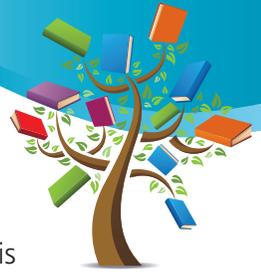
Enjoy the writing process and stay on the path.

## A Note to the Reader

The tips and prompts are designed to facilitate the writing process, not detract from it. Pick those that motivate and inspire you, but be careful not to get so caught up in preparing to write that you don't get around to writing.

### Special Thanks...

To my writing partner, Susan Gabrielle, for her support and the ongoing editorial assistance she provided in helping me develop this book.



## Tip #1

Decide that writing is going to be a regular part of your life. Take a moment now and complete this sentence: I want to write because:

\_\_\_\_\_.

## Tip #2

Figure out when you are going to write. In the beginning, it really helps to develop a writing habit, to set aside a regular time of day to write. If you're a morning person, you might want to make writing one of the first things you do after you wake up. Or if you're a night owl, you might want to write before you go to bed.

## Tip #3

Decide how much time you're going to devote to writing. Some people like to write a certain number of pages each day or count the number of words. Experiment and see what works best for you.

## Tip #4

Decide what type of writing you're going to do. Are you going to journal each day? Work on a memoir? Write short stories? Poetry? Are you writing to heal from childhood wounds? During the process, you can always change your mind, but it helps to set an intention.



### *Tip #5*

Look at your bookshelf or the books you've downloaded onto your e-reader and identify what you read most often. Self-help? How-to? Mysteries? Fiction? Nonfiction? Biographies? Poetry? Plays? Many writers write the same kind of books they enjoy reading.

### *Tip #6*

Figure out the most comfortable place to write. Are you going to take your laptop to a coffee house each morning? Will you sit at the kitchen or dining room table, set up a desk in the corner of your bedroom, hide in the basement, or go to the library? Professional writers have a place that is dedicated to writing.

### *Tip #7*

Identify obstacles that might prevent you from writing. How are you going to deal with judgmental thoughts about what you have written, interruptions by members of your household, disruptions in your schedule, or negative beliefs about your ability?

### *Tip #8*

Tap into your subconscious before you sit down to write. Here are a few suggestions: Take a yoga class, do some deep breathing exercises, meditate, or picture yourself in a relaxed state writing with ease.



### *Tip #9*

Meditate for five minutes before you start writing. Sit in a comfortable position, feet on the floor in front of you, hands resting in your lap. Follow your breath in and out. Watch where your mind takes you and come back to your breathe. Write about that experience.

### *Tip #10*

Experiment with writing to music. Try writing to classical, jazz, light rock, and nature sounds. Does music enhance or detract from your writing experience?

### *Tip #11*

Before writing, go for a short walk around the block or at a nearby park. Let your mind wander. When you return. write about your thoughts or things you saw.

### *Tip #12*

Instead of writing, try drawing or try some other creative outlet such as ceramics, sewing, baking, photography, or something you haven't tried before. Write about it.



### Tip #13

Have you experienced writers' block? Try automatic writing. Type or write nonstop for five minutes without thinking. Whatever words or images come, just write them even if they seem like nonsense. Go back and circle images or words that stand out.

### Tip #14

Having trouble overcoming the voice of judgment? Download and listen to my guided visualization, "Eliminate the Judge" at [www.JanFishler.com](http://www.JanFishler.com).

### Tip #15

Go to your favorite bookstore and purchase one or two how-to-write books. Look for books that contain information about the type of writing you want to do, like nonfiction versus fiction. Spend at least 15 minutes each day learning a little about the writing you will be doing.

### Tip #16

If you don't already own a copy, buy *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* by Anne Lamott. It's filled with great advice like, "Almost all good writing begins with terrible first efforts. You need to start somewhere."



### *Tip #17*

Buy a notebook and carry it with you, along with a pen or pencil, wherever you go. Use it to jot down ideas and observations.

### *Tip #18*

Keep notebooks and pens in your car and other places you frequent. Buy pens you like to use like fine-point, fun-colored Sharpies.

### *Tip #19*

To create a writing habit, look at the calendar and pick a start date. Schedule your writing time in your day planner or on a wall calendar—whatever you use to maintain your schedule. Make writing as important as a dentist or doctor's appointment.

### *Tip #20*

If you're going to be writing at home, get any supplies you might need to organize your writing space. Is your chair comfortable? Is the lighting good? Do you have ink and paper for your printer? Do you have a file cabinet or box where you can store your research and drafts?

### *Tip #21*

If you don't have one, buy and hang a bulletin board that will be dedicated to your writing. Mine is hung near my desk. On it I hang inspirational quotes and pictures that speak to me and motivate my daily writing.



## *Tip #22*

Go through old magazines and clip out pictures that interest you. Hang them on your bulletin board or make a collage out of them. Write about the images. Exactly what is it that grabs your interest? Is there a common theme? How do the various images make you feel?

## *Tip #23*

Begin writing. Sit down and do it. If you have trouble getting started, close your eyes and take some slow, deep breaths. Put your hands on the keyboard or your pen on the paper and write about whatever comes up. Don't worry about spelling or grammar, or whether what you have written is "good." Just write.

## *Tip #24*

One easy way to free yourself to write is to set a timer for five minutes and write non-stop, without judgment, until it goes off. You'll be amazed at how much you can write in just five minutes at a time.

## *Tip #25*

Buy a pack of 3 x 5 cards and write ideas on them as they come to you. When you're looking for something to write about, shuffle the deck and pick a card.



## *Tip #26*

Look through old photo albums or boxes of old photographs. If you don't have any of your own, find some at a thrift store. Select three to five photos of interesting people. Write about each photo.

## *Tip #27*

Take a character you've create from Tip #26 and put them into a short story or poem.

## *Tip #28*

Make a list of things you know about, i.e. your area of expertise. Many people begin writing about what they know. You don't have to have a degree to be an expert in a particular area. Maybe you know a lot about cooking, organizing your house, raising horses, training dogs, repairing trucks, or painting portraits. Maybe you're an observer of nature or an avid cyclist.

## *Tip #29*

Do some research on the topic you're writing about or the type of writing you're doing. If, for example, you're writing a story about the Wild West, read about that period in history. If your protagonist is a ballerina, go to the ballet.



### *Tip #30*

Once a week, take a field trip to your local library or favorite book store. Browse and see what books jump out at you. What piques your interest? Take a moment and add this weekly activity to your calendar.

### *Tip #31*

Once a month, make an effort to go someplace you've never been before—a new restaurant or neighborhood for example—and then write about it.

### *Tip #32*

Try a new food and then write about it. Describe the texture, color, flavor, and smell. Write a scene where a character tries the food and wants to send it back to the kitchen.

### *Tip #33*

The next time you go to the mall or some similar place, bring your notebook and take some time to sit and observe the shoppers. Pick someone and describe her in great detail. How old is she? What clothes is she wearing? Make things up about her: Is she healthy or unhealthy? Rich or poor? Is she married or single? Happy or unhappy? What is her occupation? What is her secret obsession?



### *Tip #34*

Join or start a book club. Your local library might have one you can join, or perhaps there's a book club meetup ([www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com)) in your neighborhood or community. Reading and discussing books is a good way to develop an understanding of how plot, dialogue, narrative, and scene work together.

### *Tip #35*

Writing groups can be an excellent source of inspiration and motivation and a way to stick to your writing schedule. Look for other writers—both online and in person and schedule a monthly meeting to share your work in progress and get constructive feedback.

### *Tip #36*

Go to a café or coffee house and make an effort to listen in on a conversation. Try writing dialogue that matches what they are saying. Notice how people talk, how often they interrupt one other, how incomplete their sentences are.

### *Tip #37*

Take a walk around your neighborhood. Discover three things you've never seen before and write about them.



### *Tip #38*

What is absolutely the worst thing that could happen to you? Write about it.

### *Tip #39*

Write about the most embarrassing thing that ever happened to you. Where were you when it happened? Who was with you? How old were you? Why were you so embarrassed? Have you ever told anyone about it? Why or why not?

### *Tip #40*

Write about someone you love or have loved. What does/did he look like? What made you love him? What song reminds you of him? Does/did he love you, too?

### *Tip #41*

Who is the most inspirational person you know? What about him/her inspires you? Write about this person in detail.

### *Tip #42*

Who is your favorite author? Try writing 500 words or so in that style.



### Tip #43

Write 500 words or so in a style you have never considered before. For example, if you write short stories, try writing poetry. If nonfiction is your thing, try fiction.

### Tip #44

Open up the dictionary at random and pick a word. Use that word in an opening sentence and continue from there.

### Tip #45

Go through the newspaper and select a story that interests you. Turn it into fiction or poetry.

### Tip #46

It's important to add flavor to your writing. Metaphor, simile, hyperbole and metonymy are some of the literary techniques that writers use. If you're not up on your literary terms, you'll find them at: [http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit\\_terms\\_M.html](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_M.html). Go back and look at some of your writing and highlight a few places where you might want to add flavor. The next few tips will cover this topic.

### Tip #47

Spend today observing your environment and writing similes in your notebook. A simile is a figure of speech that directly compares two different things, usually by employing the words "like" or "as." Here's an example from *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck, "Kate inched over her own thoughts like a measuring worm."



## Tip #48

Metaphor differs from a simile in that “like” or “as” is not used in the comparison. The person or thing being compared becomes the object as in this quote from Shakespeare, “Juliet is the sun.” Come up with five metaphors. Give yourself a gold star and an A++ if you can.

This link might help: <http://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Metaphor>.

## Tip #49

Have some fun today playing with hyperbole, a figure of speech in which exaggeration is used for emphasis and is often humorous. Here are some examples: I can smell the roses from a mile away. My neighbor has a million cats. Here’s one from Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Living to Tell the Tale*, “At that time, Bogota was a remote, lugubrious city where an insomniac rain had been falling since the beginning of the 16th century.”

## Tip #50

Metonymy is the rhetorical strategy of describing something indirectly by referring to things around it. For example, “The pen is mightier than the sword.” Pen stands for the written word. Sword stands for military aggression and force. Here are some other examples: Crown in the place of royalty, The White House in place of the president, the suits in place of business people, silver fox for an attractive older man, hand for help. Keep your notebook handy today and jot down any examples of metonymy you hear while listening to the radio or television.



## Tip #51

Go back to some of your writing and try adding metaphor, simile, hyperbole, and metonymy.

## Tip #52

If you're writing short stories or longer fiction, be sure to learn about point of view. Start by searching Google.

## Tip #53

Take time to understand when to use narrative and when to develop scenes. Learn more by reading Chapter One of *Self-Editing for Fiction Writers: How to Edit Yourself into Print* by Browne and King.

## Tip #54

Take some time to learn about writing scenes. Do some reading on the subject or check out some online resources. Visit this link to get you started: <http://www.wow-womenonwriting.com/40-FE4-CreatingScenes.html>.

## Tip #55

Try writing a scene from something that actually happened in your life. Be sure to include setting, one or two characters, props, dialogue, and other relevant details. How did it go?



## *Tip #56*

If you're writing about people, you're writing about characters. The trick in writing is to make your characters memorable. In thinking about characters, ask yourself the following questions: What is my character's life purpose? What are his quirks? Talents? What does she look like? What is her fatal flaw? Develop a character you might want to write about.

## *Tip #57*

Develop a character from a different time and place than the one you developed in Tip #40.

## *Tip #58*

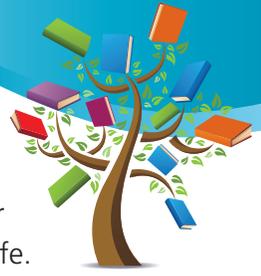
Write a scene where two characters interact. Don't overthink it—just see what happens when these two people get together.

## *Tip #59*

Read through some of the pieces you have written and see if you've included the senses: sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste.

## *Tip #60*

Remember a time when you were very angry. Write about the circumstances and what you learned from the experience.



## Tip #61

Create a character who is angry. Put this character into a situation where the anger saves his or her life.

## Tip #62

Remember a time when you were scared or afraid. Create a scene based on that situation. Feel free to deviate from the facts.

## Tip #63

Turn your least favorite relative into a fictional character. Write him or her into a perilous situation.

## Tip #64

What memories does the word *love* evoke? Make a list of scenes that come to mind. Write 500 words about one of them.

## Tip #65

What memories are evoked by the word *hate*? Make a list of scenes that come to mind. Write 500 words about one of the scenes.



## Tip #66

Bruce Ross-Larson (*Edit Yourself*) begins his book by saying, “Just as your speech is filled with many words that add nothing to what you say, your writing is often larded with words that obscure your meaning rather than clarify it.” Read through a few pages of your writing and see if you can trim some of the fat. For example, the *field of environmental education* can be changed to *environmental education*.

## Tip #67

Take the advice given to Ernest Hemingway by Ezra Pound: “Use no superfluous words. No adjective that does not reveal something. Go in fear of abstractions.” As you edit your writing, see if you can eliminate some superfluous words or adjectives that don’t reveal anything to the reader..

## Tip #68

Renni Browne & Dave King (*Self-Editing for Fiction Writers*) share insight about what editors look for when they read a fiction submission. Editors say, “The first thing I do is find a scene with some dialogue. If the dialogue doesn’t work, the manuscript gets bounced. If it’s good, I start reading.” If you’re writing dialogue, take the time to learn how to do it well. Read some books like *Writing Dialogue* by Tom Chiarella.



## Tip #69

Purchase a copy of the classic, *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk and E.B. White and learn the elementary rules of usage and the elementary principles of composition.

## Tip #70

If you decide to publish your writing, even if it's just on a blog, review the grammar rules and make an effort to avoid some of the more obvious errors. If you are grammatically challenged, ask a friend for help or check out Grammarly: <http://www.grammarly.com/?q=grammar&gclid=CJTr1sjYkLMCFaaDQgodI2QAWA>.

## Tip #71

For inspiration, pick up (and read) a copy of *Painless Grammar* by Rebecca Elliott. "It's a user-friendly, action-packed, fun-filled book for kids who want to learn to write well without atrophying their brains from boredom."

## Tip #72

Read something you've written out loud, or better, have someone read it to you. How does it sound? Could you make it better?



### *Tip #73*

Be brave. Get some feedback. Send the best 500 words you've written to some of your most trusted friends. Ask them to answer the following questions: 1. Does the content interest you? 2. Would you like to read more on the topic? 3. Did it evoke emotion when you read it? If so, which ones? 4. Do you have suggestions for making it better?

### *Tip #74*

Consider the feedback you receive on your writing. If you get the same comment more than three times, you probably should pay attention to it. On the other hand, it's your writing. If a comment doesn't feel constructive, or you can't deal with it now, or you don't know how, put the comments aside and come back to them later.

### *Tip #75*

Are you curious about how readable and understandable your writing is? Do you want to be sure your writing matches the reading level of your audience? Tools are available to determine what grade level of education will understand and comprehend what you've written. Go to <http://www.writingtester.com> and copy and paste a sample of your writing. (The higher the score, the easier the writing is to read!).



## Tip #76

Remember, writing is a craft. The more you do it, the better you get. Think about adding more pages, more words, or more time to your daily writing practice.

## Tip #77

If you're writing every day and you're getting serious about the craft, take a writing class. You'll learn some great stuff and meet other writers.

## Tip #78

If the class you take goes well, join or create a writing group. It's a fantastic way to get feedback about your writing and try out new content.

## Tip #79

If haven't already done so, share your writing by starting a blog. Here's a link to the Top 10 Blog sites: <http://topsitesblog.com/blog-websites>.

## Tip #80

Go back and read through whatever you've been writing. Pick out your best piece. Figure out what makes it your best.



### *Tip #81*

Now that you have identified your best, review some of your earlier writing and see what you can do to improve it.

### *Tip #82*

Send something you've written to a friend or family member as a gift.

### *Tip #83*

Try writing longhand today. If you typically write on the computer, try writing longhand. If you write in notebooks, try typing, going as fast as you can without editing. See how many words you can get on a page in five minutes.

### *Tip #84*

Write about the differences you experienced between writing longhand and/or writing on a computer.

### *Tip #85*

We all have an important story to tell, so try writing memoir today. Come up with a situation from your life and turn it into a scene.



## *Tip #86*

Some writers like to begin their writing time by printing out, reading, and editing what they have written the previous day. This can be a useful practice as long as you don't get too bogged down in "fixing" problems or become too critical of your work. Sometimes, it's best to just forge ahead until you've established a writing habit.

## *Tip #87*

How serious are you about writing? Is this a hobby or are you considering publication? If writing is your hobby for now, then just continue writing! If you are considering publication—just keep writing, and begin to educate yourself about publishing options.

## *Tip #88*

Take a chance. Send your poems, short stories, and other pieces out into the publishing world. Don't worry about rejection. It's not personal. Publishers are just looking for the right match.

## *Tip #89*

Research some blogs on topics that interest you. Follow a few of them. When the spirit moves you, write an email asking to become a guest blogger.



### Tip #90

Research whether to look for an agent or publisher, or go the self-publishing route. This is a rather complex topic. Give yourself plenty of time to digest the information.

### Tip #91

Be sure to research vanity presses, print on demand, and e-book publishing. If you don't know what these terms mean, take the time to learn what each has to offer.

### Tip #92

Figure out how you will build your platform as a writer. Generally, a platform consists of building your audience, selling your writing, and finding success as a writer. To get started, go to: <http://www.be-a-better-writer.com/writing-platform.html>.

### Tip #93

If you self-publish, be sure to hire an editor. Also check out John Kremer at [www.bookmarket.com](http://www.bookmarket.com).

### Tip #94

Host a salon or gathering at a coffee house or bookstore where you and other writers can read some of your work to members of the community.



### *Tip #95*

Write about the salon experience. How did it make you feel? What would you do the same or differently the next time?

### *Tip #96*

Identify your strengths and weaknesses as a writer.

### *Tip #97*

Work on building more strengths. Read books, take classes, interview local authors.

### *Tip #98*

Go to [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com) and look for a writing Meetup group in your area. If you can't find one to join, consider starting one.

### *Tip #99*

If you are an expert on a particular topic, share your knowledge by writing and submitting articles to online magazines. Here's a link to get you started: <http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/magazines/>. If you're not yet an expert, pick a topic and become one.

### *Tip #100*

**Keep Writing!!!**



Jan Fishler is the author of *Searching for Jane, Finding Myself: An Adoption Memoir*. Jan developed the Write YOUR Story® workshops to help others tell their stories. Her classes tap into the power of the subconscious so that stories practically write themselves.

For 25 years, she was a corporate scriptwriter, copywriter, video producer, and trainer. She produced The Path to Publication DVD series, filmed at the Community of Writers Conference at Squaw Valley. The series contains advice from such well-known authors such as Amy Tan, Anne Lamott, Janet Fitch, and Mark Childress.

Currently, Jan is developing new workshops and collaborating on a writer's guide. Find out more at [www.janfishler.com](http://www.janfishler.com).

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