

WRITING PROMPT EXERCISES

Introduction

Writing exercises are a great discipline.

I use a mixture of exercises to trigger ideas. This ensures I stretch myself creatively on a regular basis. I don't want my stories to all sound the same and mixing up the way in which I approach writing them helps with that.

The other advantage is there are writing competitions based on working to an opening or closing line so getting practice in is useful for approaching those.

The main writing exercises I use are:-

1. Working to a set opening line.
2. Working to a set closing line.



So how do you find suitable lines to work with?

1. Use proverbs/well known phrases.
2. Invent your own using random number, word, phrase, and question generators to assist.
3. Play the story game. Write down a selection of nouns on pieces of paper. Do the same for verbs. Do the same for adjectives. Put these in three different hats or something you can use to draw paper out from at random. Then have a good rummage! Pick out one word from each hat. You now have a

three word opening or closing line to play with. For example if you picked Winchester Cathedral, walking, slowly, you could start with an opening line such as:-

Sarah was walking slowly out of Winchester Cathedral when I first saw her. It's then up to you who the narrator is here, why meeting Sarah is important at all and so on.



Questions

Questions can be great opening lines as your story then has to go on to answer the point. Think of Kipling's "serving men" - what, how, where, why, who, and when.

Some examples for you to try:-

1. Where is the body hidden?
2. Why did Sandra inherit everything? (There could be a link between 1 and 2 here!).
3. How did *that* happen?
4. When did Joshua get home?
5. What did Joshua think he was doing?
6. Who told Joshua about the alibi?

I like to sometimes add another category here - the glorious one of "what if?" as you can have so much fun with that.

1. What if there *were* aliens in the living room?
2. What if Joshua did succeed in his plans? (Even I want to know who this Joshua is now and more importantly what he is up to! Go on, give it a go).
3. What if Sandra could prove the will was not forged?



Have a go at some of these as suitable opening lines:-

1. The world would end tomorrow but Jasper wasn't moving his schedule for anyone.
2. They needed the rain but how much would it destroy this time?
3. The idea of a love match was laughable.
4. There were worst problems in life, he knew, but right now he'd be hard pressed to name six.
5. Enough was never enough for her but she didn't know how to stop it.

In all of those examples there is a situation set up which your story should then go on to tackle. (This is the best way I know of judging what would make a good opening line).

Closing Lines

The closing line to a story should of course wrap up the tale and ensure there are no loose ends to frustrate a reader. There should be impact too. You want a satisfied reader to feel there could be no other suitable ending and that it delivered on the promise set up by your opening line.

I have sometimes written the closing line first and, as Agatha Christie was known to do, work backwards to get to the start point.

Closing Line: *He would have to take the money.*

What could come from that?

1. He would rather have revenge on someone who'd wronged him but the money they offer is not something he can afford to reject, as they know.

2. His business is failing. Wants to keep it going to appease his father but knows he can't. Has been made a good offer. Could start again on it.

3. Is being bought off to stay silent about something. Doesn't want to endanger family. Knows he can make a new life well away from current location if he takes the money. Also knows someone innocent will be jailed if he does go.

I'm sure you can think of other story ideas from that but you can see from those three outlines how that last line would be an apt closure. All three have potential for emotional impact and conflict (including internal. How hard would your character wrestle with themselves before coming to the final decision summed up in that last line?).



Always a good question!

See what you can do with these examples!

1. She refused to walk off into the sunset because she was going to run.
2. I told you I could solve your problems.

3. The dragon was no longer the most dangerous species in the area.
4. He *had* got away with it after all.
5. The hermit ensured nobody could get to the treasure after this.

Punchlines can make good endings and the last line is a great place for a twist in the tale finish too.

Random Generators

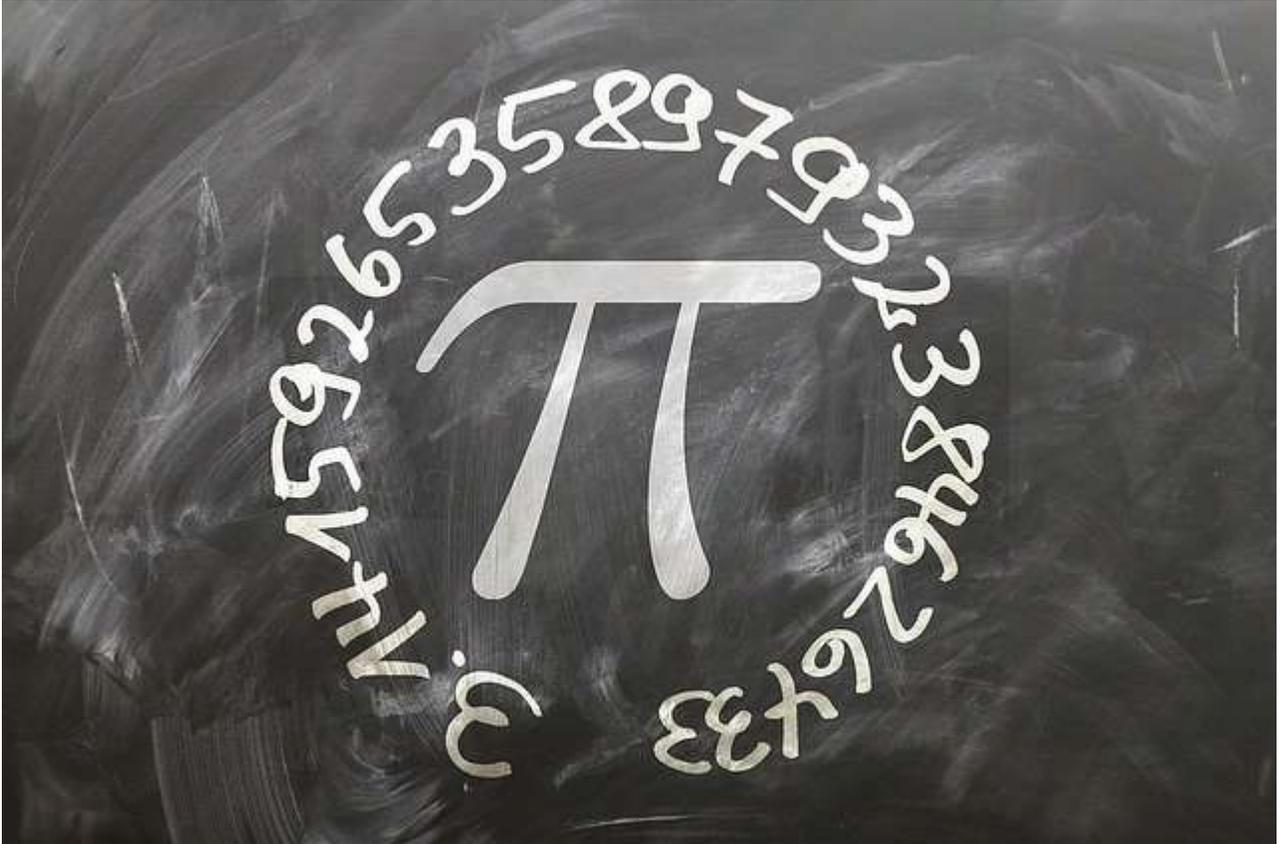
I use random number, word, phrase, and question generators to trigger ideas. On all of these, you can set parameters or change categories or both, giving you yet more possibilities to play with.

How on earth can you use random numbers in fiction then?

<https://www.calculator.net/random-number-generator.html?clower=0&cupper=11&cnums=1&cdup=y&csort=n&cnumt=i&cprec=50&ctype=2&s=47682.7775&submit1=Generate#comprehensive>

With this you can select whole numbers or use decimals. I've used number generators to come up with a figure I can use as a countdown for something happening in a story. For example, 314 would be 314 seconds in my tale, which is just over 5 minutes. Not long for a character to make a life or death decision is it?

Equally I can use it as a date - i.e. March 14th if using the US way of setting out dates. Here I would be looking at why the date is so important to my character. There will be a story behind that.



Also known as 3.14 or Pi Day!

<https://randomwordgenerator.com/>

With this, you can select the number of words you want and even the first and last letters.

I chose two words, both to start with an A and end with a T. What came up? Abundant Ant! Now that made me smile, I admit, but you could get a story from that. Yes, you can. Ant is short for Anthony! Now what could a character called Anthony be abundant in? Generosity? Riches (but is a Scrooge like character who *doesn't* change). You get the idea.

<https://randomwordgenerator.com/phrase.php>

Here you can select the number of phrases you want at a time. I chose three and my selection was:-

Go Out On a Limb
Wouldn't Harm a Fly
Burst Your Bubble

Now there's a number of ways you can use these. You could use these as three potential titles for three new stories. You could use one as a title and get either the two remaining phrases into the story somehow or use them as themes for your tale. You could use them as opening lines - for example:-

Go out on a limb, he said. It would be fun, he said.

Well I'm here to tell you he was wrong and thanks to him I now have two limbs in plaster!

And from the same people behind the word generator comes the random question generator. Again you can pick how many you want to come up at a time.



Use random word generators to help with your creative process.

<https://randomwordgenerator.com/question.php>

I picked three again and what came up was:-

***Do you think any kind of afterlife exists?
What makes you smile about us?
What's something you've tried, that you'll never, ever try again?***

Now the great thing with these is you can use them to quiz your characters as part of your outlining process. In understanding what *you* need to know about your character before you write them, you will write them with more conviction. That does come through to a reader. The character will have a ring of truth to them.

I hope you have fun with some or all of these!

Allison Symes

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