

# Prompts From Published Authors 2



Make a list of the most common cliches you can think of, (for example, heart of gold, right as rain, who knows where the time goes?) Choose one that resonates with you and free write one to two hundred words on the subject, digging deeply into the idea. Be specific, detailed, perhaps apply an unexpected slant to bring fresh emotional weight to a tired phrase. If a story emerges, you might like to try the cliché as the title.

**Gillian O'Shaughnessy, author of forthcoming collection, *Salt City Runaway***



Explore the different ways the idea of “balancing acts” can be applied to a story. What are the variety of scenarios in which this particular concept could be incorporated in a flash fiction piece—physically, spiritually, comedically, seriously, apathetically, or symbolically?

**Shome Dasgupta, author of *Cajun South Brown Folk* and *Histories of Memories***



How did you eat your last meal? Mindfully? In a hurry? Write something that evokes the sense of presence or otherwise you experienced while eating.

**Sumitra Singam, author of *Mother Karma*, and organiser of Yeah Nah zoom meetings**



Take an old family story and a random non-related image, then (1) place them in another time or place and/or (2) add magic and/or (3) make it a sad ending if it was originally happy or happy ending if it was sad and/or (4) challenge norms and expectations and/or (5) merge them with “hopefully”s or dreadful “what if”s. That’s your new draft. Once you’re done with that exercise, reread it to learn what you were really writing about and edit in that direction.

**Amy Marques, author of *PARTS* and *Foot Notes* and co-author of *Are You Willing?* and editor/artist for the *Duets Anthologies*.**



1. Take the setting / situation from a movie or TV show you recently watched (this could be country, town, building, time, an event, season).
2. Take a character from a book you have recently read or know very well (not the literal character, just an aspect of them such as their job, appearance or a personality quirk - they don't have to be human).
3. Take an object from somewhere close to you.

Now put them together in a flash...

**JP Relph, Editor of Trash Cat Lit and author of *Sick Ink* and *One For Sorrow***



Write a story using the 1st person plural to describe an experience that is particular to your characters but which most readers will be able to relate to on some level. Bonus points for making it funny.

**Kathryn Silver-Hajo, author of flash collection, *Wolfsong*, YA novel, *Roots of the Banyan Tree*, and flash collection, *Spinning: Love, Family, and other Strange Entanglements* (forthcoming fall 2026).**



Draw a picture of an animal. Write a story from the animal's point of view. Include one or more of the following words: blather, cave, hydrangea, peeve, sparkle, mushroom.

**Jeff Harvey, author of *Life Would Be Perfect If* (Bottlecap Press 2024) and founding editor of *Gooseberry Pie Lit Magazine***



Take a book off your shelf, open to a random page. Pick the first word on that page. Flip to another page and pick the first word on that page. Repeat until you have 5-10 words. Write a piece that includes these words. Bonus points if you can combine some words that wouldn't normally go together. Have fun!

**Jenny Wong, author of *Shiftings & Other Coordinates of Disorder***



Take a headline from a news website or (gasp) newspaper. Read ONLY the headline. From the headline, imagine the story in your head. What happens? Why? Who are the players? How does it end? After you have a summary of your imagined story, read the article. Take what works from the real article and your imagination and smash them together. Discard what doesn't work. Then write!

**Mario Aliberto III, author of the flash chapbook, *All the Dead We Have Yet to Bury* (Chestnut Review, 2025).**



Think of a person you've seen today. Next, think of an animal. Now think of the last item you've purchased. Write a story that combines all three.

Further considerations:

- For the person: What do you imagine their home life looks like? What mood were they in? Where were they going?
- For the animal: How does the animal move? Is it a wild or domesticated animal? What does it eat?
- For the item purchased: What need does it meet? Who might have made it? How did it get to you?

**Coleman Bigelow, author of the flash fiction collection *Man's Best Friends***



You (or your character) receive a terrible gift. Write back to the sender and ask what they were thinking. Let rip. See where it takes you, if it reveals layers of the relationship. Does an interesting hinterland emerge?

Or maybe the problem isn't the gift: it's you (or the character). Now write a response from the object to you (the character). What the hell is your (your character's) problem?

Write a story from the conflict which emerges.

**Kathryn Aldridge-Morris, author of *Cold Toast* (Dahlia Books)**



This is a prompt from a writing workshop with Lucy Wadham. She asked us to imagine our own funerals, which got a lot of us feeling glum for a while. But she then told us it had to be funny, which sent all our brains to whacky-mode. I wrote about the weirder family members present, notably an aunt who sold sweets to the mourners for a bit of extra cash. A child who spat in all the triangle sandwiches at the wake. Have a go, if you're feeling up for it.

**Kik Lodge, author of *Scream If You Want To* (Alien Buddha Press) and *The Bully in my Pillow* (Stanchion Books).**



Use your powers of observation to fuel your inspiration. Over a period of a week or two:

- Observe and record a line or two of overheard real-life dialogue, the saltier and more piquant the better.
- Observe and record at least two sensory details—taste, smell or touch only.
- Observe and record at least one person's physical action—gait, gesture, nervous tic.

Include these in a flash piece featuring a confrontation. The first line of dialogue should be a question. (Examples: "Why did you say that to her?" "When are you going to stop treating me this way?")

**Timothy Boudreau, author of *Saturday Night; Love You, Miss You, Goodbye Forever* (forthcoming); *Stepdad on the Dance Floor* (forthcoming), and *All We Knew Were Our Hearts* (forthcoming).**



Write a piece in which the narrator's body quietly begins enforcing a new rule—an organ, limb, or bodily function refuses to cooperate unless a specific, irrational condition is met (e.g. the heart won't beat without applause, the skin won't hold warmth, the knees demand confession). No one else finds this alarming. The narrator must complete one ordinary obligation while negotiating with their own body. End the story at the moment the body wins—or gives in. The weirder the better.

**Tracie Adams, author of *Our Lives in Pieces* and *Not Finished Yet***



Read a fairy tale and pick out a minor character. You know, the one who delivers a gift or a quest or an ultimatum and then disappears two sentences later? Start free-writing from their perspective. What does their world look or sound or smell like? Where do they go once they leave the page of that fairy tale? Who do they spend their time with? You might find that their lives are just as magical.

**Joel Hans, author of *The Bedtime Emptying of Our World***



One way to approach ekphrastic flash fiction is to follow your questions about an artwork into the story. If the first thought that springs to your mind is, 'Who would buy this?', there's a character waiting for you who would. 'Why did the painter use this blue? Does this kind of bird mean something here? Is this object significant?' These questions can lead you to interesting symbols and metaphors. Choose an artwork you've wanted to write about. Jot down questions that come to mind, and follow them to find your story there.

**Lorette C. Luzajic, editor of *The Ekphrastic Review* and *The Mackinaw*, and author of *Disgust*, *The Rope Artist*, *Winter in June*, and *Pretty Time Machine***