

Top Ten Ways to Generate Ideas to Write About



By Billie A Williams

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. *Your Life*
2. *Your Experiences*
3. *Your Likes and Dislikes*
4. *Three random words*
5. *Buy a book of writing prompts*
6. *Pick a quotation*
7. *A newspaper article*
8. *A book title*
9. *A Place*
10. *A person's name*
11. *Observation (Bonus) ☺*



YOUR LIFE

This is who you are. Where did you grow up? Who are the people who've crossed your path? Every one of them has influenced you in some way. You could write about them. You could write about your favorite hobbies, sports, or pastimes. Think of things in your life that might interest others.

Then you can either fictionalize it or write it as a memoir or article, essay or even a poem for your own personal file or to publish in newspaper, magazine or write a whole book. Think Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, or any number of family memories that could make a good read. There is no limit to the number of novels that have started just this way.



YOUR EXPERIENCES

Take a look back at the experiences you have had. How about your firsts, first day of kindergarten, first lost tooth, first day at camp, first doll, bicycle. Search your memories. It doesn't matter what age you are you've had some experiences no one else has had.

One thing I remember is: I spent summers on my grandparents farm in a small remote community in Northern Wisconsin. I would go to the Catholic church with my Grandmother in a neighboring town. Then we'd come home and I'd go to a small Presbyterian church just me, no one else. Sometimes I'd get a ride the mile home with someone from church. On this particular day, no one was ready to leave when I was. I could walk that mile. Never mind there were woods on both sides of the narrow road leading toward grandpa's farm. Never mind there was very little traffic on that road.

I was nearly home, I was crossing the bridge over a small creek when I saw this gigantic bird – he was huge, more huge even than my imagination could make him. He swooped and circled and swooped, I was sure he was going to pick me up and carry me

away to some nest to feed his or her young ones. I started to scream and run with all the power I could muster. My grandpa met me about two blocks from where I had started running. He scooped me up in his arms and carried me home, trying to hear what had happened to frighten me so much.

That could be turned into a longer story for sure. I had tons of unique experiences on that farm. Oh the bird was a Blue Heron and he was fishing the river, not little girls. ☺ Mine your experiences.



YOUR LIKES AND DISLIKES

What do you like? What movies draw you in? What do you like to eat? What do you hate to eat? If you were forced to eat fried eggs, maybe they don't appeal to you even yet. Or maybe you had a bad pizza and therefore would never touch one again.

What gets your dander up or makes your calm climb ever higher until you are ready to lash out at someone anyone? You undoubtedly have plenty of opinions about the recent bank bailouts, or oil spill or maybe Animal cruelty is your cause to fire off a protest or missive to the editor of your local paper.

Think in terms of what emotions you can bring to the page. It can be joy, happiness, sadness, anger, or any other emotion you might have. Start writing about how you feel, what made you feel that way.



WORDS YOUR STOCK IN TRADE

PICK UP A DICTIONARY

Pick up a dictionary, or a newspaper or magazine. Open it and close your eyes. Select a word as you slide your finger down the page. Then pick another word, and another. Three is a good number.

No matter how weird the three words look together just start writing. You may surprise yourself with some really good material. My book *Skull Music* came out of an exercise like this.

Sometimes you have to force yourself to begin with what you have and create something out of it. I've tried similar prompts with my writing groups and they always surprise themselves with what they write. If you want a real challenge, pick one random word. What would you do with the word **YELLOW**? Try it you might surprise yourself.



BUY A BOOK OF WRITING PROMPTS

There are some marvelous books of prompts out there. My friend Sherry MaBell Arietta Russ has built a whole writing career around providing writing prompts for those wanting to learn how to write. One of her books “*Weekly Writes*,” is one of my very favorite ones. But she has a plethora of resources for you. <http://www.weeklywrites.com> Go have a look for yourself.

I have a number of books that are prompts and nothing else.

A Picture is worth 1,000 Words

Write Brain

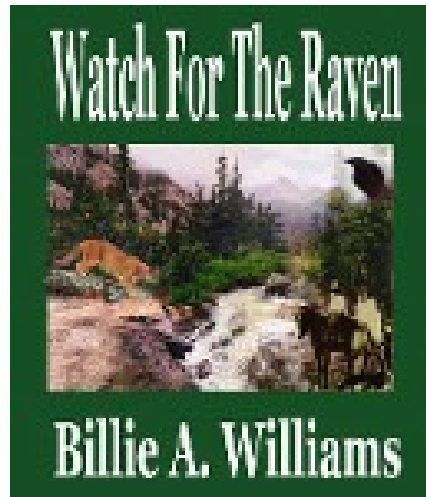
Hooked

The Writer’s Idea Workshop

The Writer’s Book of Matches, 1001 Prompts to Ignite Your Fiction

1001 Article Ideas

If that isn’t enough pick up a neat little thing from Writer’s Digest called the **Story Spinner**. There are literally thousands of possible story ideas on this wheel of creativity.



PICK A QUOTATION

Look for a quotation that resonates with your. Actually, you'll find them everywhere. Pocket calendars and others usually come with one for each month. Or you can buy or go to your library and find the Oxford English Dictionary of Quotations. There are several choices for nearly every possible theme you can imagine.

I'll bet your mother or your favorite aunt had phrases they used all the time. Something like "Rain before seven, quit before eleven," or "Red in the Morning, Sailor take warning," both a manner of weather predicting. My mother had a saying for everything. I've used several for my books. *Watch For the Raven* began with what she said, "back when Tag was a pup and turkeys chewed tobacco." That was the beginning of a young adult, historical adventure.

Brian Tracy, marketing guru has a quote a day you can sign up for as does Cynthia Kersey at Unstoppable Enterprises, or TUT, the Universe. Great quotes to get you going every day. Search the internet for quotations and you will find more than you can every hope to use in a lifetime. (Unless, you are a very prolific author, or perhaps very, very young.)



BOOK CATALOGUES

Library shelves, bookstore shelves, look at the titles of the books do any of them suggest something you might be interested in writing about. You could use the title as a prompt to write from. Titles aren't copyrightable, but your story would never be the same as theirs anyway.

Sometimes a title would suggest a theme you considered but never followed through with. Another way to get ideas is to read, read, read everything and anything, something could spark an idea. Just for fun, pick a book title and start writing using it for your first sentence. See what you come up with.

It's good exercise if nothing develops, you have at least exercised your creativity muscles.



PLACES

Street names can be a fascinating jumping off spot for your writing. How about Hollow Creek Road, Easy Street (my daughter lived here one time – it was not), Cemetery Lane, (My sister lived at 0 Cemetery Lane and you know that found a way into one of my books.) How about Melody Lane, or Smiley Road? Look around as you travel, street and road signs can spark your muse.

As a kid we had moved on the outskirts of Ironwood, Michigan the suburb was called Jessieville, but the place we lived in within that burb was called “The Caves” because of the cave ins from abandoned iron ore mines. When we moved from there to Bessemer, Michigan we moved to a place the locals called The Jungle. I have no clue how it got that name. Think back to your childhood or growing up years where did you live? Did it have a local name, a nickname?



NAMES

Sometimes names will trigger a story. How about Dusty Rhodes, I used as a character in my novel *Small Town Secrets*. It turns out he was a real person and a relative of his lived behind us in the town where we had recently moved. How about River Phoenix, or Dakota Cassidy, Amber, January Flannel (appeared in *The Capricorn Goat*, another of my novels)? How about Rocky or Rocci (our local veterinarian)?

Writer's Digest Books has a book that will give you names, with ethnic origins and meanings. It's a treasure trove of ideas, and a way to get your writing to a whole new level. The book is *The Character Naming Source Book*.

Alternately, you can go through a phone book and look for unusual names. Get one of those baby naming books they always have a plethora of great names. How about using a famous person's name, with variations of course. LeRoy Rogers appears in *The Capricorn Goat*.

Taake (pronounced like take) Two and Twice Tuesday are twins in *Small Town Secrets*.

Go on a search, find a name and just sit and write either as that fictional person or about that person and how that name might have affected their life.



OBSERVATIONS

Take something from your environment and just begin writing about it. I have had a spider hanging from his fine silk thread parachuting from limb to limb on a tree, or sliding down the windshield of my parked car, building a web outside of the window of my writing room. All of these have appeared in my novels because they were there when I was stuck and trying to find some way to get unstuck in my writing. It so happened they were the perfect idea I needed to move the story forward.

Be on the alert you never know when a bird, a spider, a snake or some other object will be the perfect vehicle to move your writing forward.

Look around you. The way light streams through a window, slices through venetian blinds, turns prisms into rainbows or creates ominous or every changing shadows in the mountains. Light has quality, texture and nuances that you can capture in your writing, with a little work. Light can evoke emotions or emotional states in movies and television, but that began as written words. See the potential?

Clouds, ever changing, slowly ambling across a summer sky or swiftly skating across the chill of a fall sky, bumping into each other or changing shapes as they go. As a kid did you ever lay on your back and watch clouds, seeing the wonderful creatures they become, or dreaming of flying through them. Have you looked down on huge cumulous clouds casting shadows on the earth below? All of this is writing fodder. All of this can be mood setting, creating a tone for the story you hope to create.

If you still are at a loss for story ideas, Writer's Digest has a story wheel that is potentially capable of creating millions of prompts to get your story going. The wheel has several layers, one is words, one is starters, and one is settings. It is an ingenious tool and I highly recommend it.



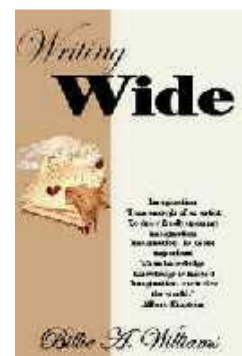
FINAL WORDS

The more you put pen to page or fingers to the keyboard the easier it will be for you to find ideas EVERYWHERE. Newspaper headlines or articles, crunching leaves underfoot; fishing a trout stream, rappelling down a cliff are only a couple story starters. On a drive across the country, visions of covered wagons on a trail west float easily into mind. Relax; let ideas drift by or snatch them in your notebook you always carry. Since you are a writer you always carry a notebook right?

If you need or want more, go to <http://writingwide.com> and pick up your copy of Writing Wide, or Spice Up Your Writing or even A Writer's Vehicle to get your writing moving.

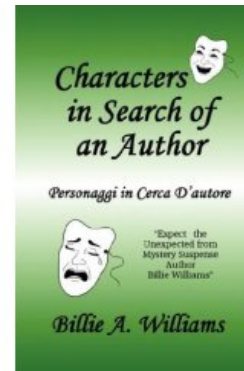
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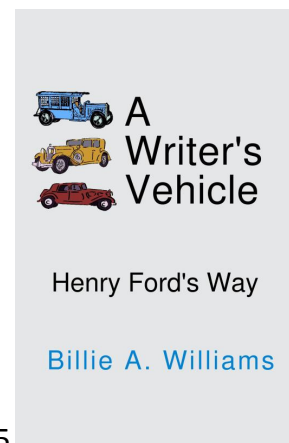
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