

Genre-Themed Writing Prompts

Grades 9-12

Strong writers practice composing texts in many different genres, both during school and outside the classroom. These genre-themed writing prompts are a fun and creative way to help your students develop important writing skills while also gaining familiarity with some of the most popular fiction and nonfiction genres. Responding to writing prompts can help students strengthen skills such as crafting a narrative, establishing a clear sequence of events, developing an argument, and more. It can also help young students develop stronger reading skills, especially when they are encouraged to read their written responses aloud.

This resource includes genre-themed creative fiction and nonfiction writing prompts for teens in grades 9-12. These prompts would be appropriate for use in the home as well as for classroom use. The prompts were written to encourage responders to draw from various literacy skills included in the [Common Core ELA Writing Standards](#).

In addition, this resource includes a genre guide that caregivers and educators can use to introduce writers to each genre prior to writing. This guide includes a grade-level appropriate definition for the genre, a genre-specific writing tip for students to focus on, and suggestions for further reading.

Reflection and Feedback—Suggestions for Caregivers and Educators

When administering these prompts, provide teens with ample time to respond thoroughly and carefully. After writing, there are a few different feedback methods that may be helpful.

Independent Reflection

- Encourage writers to go back over what they have written to check for spelling, grammar, or logical errors.
- Encourage writers to read their written responses aloud. Some may have an easier time hearing mistakes than seeing them on the page.

Peer Feedback

- If multiple teens are participating in this activity, encourage them to read one another's responses. Then, have them share what they liked about the other writers' responses, and any questions they have about them.

Caregiver/Educator Feedback

- Read over the responses. Check for the following elements:
 - Do their responses effectively address the question of the prompt?
 - Did they structure their narratives with a clear progression of events and/or ideas?
 - Did they successfully implement narrative techniques such as dialogue, descriptive language, and sensory details?
 - Do they back up any argumentative claims with logical supporting details?
 - Do their responses include clear and effective conclusions?
 - Did they demonstrate repeated or consistent mechanical errors, such as issues with spelling, sentence structure, or punctuation? If so, provide corrective feedback.
- Pick one or two areas of feedback to highlight for your writers and take time to discuss them together. You may be able to find additional resources on the web to provide practice opportunities in particular areas where improvement is needed. Be sure to also point out a few things that they are doing well in their writing.

Lastly, celebrate the writing process! Encourage writers to share their responses with friends, family members, and other loved ones. Perhaps they could send a handwritten copy of their response to a grandparent or call up a cousin and read what they wrote over the phone. And if a writer seems passionate about a specific prompt or topic, encourage them to keep writing about it, either via more guided practice or as something to do in their free time!

Additional Resources

- For more information on writing prompts, read our [Understanding and Responding to Writing Prompts Guide](#).

Grades 9-12 Genre Guide

The writing prompts in this resource correspond to the following fiction and nonfiction genres:

Fiction Genres



Mystery

Definition

A fictional story in which an important fact stays secret until the very end.

Genre Hint

Don't rush. To help your reader solve the mystery, make sure to tell your story step-by-step, in an order that makes sense.

Read more!

Some examples of books that fit into the mystery genre include:

- *Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie* by Alan Bradley
- *The Diviners* by Libby Bray
- *Firekeeper's Daughter* by Angeline Boulley



Fantasy

Definition

A fictional story that is full of magical characters, places, and events.

Genre Hint

Be creative! Fantasy stories can be as wacky and wild as you want.

Read more!

Some examples of books that fit into the fantasy genre include:

- *Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis
- *Six of Crows* by Leigh Bardugo
- *Children of Blood and Bone* by Tomi Adeyemi



Science Fiction

Definition

A fictional story that imagines futuristic technology and scientific advancements, such as time travel, robots, aliens, and more.

Genre Hint

Use what you know. What do you know about this topic in real life? Show how these real life ideas are affected by science fiction elements.

Read more!

Some examples of books that fit into the science fiction genre include:

- *Pet* by Akwaeke Emezi
- *Binti* by Nnedi Okorafor
- *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley

**Supernatural/Horror****Definition**

A fictional story that is intended to startle the reader, often through the use of ghosts, monsters, and other unnatural elements.

Genre Hint

Paint a picture. Sensory details that show what a character sees, hears, smells, and feels can make your story extra creepy!

Read more!

Some examples of books that fit into the supernatural/horror genre include:

- *Sawkill Girls* by Claire Legrand
- *Squad* by Maggie Tokuda-Hall
- *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* by Shirley Jackson

**Action and Adventure****Definition**

A fictional story in which a character experiences exciting, thrilling, and sometimes dangerous events.

Genre Hint

Raise the stakes. Adventure stories work best when an obstacle prevents the main character from achieving their goal.

Read more!

Some examples of books that fit into the action and adventure genre include:

- *Stalking Jack the Ripper* by Kerri Maniscalco
- *Legend* by Marie Lu
- *The Gentleman's Guide to Vice and Virtue* by Mackenzie Lee

Nonfiction Genres



Memoir

Definition

A true story based on the writer's own life. Memoirs are similar to autobiographies, but usually focus more on vivid details and memories than on facts and dates.

Genre Hint

Show don't tell. Use sensory details to describe what you saw, heard, smelled, and felt in order to bring your memories to life on the page.

Read more!

Some examples of books that fit into the autobiography genre include:

- *All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson
- *Night* by Elie Wiesel
- *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jaqueline Woodson



Informational

Definition

A nonfiction text that is written to inform the reader about a given subject.

Genre Hint

Be specific. Imagine that your reader has never heard of this topic. What do they need to know to understand it?

Read more!

Some examples of books that fit into the informational genre include:

- *It's Getting Hot in Here: The Past, Present, and Future of Climate Change* by Bridget Heos
- *VIRAL: The Fight Against AIDS in America* by Ann Bausum
- *Bubonic Panic* by Gail Jarrow



Criticism

Definition

A text written to evaluate another work of art or literature.

Genre Hint

Zoom in. Critical writing works best when you focus on the small details of a work, rather than the big picture.

Read more!

Some real-life examples of critical writing include:

- Movie reviews
- Book reviews
- Music reviews



Persuasive

Definition

A nonfiction text that aims to convince readers to believe in an idea or to take a certain action.

Genre Hint

Prove your point. The more evidence you give to support your claim, the more convincing your argument will be.

Read more!

Some real-life examples of persuasive texts include:

- Commercials
- Campaign speeches
- Petitions



Letter Writing

Definition

A text written to a specific person and sent via the mail or the internet.

Genre Hint

Know your audience. A letter is written with a specific person in mind. Write your letter in the same voice you would use to talk to this person.

Read more!

Some real-life examples of letter writing include:

- Postcards
- E-mails
- Text messages

Grades 9-12 Writing Prompts

The writing prompts that are listed below are also included on the pages that follow on lined sheets you can print and hand out to teens to write their responses.

Fiction

Write a story about a high schooler who purchases an item of clothing from the local thrift store. Stitched into the fabric is a secret code. What does it say? Who put it there? Show what happens as the student unravels this mysterious puzzle.

Genre hint: Don't rush. To help your reader solve the mystery, make sure to tell your story step-by-step, in an order that makes sense.

Write a story about a character who inherits a necklace that possesses a fantastic magical power. What does the necklace do? Where did it come from? And what does the character do with it? This story can take place in the modern day or in the past, but be sure to use descriptive language and vivid details to show what happens next.

Genre hint: Be creative! Fantasy stories can be as wacky and wild as you want.

Write a story about an astronaut on the first manned mission to Mars. What do they see and experience when they reach the Red Planet? How do they survive? Tell the story of this intergalactic escapade using descriptive language and clear details.

Genre hint: Use what you know. What do you know about Mars, from television or books? What would happen if you had to live there?

Imagine that you are staying by yourself in an isolated cabin in the middle of the woods. One night, you hear a strange scratching noise coming from the attic. Tell what happens next as a supernatural or scary story, being sure to use plenty of descriptive language.

Genre hint: Paint a picture. Sensory details that show what a character sees, hears, smells, and feels can make your story extra creepy!

Have you ever been white water rafting? Write a story about a teenager who takes a rafting trip through the Grand Canyon. Be sure to describe who they are with and what the conditions are like, including the weather and any run-ins with local wildlife. Plus, use at least three instances of dialogue between characters.

Genre hint: Raise the stakes. Adventure stories work best when an obstacle prevents the main character from achieving their goal.

Nonfiction

What is a childhood memory that you can still remember in vivid detail? Tell the story of this event as a nonfiction narrative. Use at least three similes (comparisons using "like" or "as") or metaphors (comparisons that do not use "like" or "as").

Genre hint: Show don't tell. Use sensory details to describe what you saw, heard, smelled, and felt in order to bring your memories to life on the page.

What is your favorite hobby? Whether it is competing in a sport, playing an instrument, or mastering a video game, select one pastime that brings you joy. Then, go online and research the history of that activity. Where did it come from? Who created it? How has it changed over time? Write a five paragraph essay explaining what you learn.

Genre hint: Be specific. Imagine that your reader has never heard of this activity. What do they need to know to understand it?

Think about a book you have read recently that you did not enjoy. Then, write a short, objective review of the novel, describing how you felt about it. Challenge yourself to acknowledge the parts of the book that worked well, while also explaining the parts that did not. You might want to discuss the book's characters, pacing, style, or tone.

Genre hint: Zoom in. Critical writing works best when you focus on the small details of a work, rather than the big picture. Instead of "This book was bad," try to highlight specific elements that made you feel that way, such as slow pacing or unrealistic characters.

Do you believe in the existence of extraterrestrial life? Write a persuasive essay explaining why you do or do not think that aliens exist. Be sure to give evidence supporting your answer and to acknowledge potential counterarguments that someone might use to debunk your claim.

Genre hint: Prove your point. The more evidence you give to support your claim, the more convincing your argument will be.

Where do you see yourself in one year? Write a letter to your future self, reflecting on what your life is like now and making predictions about what you will achieve in the coming months. Imagine what you will be doing and what goals you will complete. End your letter with a piece of advice that you think your future self might need to hear. Then, give the letter to a caregiver or hide it away somewhere to open this time next year.

Genre hint: Know your audience. A letter is written with a specific person in mind. Write your letter in the same voice you would use to talk to this person.

