

If you're after inspiration, check out our gallery of great photos and lots of prompt ideas and tips to get you started and spark ideas in relation to them (linked below) We'll be posting them on social media periodically too.

The creative process often begins in one place and ends up somewhere completely different. There's no way to know how a photograph might trigger or influence your writing, but we've suggested some ways to use one or more as a writing trigger. It could be that you want to tell the whole 'story' of a photograph, in front of or behind the eyes of the lens, or that the photo has sparked something else that you'd rather pursue. It might influence your setting, plot, atmosphere or character. Or maybe it will get you to write some killer dialogue for one specific moment.

An aspect of a photo could just make a cameo in your writing. There might be very little of the photo influencing what you write, or left in the final piece. Likewise, great if you found a photo a real source of inspiration.

Prompt exercises & questions to ask your imagination...

[Click here for a gallery of inspiring images](#)

- Look at all the photos and see which image instantly appeals to you. Then think about why. What is it about that photograph that caught your attention? It could be a detail or even a feeling it gives you.
- What's happened just before or after the photo was taken? Ask yourself: who took it?
- Think about what you can't see. What might have been outside the frame of the shot or hidden behind something?
- Zoom around the image from all sides. Go inside people's heads. Ask: what's on someone's mind in a photo? Or go outside the frame as an all-seeing narrator. Find the most interesting point of view.
- Try an unusual point of view— what would the room/piano/cat/poster say if it could speak? Write what they have to say.
- Write from the photographer's perspective. What made them take this picture? Write in the voice of two or more characters in the photograph having a conversation.
- Pretend this is a personal photo and imagine you are showing it to someone and telling a story like it's your own using detail from the photo to make it more real. This great poem [Class Photo](#) by Billy Collins might spark some ideas.
- Step inside the photo. Use your five senses to describe the experience.
- If you want to form a narrative, question everything in the picture - Why is something/somebody there? What has just happened? What is about to happen? Is all not really as it seems? What is the significance of a certain part of the picture? What can't the viewer see?
- Start writing at a key moment. Don't feel you have to explain *everything*. Focus in on what's relevant to a moment in time, or what you find interesting, and drop enough info so the reader can get something of the wider picture. William Trevor said the short story is "... *the art of the glimpse. If the novel is like an intricate Renaissance painting, the short story is an impressionist painting. It should be an explosion of truth. Its strength lies in what it leaves out just as much as what it puts in, if not more.*"
- Imagine the photo is documenting something in the past or future - what's it like to live in that time? You could be talking through an old photo from the future, or one with an imagined parent in from the past.

- Is it an official photograph someone's found? Maybe it was in someone's belongings left somewhere. It could be a crime scene. Or maybe we're trying to piece together someone's life from the details in it.
- How does the photo make you feel? What memories or associations does it trigger? What does it remind you of personally? Fictionalise someone from your own life or experience, or your own memory.
- Write about a theme suggested to you by a photo – for example, loneliness, but root it in a concrete moment. How can you show it through things like: the scene, the story, characters, dialogue, action.
- Instead of just sitting down and writing a story or poem, try doing a mind map of all the words and associations that occur to you when you look at the image. This might help you build a stock of ideas or phrases that you can use or help you come up with interesting links or a free writing exercise.
- Write down five immediate, intriguing or leading opening sentences that offer a promise of something and then follow the one you're most drawn to and see where it take you.
- Write with the restriction of not using any words that you've brainstormed. This can work great for poetry in particular because you're more likely to describe the familiar in an unfamiliar way and can find some great metaphors this way.
- Take from others' writing that moves you. Take ideas from poems that capture you. Borrow ideas, structures, movement through a story or poem (just never borrow anything anyone's actually written!). Play close attention to what you like in a story or poem and see if you can create your own version of it. Read short stories and poems that are considered among the best and ask yourself why they work. Look at structure and how that works effectively.

Free writing exercise

Put yourself under the clock and write about a few of the photos for 5 or 10 minutes each without stopping, and without correcting yourself or overthinking (that's what writers do – they concentrate on getting as much down as they can before going back and making sense of them when they've finished. You could give yourself a starting prompt phrase for each, e.g. I remember when this was taken... or It's not every day you... Keep your hand moving and don't be tempted to stop, analyse or edit. Sometimes our best ideas are triggered from our subconscious this way. Intuition and imagination can take over. See where connections lead. Don't be afraid of silly ideas. Sometimes they are actually our best and most original. Don't be precious about whether you are doing it 'right' - there is no wrong way!

When you've run out of steam, highlight the best words, phrases and ideas and see if you can shape them into something. You might decide a piece you thought was a short story wants to be a poem listing beautifully selected images of what the moon saw. You might decide what you thought would be a poem wants to be a story based around a conversation between two people, or a dramatic monologue from a robot.

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Next page: General writing tips

General writing tips

- Don't worry about what you are writing, or you won't write it! Get in the zone and write something that *you* would enjoy reading. Get it all out as a draft and then you can always reword, edit and polish it into something better afterwards.
- You can approach a story/poem in whatever way you wish. It could be as varied as a text message conversation, or a letter, a memory, or even an internal monologue.
- Try bringing what you are writing about alive with your senses – what do things taste, smell, feel, sound or look like? Describing things using your senses is always good. You might get some great description that way. Avoid the obvious descriptions that get used again and again and look to see something afresh.
- Avoid generic language that's vague and clichéd and look to be specific. A blue Nissan pulled into the drive, gives the reader a much clearer image than simply telling us a car pulled in. Root the story in a time and place (even if it's Mars, 4000 years in the future!).
- Don't try and sound like a writer! Sound like...YOU :) Your perspective, how you see and experience the world, paying attention to this, that's what will get you writing as a writer. If you are writing in character, think about how they would authentically speak.

Helpful links

Poetry:

- For examples a whole load of [great resources and poems](#) written by young people that have won the prestigious Foyle Young Poet competition
- [Top 10 tips for being a successful poet](#) from poet Andrew Motion
- Poet Ryan Van Winkle gives [his advice](#) to aspiring poets on how to get inspiration flowing
- If you like spoken word poetry, there are some great examples on [Button Poetry](#) or [Def Jam Poetry](#)
- Great [poetry competition tips](#)
- [5 ways to write a poem](#) from Reader's Digest
- 10 Tips on How to Write a Poem from Jerz

Stories:

- 13 new to [writing mistakes](#)
- For some great example of flash stories online: try <http://www.smokelong.com> or <http://www.wordriot.org>
- Inspiring [quotes](#) that will get you thinking about the nature of short story:
- Nik Perring's [short fiction tips](#)
- Great [advice on flash fiction](#):
- About narrative [point of view](#)
- Fiction writer and professor, John Dufresne offers some tips on how to [get started writing a short story](#)
- Writing good [dialogue](#)
- Writing internal [monologues](#)
- How to write your [character's thoughts](#)