

Understanding Writing Prompts

Name _____ Date _____

Writing about your feelings and interests is what becoming an author is all about. Every kid should have plenty of opportunities to write about things he likes. However, while you're learning basic writing skills at school, sometimes you might be asked to write to a prompt. **A prompt guides you to a specific story or topic.**

A **writing prompt** can be anything from a **subject** or **topic** to a **story-starter**. It's designed to get your creative juices flowing. Sometimes an entire class writes to the same prompt. This way, you and your fellow writers can compare your writing, supporting details, or how you each ended your stories. Learning from one another is a great way to improve your author skills and learn how a variety of writers think.

Fictional Narrative Prompts

A fictional narrative prompt asks you to tell an imaginative story that has a problem and a solution. A fictional narrative prompt might look like this story-starter:

You are spending the day at the beach with your friends. While you are digging through wet sand to build a sand castle, you find a small, golden box. Light radiates from inside. The box begins to vibrate in your hand. You are absolutely astonished, but that's nothing compared with what happens next....



As with all narratives, a fictional narrative shows the passing of time. It can be completely made-up or an imaginative account of something that really happened, such as a historical event. **Fictional narrative clues are words like *Imagine, What happens next?, Make-believe, Pretend, Create, or, Write the ending of the story.***

When you read a writing prompt, study it carefully. To determine if it is a fictional narrative prompt, ask yourself the following questions:



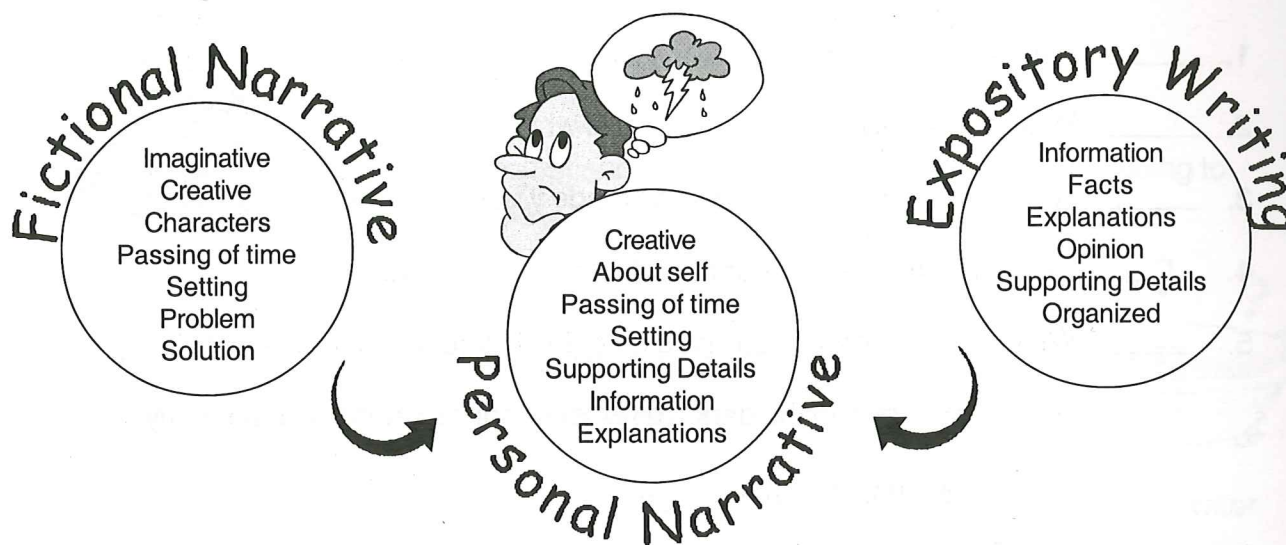
1. Does this prompt ask me to make up a story out of my imagination?
2. Can I create characters, situations, and dialogue that never really happened?

If the answer is yes, the prompt is a fictional narrative prompt.

Understanding Writing Prompts...continued

Personal Narrative Prompts

A **personal narrative prompt** asks you to tell about something that has really happened to you personally. Although a personal narrative involves the passing of time, it does not necessarily have to have a problem and a solution. Personal narratives combine elements of both story-telling and expository writing.



Here is an example of a personal narrative prompt:

Tell about a time when you did something that made you feel very proud of yourself.

Personal Narrative clue words are *Tell about the time, Write about a time when, or, Tell what happened when you were...*

Expository Writing Prompts

An **expository prompt** doesn't direct you to write a story. Instead, an **expository prompt** asks you to write about a **specific subject**. For instance:

Large, wild animals have intrigued mankind for thousands of years. Which wild animal do you find the most fascinating, and why?

Expository prompts ask you for information, directions, opinions, or to persuade the reader. Expository prompt clues are words like *Explain, Convince, Why, Give reasons, or, How do you....?*

Recognizing Writing Prompts

Name _____ Date _____

It's important for writers to be able to tell the difference between different kinds of writing prompts. Read the prompts below as a class. Discuss what each prompt asks you to write. Write **FN** for **fictional narrative prompts**, **PN** for **personal narrative prompts**, and **E** for **expository prompts**.



1. _____ Explain why athletes have to have special training.
2. _____ What is your favorite restaurant, and why?
3. _____ Tell about a time when someone made you very angry.
4. _____ Explain how to make your favorite after school snack.
5. _____ While pulling weeds, you find a gold ring in your backyard. You notice the ring glows in the dark. Tell what happens when you put the mysterious ring on your finger.
6. _____ In your opinion, what animal would be the least desirable to have as a pet?
7. _____ You come home to find your parents sitting in a limo in front of your house.
Write the story of what happens next.
8. _____ Convince the class that we should have 30 minutes of free time each day to talk to kids from other classes.
9. _____ You find an unusual book in a trunk of your grandmother's attic. It is a storybook for kids. When you open the pages, the characters in the pictures come alive and invite you into the story. What happens next?
10. _____ How do you help the rest of the members of your family?
11. _____ What reasons could you give to support the statement, "Kids should be allowed to have a job and earn money?"
12. _____ Tell about a time when you did something you weren't supposed to do and had to learn a hard lesson.

Addressing a Prompt

Name _____ Date _____

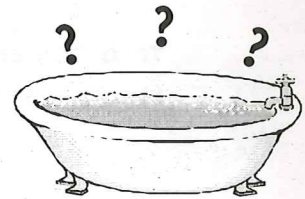
Kids sometimes make a BIG mistake when they start writing without addressing the prompt. It leads to a lot of confusion! The reader has no clue as to what their topic is.

Addressing the prompt means talking about the topic right away so your reader will know what you are writing about. Let's imagine this is the expository writing prompt:

What is one chore you've done lately that you've been dreading for a long time?

Instead of addressing the prompt and letting the reader know what she's going to write about, the author just jumps into the details of the dreaded chore:

He needed a bath, so I filled the tub with warm, sudsy water. Next, I got out some towels and a huge bar of soap. This wasn't going to be easy!



Who needed a bath? Her little brother? A stray cat? A sick chimpanzee? The writer didn't tell us, so we are left to wonder. It is better to let the reader know what you're talking about by addressing the prompt right away.



My dog Bentley has needed a bath for days, but I kept putting it off because he is so stinky! Last night, I filled the tub with warm, sudsy water. Next, I got out some towels and a huge bar of soap. This wasn't going to be easy!

Now, that makes more sense. Don't write any details until you've let the reader know what you are talking about. Don't write out the entire prompt or repeat it word for word. Address the prompt by giving the reader clues or telling him what you're writing about. Here's a fictional narrative prompt:

You and your class are camping in the woods on a field trip. Tell what happens when you wander off by yourself and get lost in the woods.

The first sentence should talk about the prompt but not repeat it word for word.

After five hours of trying to make my way back through the woods to the others, I had to face the ugly truth: I was lost.