

QUIRKY WORD PROMPTS YOU'LL HARDLY HATE



Word fun in advertising, figurative
language, synonyms, freewriting,
and much more



Writing with
Sharon Watson

Quirky Word Prompts You'll Hardly Hate SAMPLE

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Dear Teacher

Dear Teacher,

Is it tough getting your students to write? Do you wish you could encourage your eager writers with clever, engaging prompts?

In *Quirky Word Prompts You'll Hardly Hate*, you have over 120 writing prompts based on an attention to words and a love of them. Your linguistic learners will enjoy them. So will your eager, reluctant, young, or well-experienced writers.

You'll find a variety of prompts in this eBook. Here's a sample:

Simple haiku with an emphasis on syllables

Dentist visits that specialize in lively verbs

Camping in a storm, highlighting specific verbs and non-boring narrative

Lists of all sorts, which are perfect for reluctant writers

These prompts are geared for 5th – 12th graders. Peruse them. Use them on rainy days. Cut them up and put them in a prompt jar. Find ones you think your children or students can relate to or enjoy.

Feel free to skip around in *Quirky Word Prompts*. These are not sequential.

We offer these to you in a sincere effort to encourage fun in writing and to engender a love of writing (or at least less panic).

Yours for more vibrant writing,

Sharon

P. S.—Most of these prompts were first published on schoolhouseteachers.com while I provided their daily writing prompts and, as yet, have not found their way to Writing with Sharon Watson's site. Enjoy!



Word of the year

The Merriam-Webster dictionary selected the gender-neutral pronoun *they* as the word of the year for 2019. The American Dialect Society also chose *they* for its Word of the Decade.

Options to ponder and write about:

1. Why do you think *they* was selected as a word of the year/decade? Explain your reason in a paragraph.
2. If you were to choose a word of the year **for your life** for this year, what would it be? Using a paragraph, explain why you chose that word. Illustrate it with examples.
3. Look back over the previous year. What word would you choose to describe that year, either personally or culturally? Use a paragraph to explain why you chose that word. Include examples.



Note: The word *justice* was chosen for word of the year in 2018 by Merriam-Webster. *Blog* was their word of choice in 2004. According to their website, the word varies by its popularity, number of times searched, its meaning to the culture, and its influence.

Adjectives and adverbs in advertising

Black bean soup

Advertising leans heavily on buzz words in the form of adjectives and adverbs. **Adjectives** modify nouns (*new* and *improved* detergent, *powerful new* tool). **Adverbs** modify verbs, usually with an -ly ending (*exactly* crafted car, roasted *slowly*). In your writing for school and in professional writing, use adjectives and adverbs *sparingly*. Sprinkle, don't pour.



But in advertising, shovel them in. Read this ad that appeared on tables at Panera® restaurants to introduce their Cuban Black Bean Soup:

Each spoonful of the garlic-scented tomato broth is thick with shredded pork and smoky chipotle, earthy black beans and lentils contrasted with bright cilantro, lime juice and a touch of Tabasco®.

Is your mouth watering yet? Combine that advertisement with an inviting picture of a steaming bowl of hearty soup in snugly warm earth tones accompanied by a slab of still-warm bread, and you have a winning advertisement for a fabulously tasty new product. (Did you notice all the adjectives and adverbs I piled up in that last sentence?)

Now it's your turn. Underline all the nouns in Panera's black bean soup ad. Then circle all the adjectives that modify those nouns. What do you notice about the nouns and adjectives?

Cereal

TV and radio commercials are not the only places companies try to sell their products. Think of billboards, restaurant windows plastered with enticing images of food products, and even your cereal box.

Yes, even after you've bought the cereal, you still get advertisements about it. Take a look at a cereal box. Notice all the adjectives that describe the cereal and its greatness. Here's a sentence from my Cinnamon Life® cereal:

Quaker Life® Cereal satisfies the kid in everyone with just the right touch of sweetness and crispy goodness.

Notice that it's not "sweetness" but "just the right touch of sweetness." And it's not "goodness" but "crispy goodness," using the adjective "crispy" to describe what kind of "goodness" it is.

Now it's your turn. First, find and write three adjectives from a cereal box or a box of ready-to-cook food. Next, write your own sentence for the front or back of any cereal box so that you can keep advertising its tremendous qualities even to people who already are eating it.

Travel brochure

Write a list of five words that describe your state or province in a positive light. Then use each one in a sentence, as though you are writing a travel brochure for tourists.

Note: You'll end up with five sentences.

Burma Shave

Allan G. Odell belonged to a company that invented shaving cream (a new product at that time), and he saved his company from ruin. How?

Odell revolutionized advertising by posting little signs along highways with advertising jingles on them. Each sign was only one piece of the jingle or poem, so each advertisement had five signs, like this:

Within this vale

Of toil and sin

Your head grows bald

But not your chin

Burma-Shave

The signs were posted at eye level and far enough apart so folks easily could read the whole jingle as they drove along.

Advertise some product you have in your house or one that you would like to buy. Write a short, rhyming poem, like the Burma-Shave one, to entice people to buy this product.

Make a boring paragraph sparkle

I was in a play

Here's a boring description of what probably was an exciting, heart-racing night.

I was in a play, and it was real fun. The costumes were so fun to wear. I really liked wearing mine. The audience laughed when the play was funny, and they were real quiet when the play was sad. Once, I forgot my lines, but then I heard my cue and kept going. All the cast had a good time doing the play together.

Rewrite that lackluster paragraph. Remove anything like the words *real*, *really*, and *good*. Those are too general; they are not specific enough. Verbs in the *to be* family, like *was* and *were*, sometimes can be problems, too, because they take the place of better, more specific verbs.

Use vivid verbs and descriptive adjectives. Make that play sound as exciting as it probably was.

Figurative language

Euphemism

If you start with a negative word and change it to make it sound less offensive, you are using a euphemism. **Euphemisms** are words or phrases that make a word or concept sound more pleasing, like *sanitation worker* instead of *garbage man* or *conflict* instead of *war*.

Euphemisms are related to synonyms—words that have similar meanings—but euphemisms sound more appealing than the original word.

For example, instead of saying that someone died, you could say that they *passed on*, *kicked the bucket*, *bought the farm*, and so on. Incidentally, the term *bucket list* derives from the euphemism *kicked the bucket* and means making a list of things you want to do before you die.

Start with a negative word like *dead* or *war* and then make a list of three nicer-sounding, more appealing euphemisms for it. You can use terms you've heard before or create new ones.

Lists

Island countries

What are some problems island countries might face because they are islands? Make a list of your ideas.

Vending machines

Vending machines contain all sorts of things: snacks, drinks, fresh fruit, gum, and even hygiene items such as toothbrushes and ibuprofen.

What else would you like to see in a vending machine? You can be creative, silly, or serious.

Steve Jobs

"My favorite things in life don't cost any money. It's really clear that the most precious resource we all have is time." -Steve Jobs

What are your favorite things that don't cost any money? Make a list.

How long will your list be? Your list will be the same number as your age, so if you are fourteen years old, for example, your list will have fourteen items on it.

Word fun

'Twas brillig

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

What?

That's the first verse of the poem "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll. You can read the whole crazy poem by [clicking here](#). Surprisingly, if you read the whole poem, you really can tell what is going on, despite all the new words.

Lewis Carroll enjoyed making up words, as you can tell by his poem. In fact, one of the words he concocted for this poem is a word we still use today: "chortled," as in "He chortled in his joy." We use it to mean something like a laugh, with great feeling or exuberance.

Now it's your turn to create a new word. You can put together pieces of other words or simply make one up. Then write a sentence using it.

Rename February

Ever wonder where the awkward name "February" came from? In the early Roman calendar, the winter months had no name. After all, nothing much was going on. A few hundred years later, people wanted to acknowledge that it existed, so they chose something that occurred during that time of year: the Roman purification rite Februa for which people took ritual baths.

Other countries called that month something a little more descriptive. For instance, in Old English, it was called Solmonath, meaning "mud month," or Kale-monath for "cabbage month," possibly named for the only food left over from the fall harvest.

Now it's your turn. Rename the month of February. Choose something to describe an activity, food, feeling, and so on, that you associate with the month. Use a paragraph to explain why you chose that particular name.

Freewriting exercises

Note for the writing prompts in this section: **Freewriting exercises**, also called **stream-of-consciousness writing**, are exercises in which students can begin writing on the given topic and then keep writing on anything that comes to mind. It can be lists, impressions, incomplete sentences, Venn diagrams, memories, short stories, opinions, and so forth. Students can even veer off topic. There is no right or wrong here. The only directive is to keep writing.

Birthday

What comes into your mind when you see the word *birthday*?

This is a freewriting exercise. That is, you can begin writing about the word *birthday*, maybe add some ideas or memories that pop into your mind, and either stay there or move on to something else. The only rule for this type of writing is to *keep writing*.

You could end up with lists, definitions, adjectives, likes and dislikes, opinions, a personal story, a short story—really, anything.