

50 Story Starters to Spark Your Writing

A Brilliantio Bonus Resource — The Story Course

These aren't vague prompts like "write about your feelings." Each one is a specific, unusual scenario designed to pull you into a story you didn't expect to tell.

How to use them: Pick one that catches your eye. Set a timer for 15 minutes. Start writing. Don't stop to edit. Don't judge. Just follow wherever the story leads.

Mystery & Suspense

1. Your character finds a letter inside a secondhand book. The handwriting is their own — but they have no memory of writing it.
2. A locksmith is called to open a safe that's been sealed for forty years. Inside is a photograph of them as a child.
3. Every morning, a different stranger's name appears written in condensation on your character's bathroom mirror.
4. A retired detective receives a postcard from a victim of an unsolved case — postmarked yesterday.
5. Your character discovers that their next-door neighbour has been living under a false identity for twenty years. The real question is: so have they.
6. At a dinner party, the host asks everyone to write a secret on a slip of paper. One reads: *I know what you buried in the garden.*
7. A translator working on an ancient manuscript realises the text is describing events from last week — in their own town.

8. Your character inherits a house with a room that doesn't appear on any floor plan.

Science Fiction & Speculative

9. Scientists develop a pill that lets you relive any single hour of your life. Your character keeps reliving the same one.
10. A colony ship arrives at its destination after 300 years — only to find the planet already inhabited by humans.
11. Your character's new AI assistant starts finishing their sentences. Then it starts finishing their decisions.
12. Every time your character falls asleep, they wake up in someone else's body. Today they woke up in the body of someone on death row.
13. A radio telescope picks up a signal from deep space. It's a recording of a child's lullaby — in English.
14. Your character's dead twin starts appearing in the background of other people's photographs.
15. Time has stopped everywhere on Earth except inside a single pub in rural Ireland.
16. A librarian discovers a book that contains tomorrow's newspaper — but only the obituary column.

Literary & Emotional

17. Two strangers sit in a hospital waiting room all night. By morning, one of them has made a decision that will change both their lives.
18. Your character finds out their mother has been writing letters to someone for thirty years — someone the family has never heard of.
19. A piano tuner visits the same house every six months. Each time, the photographs on the mantelpiece have changed, but nobody mentions it.
20. Your character returns to their childhood home to clear it out. Taped behind a radiator, they find a cassette with their name on it.
21. At their father's funeral, your character's sibling hands them an envelope. "He said to give you this if I ever saw you again."

22. A retired teacher gets a thank-you letter from a student they don't remember teaching — for a lesson they don't remember giving.
23. Two estranged friends meet by accident in a foreign city. Neither one is using their real name.
24. Your character has kept the same voicemail saved on their phone for seven years. Today is the day they finally delete it.

Historical & Adventure

25. A cartographer mapping uncharted coastline in 1782 finds a lighthouse that isn't on any chart — and it's already lit.
26. Your character is a war photographer in 1944 who develops a roll of film and finds six extra pictures they didn't take.
27. An archaeologist opens a sealed tomb and finds a modern wristwatch among the grave goods.
28. A Victorian governess takes a position at a remote estate. Her predecessor left a journal hidden in the nursery wall.
29. Your character is a messenger during the English Civil War, carrying a letter that both sides would kill for — and they can't read.
30. In 1888, a woman boards a steamship with a trunk she's been told never to open and a ticket to a city that doesn't appear on any map.
31. A monk in a medieval scriptorium is copying a sacred text when he realises the margins contain a coded message — in his own handwriting.
32. Your character finds a compass that doesn't point north. It points to wherever they need to go.

Fantasy & Folklore

33. A village has a tradition: once a year, they set a place at the table for someone who isn't there. This year, someone sits down.
34. Your character inherits a watch that runs backwards. When it reaches midnight, something resets — but not time.
35. A painter discovers that anything they paint at exactly 3 a.m. becomes real by morning.

36. The trees in a particular forest grow in perfectly straight lines. Your character is the first person to ask why.
37. A fisherman pulls up a bottle with a message inside. The message is a set of instructions — for finding him.
38. Your character moves into a new flat and discovers that the previous tenant left behind a door that opens onto a different city each Tuesday.
39. An old woman knits a scarf that, when worn, lets the wearer hear the last conversation held in any room they enter.
40. Your character's shadow starts arriving places before they do.

Comedy & Quirky

41. Your character accidentally replies-all to an email meant for one person. The email simply reads: *It's done. No one suspects a thing.*
42. A man discovers that his new neighbour is his exact physical double — and significantly better at his job.
43. Your character signs up for a “surprise holiday” package. They end up on a cruise ship full of people who all chose the same deal — and none of them knows where the ship is going.
44. A food critic walks into the worst-rated restaurant in the city and has the best meal of their life. The chef refuses to explain why.
45. Your character keeps receiving parcels addressed to them containing objects from their future — a trophy, a plane ticket, a wedding ring.
46. A pet shop owner realises their parrot has been giving customers financial advice — and it's consistently excellent.
47. Your character enters a writing competition. The winning story, published under someone else's name, is the exact story they submitted.
48. A support group meets every Thursday for people who've had the same recurring dream. Tonight, a new member walks in — and they recognise everyone.

Dark & Psychological

49. Your character receives a text from their own number: *Don't go home tonight.*
50. A therapist's newest patient describes, in perfect detail, a crime that hasn't been reported yet — one the therapist witnessed.
-

Choose any starter that pulls you in. Set a timer for 15 minutes. Write without stopping — no editing, no second-guessing, no going back. You'll be surprised what comes out when you stop trying to be good and just let yourself write.

These starters work in any genre, at any length. A 500-word flash piece. A full short story. Even the opening chapter of something longer. The scenario is the spark — the story is yours.