



Story Starter Prompt Pack

Prepared by Ryan Ellis | Scripting Horizons

15 simple prompts for finding story ideas, building characters, writing stronger openings and dialogue, and giving your first draft a clean self-edit.

How to Use This Pack

- Copy a prompt, paste it into any AI assistant (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini or similar), and replace each [BRACKETED] part with your own details.
- Treat the answers as raw material. Pick what sparks something, change the rest, and write the story in your own voice.
- For the editing prompts, paste only your own writing, a page or a scene at a time.
- If an answer feels generic, reply with more detail about your genre, your characters or the tone you want, and ask for another round.

Note: AI suggestions can echo familiar stories and tropes. Check anything you plan to use against existing published work, and keep the final choices and the final words yours.

Ideas and Premises

1. Spark Ideas From What I Know

I'd like to write a [GENRE] story. Things I know about or find interesting: [LIST 3 TO 5, E.G. A JOB, A PLACE, A HOBBY, A PERIOD OF HISTORY]. Give me eight story ideas, each in one or two sentences, that draw on those interests.

Tip: The best ideas often come from things you already know well.

2. Turn a What-If Into a Premise

Here is my what-if: [WHAT IF ...?]. Turn it into a one-paragraph premise that names the main character, what they want, what stands in their way, and what's at stake. Then give me three different directions the story could take.

Tip: A good premise makes you curious about what happens next.

3. Test My Idea

Here is my story idea: [DESCRIBE IN 3 TO 5 SENTENCES]. Ask me eight questions that would expose gaps or weak spots, such as unclear stakes, missing conflict or a hard-to-believe turn. Don't answer them yourself. Wait for my replies.

Tip: Answer the questions in your notes before you start drafting.

4. Choose Between Two Ideas

I'm torn between two ideas. Idea A: [DESCRIBE]. Idea B: [DESCRIBE]. Compare them on how much conflict each offers, how easy each is to sustain over [SHORT STORY / NOVELLA / NOVEL] length, and how excited I seem about each from my descriptions. Then ask me one question to help me decide.

Tip: Whichever one you keep thinking about in the shower is a good clue.

Characters

5. Meet My Main Character

My main character is [NAME OR DESCRIPTION] in a [GENRE] story set in [SETTING]. Ask me ten questions, one at a time, about their daily life, habits, fears and secrets. After my answers, write a half-page profile I can keep beside my draft.

Tip: Answer from your gut. You can always change a detail later.

6. Want, Need and Obstacle

My character is [DESCRIBE]. Help me work out what they consciously want, what they actually need to learn or face, and what stands in their way. Give me three possible versions of each that I could choose from.

Tip: A character who wants one thing and needs another gives you plenty of story.

7. Build the Supporting Cast

My story is about [PREMISE]. The main character is [DESCRIBE]. Suggest four supporting characters who each create a different kind of pressure on the lead, and give each one a name idea, a goal of their own and one habit that makes them memorable.

Tip: Give every side character something they want from the story.

8. Names That Fit

I need names for [NUMBER] characters in a [GENRE] story set in [PLACE AND TIME]. Their roles are: [LIST ROLES AND A WORD OR TWO ABOUT EACH]. Suggest five name options for each that suit the setting, are easy to tell apart on the page, and avoid starting with the same letter.

Tip: Say the name aloud a few times. If it trips you up, it will trip a reader.

Openings and Dialogue

9. Five Ways to Begin

My story is about [PREMISE] and the opening scene takes place [WHERE AND WHEN]. Write five different opening paragraphs, each starting from a different angle: action, a striking detail, a line of dialogue, a short summary of the situation, and a question the character is asking. Keep each under 100 words.

Tip: Pick the opening that makes you want to write the second paragraph.

10. Start Inside a Scene

Here is what happens in my opening scene: [DESCRIBE]. Suggest three places where I could begin the scene so the reader lands in the middle of something happening, and a one-sentence reason for each choice.

Tip: Starting a little later in the scene than feels natural often works better.

11. Two People, Different Goals

Write a short dialogue scene of about 200 words between [CHARACTER A] and [CHARACTER B] at [LOCATION]. A wants [GOAL] and B wants [GOAL], and neither says so directly. Keep the tone [TENSE / WARM / AWKWARD / FUNNY].

Tip: People rarely say exactly what they mean, and dialogue that skips around the point feels real.

12. Fix Flat Dialogue

Here is a dialogue passage from my draft: [PASTE 10 TO 20 LINES]. Point out where it feels flat, repetitive or too neat. Then suggest three specific changes, such as cuts, interruptions or things left unsaid, and show one revised exchange.

Tip: Read your dialogue aloud before you paste it. The clunky lines usually show up.

Your First Self-Edit

13. Read It Like a Stranger

Here is a scene from my draft: [PASTE 300 TO 800 WORDS]. Read it as a first-time reader and tell me, in plain language, where you felt interested, where you got confused, and where your attention drifted. Quote the exact lines you mean.

Tip: Let a draft rest for a day or two before you ask. Fresh eyes spot more.

14. Trim the Padding

Here is a passage from my draft: [PASTE 200 TO 500 WORDS]. Identify the sentences and phrases that could be cut without losing meaning, such as repeated ideas, filler and over-explaining. Show a trimmed version and list what you removed.

Tip: If a cut makes you wince, put it back. Tight is the goal, and the story still needs room to breathe.

15. Spot My Habits

Here is a longer sample of my writing: [PASTE 500 TO 1000 WORDS]. List any words, phrases or sentence patterns I seem to repeat, with a few examples of each, and suggest simple ways to vary them. Don't rewrite the passage.

Tip: Everyone has habits. Finding yours is the first step to making them work for you.

If you'd like to see these ideas in action, Ryan Ellis's fiction is a good place to start:

- [The Ghosts of AI](#)
- [Metamorphosis](#)
- [The Strange Case of Juno and Darius](#)
- [Kingdom of Likes](#)

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