Scrhoz

Turn History into Story Prompt Pack

Prepared by Mia I. Bennett | Scrhoz

14 simple prompts for turning what you've learned into fiction: where fact ends and invention begins, real people on the page, scenes from history, and checking your work.

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.
- Most prompts work best with your own notes or draft pasted in. The AI shouldn't be the source of your facts, only a second pair of eyes on them.
- Use the AI to question and check your writing, not to write your scenes. The story and the voice stay yours.
- AI can get dates, objects, names and quotes wrong, or make them up. Every prompt asks it to say what it's unsure of. Check anything you plan to put on the page against a book or another reliable source.

Note: These prompts are a starting point for planning and checking your work. They do not replace books, archives or published scholarship, and AI can make mistakes or invent details. Where historians disagree, look at more than one account before you decide. Writing about real people, especially recent ones, can raise legal and ethical questions. These prompts are not legal advice, so check with a qualified person if you are unsure.

Fact and Invention

1. Draw the Line

> My story is set in [PERIOD AND PLACE]. Here is what I think is documented and what I plan to invent: [LIST YOUR FACTS AND INVENTIONS]. Sort each item into one of four groups: well documented, disputed, thinly evidenced, or invented by me. Point out any invention that might contradict something well documented. Don't add facts of your own unless you label them as extra, and say where you're unsure.

Tip: Keep the sorted list. It becomes the backbone of a historical note.

2. Where the Record Goes Quiet

> For [PERIOD AND PLACE], which parts of life for [A TYPE OF PERSON, E.G. A SERVANT / A MIDWIFE / A SOLDIER'S WIFE] are poorly recorded, and why? Think about who wrote things down and what survived. List five gaps a novelist could fill, and for each one say what kind of evidence should still limit my invention. Don't make up sources, and say where you're unsure.

Tip: The quiet places are where fiction is most at home. They still have edges.

3. When to Bend a Fact

> I'm tempted to change [DESCRIBE THE FACT, E.G. A DATE / A PLACE / THE ORDER OF EVENTS] in my story because [YOUR REASON]. Tell me what the change would cost: who would notice, what else depends on that fact, and two ways I might get the same effect without bending it. Say whether this is a change I'd want to admit in a note at the end. Say where you're unsure about the facts.

Tip: Bend a fact on purpose or not at all. Accidents are the ones readers write to you about.

4. Composite Characters

> I want an invented character who stands for several real kinds of people in [PERIOD AND PLACE]: [DESCRIBE WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO REPRESENT]. Help me build the composite: which traits belong together, which would contradict each other, and what I should avoid so the character doesn't read as one particular real person. Don't name real individuals or invent quotes, and say where you're unsure.

Tip: A composite should feel typical of the period without being a stereotype of it.

Real People on the Page

5. A Real Person as a Character

> I'm thinking of putting [REAL PERSON, OR "A HISTORICAL FIGURE I HAVEN'T CHOSEN YET"] into my story as a character, in [PERIOD AND PLACE]. From what's generally known, tell me what is well documented about them, what is only reported by others or written down later, and what is uncertain. Then tell me what I'd be inventing if they speak or act in a scene. Don't quote them or make up letters, and say where you're unsure.

Tip: The more famous the person, the more readers know. Choose with care.

6. Real People at the Edges

> I want a real person to appear only briefly, or to be mentioned, in my story set in [PERIOD AND PLACE] around [DATE]. Suggest what my characters might plausibly know or say about them, what I should avoid claiming, and how to keep them in the background without putting words in their mouth. If the person is recent or may have living relatives, tell me what extra care is needed. Don't invent quotes or private details, and say where you're unsure.

Tip: A glimpse across a crowded room often does more than a full scene.

7. Using Real Letters and Diaries as Inspiration

> Here is a short passage from a real letter or diary that I'm free to use: [PASTE UNDER 200 WORDS]. Tell me what it shows about daily life, worries and the writer's way of speaking, what I shouldn't assume from it, and three story ideas it could spark. Don't write scenes in the writer's voice and don't copy its wording. Say where you're unsure what the writer meant.

Tip: Inspiration, not transcription. If you plan to quote, check who owns the rights.

Scenes from History

8. Turn an Event into a Scene

> Here is a documented event from my notes: [PASTE YOUR NOTES, UNDER 300 WORDS]. Suggest three ways to turn it into a scene for my invented character, [CHARACTER AND ROLE]. For each one, say whose point of view it uses, what the character wants and what goes wrong. Keep the documented facts as written, mark where invention begins, and say where you're unsure. Don't write the scene.

Tip: Choose the version where your character has the most at stake, not the best view.

9. The View From the Ground

> How might [EVENT] have looked, sounded, smelled and felt to a [OCCUPATION AND CLASS] standing in [PLACE] at [TIME]? What could they not have known at that moment, and what might they have misunderstood? Separate what is well documented from informed guesswork. Don't invent named people or quotes.

Tip: Ordinary people rarely know they're in history. Let your character be confused.

10. A Small Documented Detail as a Turning Point

> Here is a small documented detail from my notes: [PASTE THE DETAIL, E.G. A RULE / A PRICE / A CLOSED GATE / A DELAYED POST]. Suggest four ways it could turn a scene in a novel. For each one, say what it changes for my character, what the detail depends on, and what I'd need to check. Don't add details beyond my notes unless you label them as extra, and say where you're unsure.

Tip: Small, true, awkward details are the best plot machinery history offers.

11. Keep the History in the Background

> Here is a draft scene set in [PERIOD AND PLACE]: [PASTE UNDER 400 WORDS]. Mark where the history is pushing the story aside, such as explaining, listing or showing off research. Give me notes, not a rewrite, on what to cut, what to move and what to turn into action. Also mark any detail that seems doubtful for the period, and say how sure you are.

Tip: If a line sounds like a museum label, it probably is.

Check Your Work

12. Does the History Drive the Story?

> Here is a summary of my plot: [PASTE YOUR SUMMARY]. The setting is [PERIOD AND PLACE]. Tell me which events depend on the period and could only happen there and then, and which could happen anywhere. Show me where history creates the conflict and where it's only costume. Don't rewrite anything, and say where you're unsure.

Tip: If you could move the story to another century by changing the hats, it may be costume.

13. What Would a Specialist Spot?

> Here is a passage from my draft: [PASTE UNDER 500 WORDS]. Imagine a reader who knows [PERIOD AND PLACE] well. List what they would most likely question: facts, objects, customs, speech and attitudes. For each one, say whether you think it's an error, a risk or fine, and how sure you are. Tell me which to check in a reliable source. Don't rewrite the passage.

Tip: Check the flagged items yourself. The AI can be wrong in both directions.

14. Sort My Doubts

> Here is a list of things I'm unsure about in my draft: [LIST YOUR DOUBTS]. Sort each one into check now (it could change the plot), check later, or bend openly (I'll choose to invent it and say so in a note). Give a one-line reason for each, and say where you're unsure.

Tip: Do the "check now" pile before you write another chapter.

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