

All Writing Assignments

Print this out and check them off.

- Write a page:** What parts of your life do you consider your setbacks? In what ways might they benefit you?
- Write a page:** "I want to be a writer because . . ."
- Do an experiment:** Take out your calendar and schedule your writing for the following week. Set an appointment at the end of the week to review whether you accomplished or failed to accomplish your goals. If you failed, reassess your methods and try again.
- Do an experiment:** Think of a writer you love, and learn about their story. Search the internet for an interview or profile, or look on YouTube to see whether they've posted any talks and whether they mention doubts and struggles.
- Do an experiment:** Take out a piece of paper and a lighter. Write down the things you are most scared to write about. Fill the page. Then take it outside to a safe location and light it on fire.
- Do an experiment:** Set up a way that you'll track the history of your writing practice and see your work piling up. Will you leave a mark on a calendar, stack your filled notebooks somewhere you can see them, or perhaps track the number of words you've written in a spreadsheet to show how you've endured?
- Do an experiment:** Pick one of your ideas that you definitely want to bring to a completed draft. Write out a plan to get it there, and set writing dates and a final deadline on your calendar. This doesn't have to be the final forever draft, just a solid, edited draft of a story, poem, or chapter. For example, you could write a story over a month, using the first week to freewrite on the topic every day, the second week to get it to a first draft, the third week to let it rest, and the fourth week to edit it.
- Write a page:** Set a timer for half an hour, and list all the ideas knocking around in your head for stories or poems. If you're having trouble thinking of some, list out what you're obsessed with, what you hate, what you love, and what events in your life shaped you most.
- Do an experiment:** Make a list of the places you will gather your notes. Ask yourself which tools would be the easiest to use in those places, and buy them online if you don't have them already.
- Write a page:** Freewrite and use the system of shortcuts, like two slashes for a new topic, to record some thoughts.
- Fill a page:** Try a writing exercise. Write from a random word list, write in a character's voice, or outline to get some writing done.
- Do an experiment:** Gather up all the notes you've written about any stories, set a timer for half an hour, and process your most recent ones.

- Do an experiment:** Make a recurring calendar appointment for one hour a week to process your notes. Compile a list of all your gathering places so you can go through them one at a time.
- Do an experiment:** Create a repeatable fake-out with stakes. Answer the question, What will happen if I don't write today?
- Do an experiment:** Pick one story idea you have. Schedule three one-hour blocks on your calendar to do the following: Choose three genres to write your story in, then do a draft of each.
- Do an experiment:** Take a piece you're working on, and put it in the proverbial drawer for a month. Set a reminder on your calendar to take it out thirty days from now and do some editing.
- Do an experiment:** Take out your latest finished work, or even some freewriting, and use proofreading marks to make changes.
- Do an experiment:** Take out a piece of your writing and search for clichés. Ask yourself how you can push them toward originality. If you don't have a piece yet, write a list of all the possible clichés of the subject matter you want to use in your writing.
- Do an experiment:** Take one idea you have and create either a full outline or a headlights-style outline for the next section you have to work on. See how it affects your writing.
- Do an experiment:** Take a piece of writing you already have, and run it through an editing exercise, such as writing out the sentence lengths in the margin to see whether they vary enough, highlighting all the passive verbs, or cutting the word count in half.
- Do an experiment:** Take a piece you've been having trouble with and try to get unstuck. Write it to your favorite person, copy it over to a new draft, or change one aspect of the writing, such as the point of view, to see how it shakes up the piece.
- Do an experiment:** Try out one writer's group for a single meeting to see whether it helps you. Use Meetup to find one near you.
- Do an experiment:** Look for a writing workshop in your town. If you can't find one, join Scribophile.com. Set a date on your calendar when you will be critiqued, anywhere from three months to a year from now.
- Do an experiment:** Schedule an hour to go through the Mission Control Center or complete it now.
- Do an experiment:** Set a timer for fifteen minutes, and read using the system of starring what you love and marking what you don't know.
- Do an experiment:** Fill out a Book Review for the last book you read.
- Do an experiment:** Pick an award list, find the last winner's book, and buy it (or get it from the library).

- Do an experiment:** Even if you don't write in a genre, pick a winner from one of the genre lists and add it to your reading list.
- Do an experiment:** Watch Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED Talk "The danger of a single story."
- Do an experiment:** Sign up for the mailing list or subscribe to one of the top literary magazines, such as the *New Yorker*, *Tin House*, or *Granta*.
- Do an experiment:** Order a back copy of a magazine interested in new writers, such as *Spartan*, *Duende*, or *Armchair/Shotgun*, to familiarize yourself with it. Make a note in your Writer's Mission Control Center of the pieces that have some similarities to your style.
- Do an experiment:** Think about one aspect of the work you want to create, and search the internet for examples of the form, subject matter, or location. Make a reading list for your next three books.
- Write a page:** Write out the table of contents of your anthology. What are the books and other works of art that have formed you as a writer? Just fill a page with a list of all the work you've loved over the course of your life.
- Do an experiment:** Use the plot model to map out a story, short or long, fiction or nonfiction, you've been working on.
- Do an experiment:** If you have an existing draft of a story, take it out and check it against the list of things that make readers keep reading, such as stakes. If you don't have an existing draft, take a book or story you love, and find each of these elements within it.
- Do an experiment:** Use the Character Development Sheet from the website to create a character or go deeper into a character you already have in mind for one of your stories. You don't have to fill in everything. Just complete the items that spark ideas. If you don't have a character in mind, do this sheet on yourself.
- Do an experiment:** Read Hemingway's short story "Hills Like White Elephants," one of the most famous examples of the power of dialogue and subtext. Copy all the dialogue into a notebook or file.
- Write a page:** Write half a page in one point of view, then rewrite it using another point of view.
- Do an experiment:** Pick one craft book that sounds like the next one you'll need, and commit to reading it or listening to the audiobook.
- Write a page:** What value do you get out of the reading you most often do? What value do you think your work could bring to your future readers?
- Write a page:** "Here's what it would take for me to make a sustainable writing life . . ."
- Do an experiment:** Go on a job-searching site and see what kind of writing jobs are available in your area.

- Do an experiment:** Of all the jobs required of you as a writer (e.g., secretary, salesperson, or marketer), pick the one that terrifies you most, and schedule five one-hour sessions over the next five months to study it.
- Do an experiment:** Create a recurring weekly writing check-in to see how you're doing on your writing goals in terms of word count, hours worked, or any other measurement of success.
- Do an experiment:** If you have a first draft of a story, a poem, or an essay, run it through the appropriate editing checklist.
- Do an experiment:** Pick your main writing technology, and schedule an hour to study it.
- Do an experiment:** Create a social media account that you will use only as a writer. Plan a time when you will start posting, and set a recurring reminder to post something at least once a week.
- Do an experiment:** Order your business cards now, and tuck a secret one in your wallet.
- Do an experiment:** Start a list of all the positive feedback you've gotten on your writing so that you can look at it when you're feeling down and you need encouragement. Save it in your “:-)” file.
- Write a page:** “Here's my dream book deal . . .”
- Do an experiment:** Check out the Poets & Writers list of literary places to find the writing center nearest to you. Set a major writing goal for yourself, and reward yourself with a trip to the center or an online class when you complete that goal.
- Do an experiment:** If you're interested in pursuing an MFA, get Tom Kealey's *The Creative Writing MFA Handbook* or the essay collection *MFA vs NYC*.
- Write a page:** “Here's what my ego sounds like . . .”
- Do an experiment:** Try meditating for ten minutes before your writing sessions for a week, and see whether you feel a difference. I like the guided meditations on YouTube by Tara Brach and Jon Kabat-Zinn.
- Write a page:** “Here's what's holding me back the most from enjoying my life as a writer, and here's how I'm going to work on it . . .”
- Do an experiment:** Pick one writing-life book that interests you, and put it on your reading list.