



My sidewriting exercises are meant to help you improve your craft and explore different facets of your WIP, as well as support your overall writing practice. If you don't have a WIP, you can just do these with characters you encounter in a magazine spread or whoever pops into your mind. Think of these efforts as a spark of writing that inspires new scenes, new plot, new ideas, or otherwise helps you understand your story, characters, and craft better. Permission to experiment, have fun, and let go of perfectionist death grips!

### **Pick Up The Pen**

**For this exercise, we're going to explore how to bring more specificity and voice to physical actions. No more dull, dry, uninspired moments!**



**Pick up a pen.** Now set it down. Note any physical or sensory sensations you had. **Now think about what you're going to write with the pen before picking it up.** Go there mentally. Wait. Okay, now pick it up. Rest in that intention. Set it down. Again, note the sensations.

**Now recall the last time you wrote something that was hard to write, but you had to do it.** Wait until that memory is very clear. Pick up the pen. Decide you're not going to write this thing after all. Set it down. Note the sensations.

**I hope in this exercise you were able to see the physical changes within you as your motivations for picking up and setting down the pen changed.** Most were likely quite subtle. Could you put those into rich experiences into narrative detail while in the skin of your protagonist? See the difference:

*Alora picked up the pen and began the letter that would change her life: Dear John...*

...

*Alora watched the pen for a moment, hesitating. Choice. There was always a choice. A train sounded in the distance—going somewhere far away, and fast. She reached for the pen, fingers tingling, as though it were bewitched. And wasn't it?*

*To hell with it.*

*Alora grabbed the pen and, with its solid weight resting between her fingers, she began, the ink sinking into the page. She couldn't erase this. Didn't want to. Dear John...*



Now, you might think the second example is too purple for you, and that's fine. Not every single action needs to be laden down with metaphors and similes etc. But I wanted you to see both how the first tells and the second shows, but also how the reader is given an opportunity to get in Alora's skin in the second example.

We feel the weight and gravity of her task, her uncertainty, and the relief in her final rip-the-bandaid-off approach. This is expressed through the senses and through an acutely realized physical action with a strong justification and interiority behind it.

### **A Few Prompts To Practice Writing From Inside The Moment (As yourself or Your Protagonist)**

- The moment before a difficult phone call
- Debating on whether or not to answer a text or call
- The moment before opening or closing a door before or after an important moment
- Waking up in the morning
- Taking the first bite of a meal
- Choosing not to do something you're addicted to
- Refraining from an explosive reaction
- Hearing bad news for the first time
- Getting a horrible bill in the mail
- The moment before confronting someone
- Walking away from a person, place, or thing that has hurt you
- Stepping onto or into a mode of transportation
- Looking for a cough drop while trying not to cough during a very quiet stage play
- Trying not to cry
- Trying not to laugh

**"Imagination is better than a sharp instrument. To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work." --Mary Oliver**