

## Cat Rambo – Writing Immersive Worlds Exercises

One of the tools that is crucial to my writing practice is the idea of timed writing. I set a timer for a particular time and then make myself write. The rules of my practice are drawn from the book [Writing Down the Bones](#) by Natalie Goldberg, and my version of them is:

- Keep writing: the pen must keep moving, or the fingers keep typing.
- Don't edit. Tell your editor side to take a hike. They'll get a chance at this stuff later on.
- Don't think.
- Go for the weird.
- Write without value. This maxim comes up over and over again in writing advice; Jay Lake used to state it as "Give yourself permission to write crap."

In the live classes I do, we usually go for 5-10 minutes per exercise, while when working on my own I tend to go 30-45 minutes. Feel free to adjust this to your own inclination. Don't worry about doing the exercises "wrong" - if you are creating words, you are doing what you should be.

### SENSORY EXERCISES

One: Take a page from one of your stories and use five highlighters to go through marking the senses, assigning one color to each of the five senses. You may find some words evoke more than one sense — we'll talk more about them in the next session. For now, just mark them with every color that applies. Now go back and examine the results. Is one sense surfacing more than others? Are any lacking? What happens when you go through and try to add more of a particular sense, like smell?

Two: Invoking the senses is more than having your character step out onto the front porch and look, listen, smell, taste, and touch their surroundings. Remember that description is filtered through your character's point of view, so you do not need to directly state things are coming through their senses. Instead of "He smelled the lilacs on the breeze," think about constructions like "The smell of lilacs wafted on the breeze" or "A breeze reached him, carrying the smell of lilacs."

Do a timed writing in which you describe a moment when your character is entering an unfamiliar place, thinking about what they smell, taste, and particularly feel.

Three: Go to the food store and buy several foodstuffs you've never tried. Now bring them home, taste them, and spend 250-500 words describing the taste and what it makes you think of.

### MINGLED WORDS EXERCISES

One: Food is one of the richest sources of sensory imagery, and evokes all sorts of emotions, depending on your character. Think of a particular place in your story. First write a 250-500 words description of it from the point of view of someone who is very hungry. Then follow up

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with a timed writing of a similar length, from the point of view of someone who has gluttoned themselves to the point of nausea.

Two: Expand your sensory vocabulary by taking a trip through a kitchen, sniffing the different sauces and spices. Think about which are used in combination with each other, like the cardamon/clove/cinnamon/pepper/ginger spices used with milk and sugar to create chai tea. What are the smells of one of the kitchens of your childhood? Write a timed writing about that space and its smells.

Three: Some words have motion as well as a pleasant sense of sound to them as well: plop, ping-ping, puddle, splash, tweak. Come up with a list of 5-6 of these. Now do a timed writing using all of them.

### VERBS EXERCISES

One: Think of a highly sensory experience you've enjoyed lately: a favorite meal, a bubble bath, a walk through a garden in full bloom. Describe it in 250-500 words, using no passive voice whatsoever.

Two: Take several pages from a recent piece of your writing and go through highlighting instances of [passive voice](#). Go back and try to put in a sensory verb for each one. Now do the same, making each one a verb that carries with it a sense of motion or movement: swoosh, rustle, rush.

Three: Pick a manual occupation or hobby such as carpentry, gardening, cooking, medicine, book-binding, car maintenance. Create a list of ten verbs drawn from that occupation or hobby. Now describe a place unrelated to the occupation or hobby, using as many of those words as possible.

### SECOND SET - BLOCKING TOOLS

#### MAPS EXERCISES

One: Write a scene set inside a place you know well from childhood, but always disliked. It should be a place that you know well enough that you could draw a relatively accurate map of it if you needed to.

Two: Use Google Earth to explore someplace you have never been and find a particular vantage point. Write a scene from the point of view of someone who is stuck in that place and wants out of it.

Three: Map a city and make up three landmarks in it. Now pick one and think about what sort of story might begin or end at that landmark. Write the scene in which it appears.

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Four: If you have a map of your country, look at it and think about the weather. How do the major landmarks, like mountains or large bodies of water, affect it?

### INTERACTIONS WITH OBJECTS EXERCISES

One: Think of an object whose acquisition marked a transition stage in your character's life. Write a scene in which they've lost the object and are trying to find it again.

Two: Write a scene in which you show your character making or repairing something: a meal, a piece of clothing, a bit of art. Think about how they handle the tools they are using and how familiar -- or not -- they are with those tools. Where did they learn to do what they're doing, and what memories of that process come to them.

Three: What are the pieces of clothing that your character is wearing - and who made them? Are they used or new, expensive or cheap? What is it about them that made your character pick them? Write a scene in which your character is dressing before going to confront someone who has a great deal of power over them.

### SCARCITY/ABUNDANCE EXERCISES

One: Pick a material that is common from the following list: rubber, iron, coal, sand, silk, bamboo, bone. Think about what sort of technology might grow out of an abundance of it. Write a scene in which one of your characters is interacting with that technology.

Two: With the climate in the area, what sorts of foods are common? Write a 250-500 word scene of a celebratory feast that features an elaborate and expensive dessert.

Three: What building materials are scarce in this world? Write a description of a house or living quarter constructed of those materials in order to showcase the owner's wealth.

### TRADE FLOWS EXERCISES

One: What is the main source of energy in your society? Is it cheap and plentiful, or hard to come by? How does its existence affect the level of technology and the speed at which that technology changes and develops? Write a scene where a character is interacting with an energy source in some way.

Two: What is the currency system like? How are taxes handled, and who does or doesn't pay them? What are the attitudes towards wealth? Write a scene where a character is reckoning up their taxes the night before they're due.

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Three: What are the ways those wealthy people show off? How do they dress and what things do they do? What cheaper versions of these things do the lower classes do? Write a scene in which a lower-class person is assembling the outfit that will allow them to pass as upper-class.

### YOUR CHARACTER'S WALLET EXERCISES

One: Write a brief scene in which you show your character spending or earning a substantial sum of money. What are their emotions about it? What would the money allow them to do?

Two: Write a brief scene in which you show your character interacting with a job that they dislike, but which is necessary financially. You may want to think about whether it's a temporary situation or whether they see an end in sight.

Three: Write a brief scene in which you show your character applying for a job that they want very much. How have they chosen their outfit and groomed themselves? What lucky talismans or rituals might they employ? What's their body language like and how do they physically feel?

Links if people want to find me elsewhere:

<http://www.kittywumpus.net/blog/newsletter/>

<http://academy.catrambo.com>