

2. In medias res

In medias res is where you start a story in the middle of the action. The key to making it work is to give enough context for it to make sense right off the bat, then explain in more detail later in the story. Note that this is not just sticking your scenes in out of order. You'll be given credit by how well your story flows.

3. 250 Words

You have 250 words to write your story. This is called flash fiction, and it's hard. Every word counts, so don't waste your time on pointless details and get to the main part of the story. You'll be given credit based on how strong your story is (and also if it's 250 or fewer words. You don't get any credit if it's not that short).

4. Ironic Echo

The ironic echo is when a character repeats a line of dialogue from earlier, but the line means something very different in the new context. This is very common in betrayal stories. You'll be given credit by how strong your ironic echo is.

5. Book Ends

Book ends is a stylistic choice in which an author begins and ends the story in the same way (e.g., a certain action or a line of dialogue). It's usually used to show how things have or haven't changed or to recontextualize the scene or sentence or action. You will be given credit based on how well your book ends work with the rest of the story (both thematically and stylistically). You will be penalized if your book ends sound contrived or otherwise forced.

6. No Dialogue

Write a story without any dialogue. Internal monologue is okay, as are other forms of communication. The only thing that is not allowed is talking (whether directly, over the phone, or telepathically). Note that this means your character also can't talk to themselves out loud. Credit is given based on the story's strength even without dialogue.

7. Duologue

Write a story based primarily on the dialogue between two (and only two) people. This means that the story is almost entirely contained in the actual words spoken, not their actions at the time. Credit is given based on the prominence of the dialogue, as well as how it flows naturally and how it portrays a story.

8. Death is Not Cheap

You'll notice (especially here) that a lot of characters die with little to no fanfare. The challenge here is to kill off a character and have it mean something. This emphatically does *not* mean going on for paragraphs and paragraphs about how someone dying is terrible. The death may take place during or before the story (but preferably during). You will be given credit based on how much of an impact the death has. You'll be penalized if you just end up wallowing in unmitigated angst.

9. How We Got Here/Reverse Whodunit

You have two choices for this narrative challenge. The first is *How We Got Here*, which is where you start at the middle or end of the story, then spend the rest of the story showing how you got back to that point. The second is the *Reverse Whodunit* (also known as an inverted detective story) where you start with the crime being committed, then spend the rest of the story seeing how the detective finds out who did what (doesn't specifically have to be detectives and crime, obviously). In both cases, the key is to build interest in *how* the characters get to the end as opposed to *what* the end is. You will be given credit based on how strong your beginning is and how the story flows to the beginning events while keeping intrigue. You will be penalized for pulling plot points out of your ass in an attempt to keep things interesting.

10. Chekhov's Gun

Chekhov's gun is a writing element where you introduce something at the beginning of the story to bring it back later as a major plot device. The saying goes something like, "If you put a gun on the mantelpiece in the first act, you have to fire it by the end of the second". It's basically the way to avoid *deus ex machinas*. I've said in the past that writing is nothing *but* writing Chekhov's guns, because about 90% of a story is about setting up the expectations so the conclusion actually means something. Anyways, you'll get credit based on how well you write your Chekhov's gun(s). You will be penalized if your Chekhov's guns are really really obvious or misused.

11. First-Person Peripheral Narrator

Usually, when you have first-person narration, the point of view character is the main protagonist. Sometimes, this doesn't work out as well, because the main character dies at the end, or isn't really relatable in any way, or knows things that will ruin the suspense. In this case, you can bring in the first-person peripheral narrator, who is close to the action and part of it sometimes, but isn't the main star of the show (Watson to Holmes, if you will). Credit is given based on your characterization and how well the limited viewpoint works for your story. Penalties are given if your main character dips into omniscience when they're not supposed to.

12. Unreliable Narrator

An unreliable narrator is a first-person narrator who has a tendency to say things that are wrong, whether because the point of view character is a liar, naive, or insane. The go-to example is Edgar Allan Poe's "The Telltale Heart", where the narrator starts out by telling the reader that he isn't insane, all while blithely explaining how he murdered an old man. Credit is given on your ability to use an unreliable narrator well (i.e., with some subtlety).

13. CHARACTERIZATION

Characters and their motivations drive the plot of the story, so it's important that they come off as believable (though not necessarily realistic) people instead of cardboard cutouts with tape recorders taped to the back. Well, now it's even more important to do it well because a huge number of points are on the line based on whether you can do it better than your opponent. This narrative challenge requires that every character who appears in the story (or at least has speaking lines or an otherwise active role) has a personality. Remember, show us who your character is through their actions, dialogue, and choices--don't just tell us and think we'll believe it. Credit is given for believable characters with distinct

personalities. This means that while you can get full credit for Characterization points with flat (if consistent) caricatures, that's not going to fly here.

14. Horror

Write a horror story. Note that horror means invoking fear, not just spilling blood and intestines everywhere.

15. The Ending Changes Everything

This is an ending trope where the ending calls the rest of the story into question to be reinterpreted. According to TVTropes, this was popularized by *The Usual Suspects* (but I've never seen the movie, so I wouldn't know). This is a prompt that requires a very good understanding of how people read stories and what they expect. Anyways, you get credit for good foreshadowing and a strong ending. You will be penalized for trite or out of nowhere twists.

16. Epistolary Narrative

An epistolary narrative is a story written through letters. One famous example would be Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. It can be letters just from one person or a correspondence. The appeal is that you can write stories from multiple points of view as well as a point of view of what's going on at the time. If you use a correspondence or multiple letter writers, make sure that they have distinct voices. Credit is given by the appropriateness of the epistolary narrative to your story and its execution as well as the voice used in the letters.

17. Red Herring

The red herring is a plot device used in intrigue plots, generally mystery fiction. It's a clue that deliberately misdirects the reader into coming to the wrong conclusion and conceal the real answer that's been there the whole time. The things that make a good red herring are first a strong intrigue with hints that actually do foreshadow the real solution and then the red herring hints that are reasonable and mislead the reader. You will be judged on how convincingly you make your red herring and then how you foreshadow the real solution, whatever it is. You will lose credit if you do things like repeatedly say "It couldn't POSSIBLY be X!", because that's not how a red herring works.

18. Out of Character is Serious Business

There's a thing about characterization where it needs to be distinct and consistent. Well, when you get to that point, you can hammer it home when someone suddenly starts acting out of character, showing that something is either going terribly wrong or there's something happening that we don't know about. Credit is given for first having strong characterization, then dramatic use of breaking character.

20. Changing POV

Write a story with more than one point of view. Credit is given for the appropriateness of the switch and the clear change in voice (even if you're writing third-person, there should be a shift in tone to distinguish two characters).

22. Match Cut/Twisted Echo Cut

A match cut is a film technique in which you juxtapose two visually similar but contextually different shots in between scenes, either to compare or contrast between the two situations. Obviously, this works differently in writing (words instead of pictures and all of that). The Twisted Echo Cut is specifically when you use a line of dialogue and instantly recontextualize it to start a new scene. Credit is given for a smooth transition between scenes and appropriate recontextualization.

23. Grey and Gray Morality

Write a story where nobody is the good guy. This is usually achieved through "doing bad things for the right reasons" or "doing good things for the wrong reasons". The point is, nobody is exactly a shining bastion of civility or Dr. Evil. You get credit for compelling characters and motivations, as well as understandable moralities.

24. Falling in Love

Write a story that involves a building romance between two characters. It doesn't have to be the main point of the story, but it does have to be clear. Credit is given for believability and penalties are given for strangling people with the red string.

25. Omniscient Third-Person

Write a story with an omniscient third-person perspective. Credit is given for doing it well while still retaining suspense (not at the cost of arbitrarily withholding information).

26. Extended Metaphor

Symbolism is a staple of literature--it's a more abstract way of showing, not telling. This narrative challenge will have you utilize an extended metaphor, whether explicit or implicit. This means that you will take a metaphor and explore its different facets. Some famous examples would be Shakespeare's Sonnet 18, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?", in which a woman is compared to summer or Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken", in which life is compared to a journey. You will be judged on how well the metaphor is executed (remember, analogies only work if you're not wrong about how your compared objects work) and how it adds value to the story (so don't bang on about your metaphor just to have it in there, because that detracts from the actual story).

27. Allegory

An allegory is where you get to get your symbolism pants on. In literature, an allegory is when you have a second, symbolic meaning behind the literal events of your story. It's fairly common in an allegory to have a character that represents an idea like death or love or other wonderful things like that. It's similar to using an extended metaphor where the entire story is the metaphor. You will be judged on how skillfully you can create an allegory. That is to say, you will do better if your allegory is evident, but doesn't get in the way of the primary, literal story. Basically, don't run around with the sledgehammer of symbology, because that ends poorly for everyone involved.

28. Thematic Juxtaposition

Juxtaposition is the placement of two (frequently very different) things next to one another to compare or contrast. Thematic juxtaposition is using juxtaposition to get across a certain idea (or theme, if you

will). Examples are things like technology and pre-development, order and chaos, or wealth and poverty. You will be judged by how evident your juxtaposition and the symbolic message attached to it is. Remember that said message does have to be relevant to the plot and story themes.

29. Loneliness

Write a lonely character. Don't angst forever. Credit is given for doing it well.

30. Flashback

You know what a flashback is, but I'll describe it anyways. The literary term for a flashback is analepsis, and it's a scene in the story that shows events that occurred before the events of the story. It's used to fill in backstory or other exposition and can be presented as a character explaining the events or simply remembering them. You will get credit based on how appropriate and important your flashback is to the story. This means that your flashback must contain important information, be executed gracefully, and be more effective than an alternate form of exposition (like a few lines of dialogue).

31. Anachronism

Write a story with anachronistic elements. That means either antiquated language or actual plot elements that don't fit the time frame (like a gun in a medieval war story). It's best to go all the way with your anachronisms, because one out of place gun is *deus ex machina* where a ton of out of place guns is just a steampunk adventure. Credit is given for making your anachronisms work with the story. Penalties are given for extremely conspicuous anachronistic elements.

32. Depression

A story is built on your ability to convincingly build characters and emotions. For this narrative challenge, you will be judged on your ability to convey appropriate despair and depression. This means that the circumstances for the angst must be justified and the emotion itself presented in a way that actually moves the reader.

33. Stream of Consciousness

Stream of consciousness is a writing style that doesn't always fit the way people actually write because it cuts through a lot of normal writing rules in that it's meant to simulate the way that people think (more meandering than structured in any way). James Joyce was pretty well known for writing like this, if I recall correctly (but then again, I've never really read James Joyce), but he was also known for being nigh-indecipherable at times, so be careful. You'll get credit for stream of consciousness that tells a story well as well as indicates the character's personality. And no, stream of consciousness isn't just writing a bunch of run-ons.

34. Rose-Colored Glasses

This is a variant of unreliable narrator. Write a character who's looking back on events very fondly, even though the events themselves might not be so good. Credit is given for a consistent view of events and proper justification for why the narrator is so damn happy.

35. Hamartia

Hamartia is hubris, in a way. As defined by Aristotle, it's a mistake that someone makes that leads to their undoing. Specifically, it ends up causing a series of events that reverses the hero's fortune from good to bad. Keep in mind that this is not the fatal flaw, but the error that's borne of it (e.g., Doctor Faustus making a deal with the devil, which causes him to roast in hell for all eternity. His *flaw* was that he was prideful and wanted more, but his *hamartia* was the deal). This is found in tragedies (for obvious reasons) and that means that your story will probably end up being tragic. So do it well.

36. Anagnorisis

Anagnorisis was described in Aristotle's *Poetics* as a critical moment in a play in which a character gains new knowledge about the situation, often creating a turn in fortune (peripeteia). More specifically, the knowledge is generally related to the character's situation, role, or relationship with other characters (frequently the antagonist). Your job is to make this pivot point as powerful as possible. You will be judged on your execution of anagnorisis and its impact on the plot.

37. Peripeteia

Peripeteia or peripety (not to be confused with Peripiteia, a proposed perpetual motion generator), is a reversal of fortune. This is also a term that was defined by Aristotle with reference to tragedies. This is frequently tied to anagnorisis, which is new information that brings about the turning point in a story. Credit is given for the strength of the lead-up to your peripeteia (after all, a reversal in fortune in of itself is easy. The hard part is making it work).

38. Rashomon Plot

A Rashomon plot is a plot that's based on the differing viewpoints between characters. It involves multiple characters telling the same events in radically different ways (whether because of their beliefs, different attentions, or just lying). This ends up leaving the real events of the story a mystery for the reader to figure out. You may have an extra 500 words for this story. Credit is given for distinctly different points of view (they don't have to be first-person) and reasonably different accounts of events.

39. Hourglass Plot

An hourglass plot is characterized by two main characters involuntarily switching positions, whether in status, morals, or economic position. It is generally used to show how neither character learns anything through the switch (like a henchman rising up through the ranks to become the big bad and being just as terrible as the last big bad), though you are not required to do so. You will be judged on how strong your hourglass plot is (what is switched and how it affects the situation) and how well it's presented (it should be evident that there actually was a switch and said switch must make sense in context).

40. Lemony Narrator

This is a sort of first-person third-person character who narrates the story. The narrator has a very distinct (and frequently sarcastic) first-person voice while not actually being part of the story (most of the time). The trope's name comes from Lemony Snicket in *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. Often played for humor, as expected. Credit is given for cleverness without obscuring the story. Penalties are given for trying too hard and being cringey.

41. Film Noir

Film noir style narration, complete with the film noir monologue. You know what I'm talking about (if you don't, you're going to have to look up some examples). This means a dark, gritty tone and probably people doing terrible but down-to-earth things. Credit is given for creating the right film noir mood. Penalties are given for going too far headlong into parody.

42. Fighting Fate

Write a story that is about fighting fate, whether it's a character's destiny or personality or something else that foretells that they have to do something. Make sure to actually make a statement about fighting fate (which emphatically does not mean come out and say "I am fighting fate because I believe that blank blank and blank", but to build a statement out of what your characters do and what happens to them because of it). Credit is given for a strong narrative and focus on the characters' struggles.

43. Scylla and Charybdis

Scylla and Charybdis are two monsters in *The Odyssey* where Odysseus has to pass between two monsters in order to get to his next destination. He is unable to get by without getting hit by one of them, so he tries to pick the lesser of the two evils and a bunch of his men get eaten. In literary terms, Scylla and Charybdis is when a character is unable to uphold all of their obligations and has to make a decision between two choices, both of which have bad consequences. This struggle should be central to your story. Credit is given for the narrative weight of your Scylla and Charybdis, as well as the justification for why your characters can't just take a third option.

44. Flash Forward

A flash forward is like a flashback, but forwards. It may not necessarily be what actually happens. This is specifically a narrative trope, not something that occurs in-story (e.g., someone actually seeing the future). You get credit for having a flash forward that impacts the reader's view on the story (meaning if you can just remove the flash forward and the reader's experience is exactly the same, you get no credit).

45. Posthumous Character

A posthumous character is a character that has been dead from the beginning of the story and never actually shows up, but has an important role in the story regardless. Importantly, the posthumous cannot have any active role in the current events (e.g., being a ghost or coming back to life). The posthumous character is usually developed through flashbacks, though they certainly don't have to be. You will be judged on your ability to make this character's presence known and integral to the events of the story (whether as the catalyst or the cause of the plot) as well as developing this character even though they get no real screen time.

46. Peggy Sue

A Peggy Sue story is where someone mentally goes back in time to their younger self and uses their knowledge of the future to try and fix what went wrong. You can have an extra 500 words for this prompt (because I'm sure you'll probably need it). For obvious reasons, this is most commonly seen in fan fiction stories, but there are ways to do it in conventional media (you just have to frame it

differently). You get credit for showing consequences of this different route as well as what the original route was to begin with.

47. Antagonist Opening Scene

A quick search on TVTropes tells me that the name of this is actually "Villain Opening Scene", but I don't really like the term "villain" and I'd have to change the name in like five places to correct it. Anyways, it's exactly what you would guess: you start your story with a scene featuring your antagonist and his/her establishing character moment. This is used most frequently when the antagonist is the driving force behind the plot. You will be judged on how well you establish your antagonist with this opening scene (based on what he/she does) and also whether this antagonist opening scene is consistent with your portrayal of the character for the rest of the story.

48. Establishing Character Moment

The establishing character moment is a moment at a character's introduction where that character does something that shows very succinctly what kind of a person they are (e.g., someone walking by and sees Main Character B arguing with a nun who's minding her own business establishes that Main Character B is a confrontational jerkwad). You get credit for having a strong establishing moment and then sticking to that characterization for the rest of the story.

49. We Used to be Friends

Write a relationship between your two characters used to be friends, but are now on opposing sides or otherwise in conflict with one another. What broke them apart should be an important part of your story. Credit is given for compelling explanations for the two characters' behavior. Penalties are given for Star Wars references.

50. Big Bad Friend

This is where the main character's friend was actually in with the bad guy the whole time. They're still friends and the betrayer doesn't want to really hurt their friend. You have to involve at least one of your characters in this relationship. Credit is given for having both a strong friendship and a real reason for one of them to switch sides.

51. Teeth-Clenched Teamwork

Write an antagonistic relationship between your two characters, then create a situation where they are forced to work with each other, despite really really not wanting to. You get credit for evident friction between the characters and justifiable motivations. Remember that the point of this is that *neither* character wants to cooperate (meaning it isn't just going to be a lure to betray the other sometime down the road).

52. Must Let Them Get Away

This is fairly straightforward. For whatever reason, the protagonist must let the antagonist (or vice versa) go free. This means that this is specifically the protagonist not going after the antagonist, not just the antagonist making a crafty escape. You will be judged on your ability to make it so that there's an actual justification for why the protagonist lets the antagonist go.

53. Arc Number

An arc number is where you give a recurring number a symbolic meaning (very often that number will be 3, 4, or 7). Anyways, you get credit for making it so there actually can be some symbolic meaning extracted from the use and placement of your arc number. Penalties are given for just arbitrarily tacking on numbers in places or being so loud with your symbolism that you drown out the actual story.

54. Arc Words

Arc words are a word or phrase that occurs multiple times throughout a story because it has a certain meaning that's important to the story (usually for an in-universe reason). This admittedly doesn't work very well in a short story because there just isn't the length needed to turn a word into a motif. But that doesn't mean you can't try. The arc words do actually have to be important to your plot and not just some random phrase that people latched onto. Credit is given for well-chosen arc words and relevance to the plot.

55. The Bad Guy Wins

The bad guy wins. I don't really need to explain that further. You'll be judged on how well your story flows into that conclusion as well as showing that the good guys didn't just *let* the bad guy win.

56. Arch Enemies

Your two characters are arch enemies. I don't care why, but make it something that makes sense. And yes, this means that your characters have to know each other by the beginning of the story. You'll get credit for writing a convincing rivalry and reason for them to be that way.

57. Vitriolic Best Buddies

Sometimes you have a very good friend that you constantly insult and degrade and attack. It's not because you secretly hate them--it's because you trust them enough to not take offense. Anyways, for this narrative challenge you must write this relationship between two main characters (they do not necessarily have to be your two characters, but they do have to be main characters). You get points for portraying it realistically and still demonstrating that they are actually good friends.

58. Heterosexual Life Partners

This is where two people are very very close friends...but not in a romantic way. Can be between male and female or same-sex. At least one of your two characters have to be involved in this relationship. Credit is given for strong characterization and evident friendship.

59. No Internal Monologue

Don't write in any internal monologue. You can still tell us what a character is thinking (e.g., "John looked at the cookie dough and sighed. He hoped that he wouldn't burn them this time"), but you can't directly show us what their thoughts are (e.g., "John looked at the cookie dough and sighed. *If I burn them again, this party is going to be terrible*, he thought"). By the nature of this prompt, you should stay far, far away from first person. Credit is given for writing a good story even without the internal monologue.