

Idea Development Exercises

Free Writing

Choose a starting sentence (from the suggestions below or your own idea). Set a timer for 3–5 minutes and write continuously without stopping.

If you get stuck, repeat your starting sentence over and over until something new emerges.

Suggested starting sentences:

- Something that always makes me happy is...
- My weirdest memory is...
- Today has been...
- I hope...
- Something that annoys me is...

It won't necessarily make sense at the end, and that's fine. The aim is not polish, it's discovery. Often the best ideas come from a single unexpected phrase, emotion, or image that appears when you're not overthinking.

“What If” Questions

Start by generating a list of “what if” questions. Don't worry about realism — focus on curiosity and possibility.

Examples:

- What if the world was run by cats?
- What if space tourism was as cheap as a Ryanair flight?
- What if you could hear people's thoughts for only 10 seconds a day?
- What if nobody ever forgot anything?
- What if your dreams were legally recorded as evidence?

Then choose one and try answering it as a story.

Ask:

- Who is affected by this change?
- What goes wrong?
- What does it reveal about people?

People Watching

Go to a busy public place and observe people. Pay attention to:

- what they're wearing
- how they move
- how they speak or interact
- what mood they seem to be in
- small, interesting details or behaviours

Take quick notes and use them as the foundation for characters or story fragments.

Examples:

- The sad busker outside a station

- A couple on a coffee shop date not speaking to each other
- A woman in a green jacket laughing alone on the phone
- Someone repeatedly checking the same message without replying

Object / Detail Mining

Choose one ordinary object and imagine it has a hidden story attached to it.

Pick something you can see right now:

- a mug
- a key
- a receipt
- a scratched phone screen
- a pair of shoes

Ask:

- Who does this belong to?
- What has it witnessed?
- What would it reveal if it could speak?
- Why is it important *right now*?

Small objects often lead to surprisingly emotional or specific stories.

Dialogue Overhear & Reimagine

Write down a line of dialogue you hear in real life (or imagine overhearing it). Then build a story around it.

Examples:

- "I told you not to say anything yet."
- "It's not what you think."
- "Just five minutes, then I'll go."

Then ask:

- Who is speaking?
- What are they not saying?
- What happened immediately before this moment?
- What happens next?

Always Ask

With ALL stories, ask yourself:

- Who's story is this?
- Why do I need to tell it now?
- What changes between the beginning and the end?
- What does the character want — and what stops them getting it?
- What is at stake if nothing changes?