

WRITING TOWARDS COURAGE

A Thirty-Day Practice

By Laura Davis



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“So the question of social protest and art is inseparable for me. I can’t say it is an either-or proposition. Art for art’s sake doesn’t really exist for me. What I saw was wrong, and I had to speak up. I loved poetry, and I loved words. But what was beautiful had to serve the purpose of changing my life, or I would have died. If I cannot air this pain and alter it, I will surely die of it. That’s the beginning of social protest.”

— **Audre Lorde**

Black Women Writers at Work

“The voice of an individual artist may seem perhaps of no more consequence than the whirring of a cricket in the grass; but the arts do live continuously, and they live literally by faith; their names and their shapes and their uses and their basic meanings survive unchanged in all that matters through times of interruption, diminishment, neglect; they outlive governments and creeds and the societies, even the very civilizations that produced them. They cannot be destroyed altogether because they represent the substance of faith and the only reality. They are what we find again when the ruins are cleared away.”

— **Katherine Anne Porter**

written during World War II



What Makes a Great Writing Prompt?

You may wonder why you should bother to use writing prompts—and what makes a good one. In my decades of responding to prompts and creating them for my writing students, here are my thoughts on the subject.

— Laura Davis

- **A writing prompt is a much easier thing to face than a blank piece of paper.** A prompt gives you a jump-start, a place to begin. It's the impetus that gets you going and starts words flowing on the page. Just facing a blank sheet of paper with no idea where to start or what to write about is terrifying. A prompt is an effective way to manage that terror and begin.
- **A good writing prompt should be evocative.** Rather than being a flat task: “Tell me about two characters who meet in a bar,” the best writing prompts should jar you into thinking of something new. A well-worded prompt should feel almost like a burr in your side. It should make you feel provoked, edgy, spurred to respond. The first thoughts that come to you upon reading the prompt may be surprising or unusual, even risky. Always go with those first thoughts.
- **Writing prompts can help you access memories and stories you can't retrieve directly.** A good prompt can make you remember something you hadn't thought about in a month, a year, or even fifty years. My students often finish responding to a prompt, and when it's their turn to read their piece out loud, they're thrilled that they've uncovered a memory or story that they had forgotten—sometimes for decades. A strong prompt is great antidote to a failing or faulty memory.
- **A good writing prompt should be targeted and specific.** Consider for instance, how much more powerful it is to respond to the prompt, “My father's hands,” than it is to write from the much more non-specific suggestion, “Tell me about your father.” The first prompt evokes an instant visceral response and an image; the second is too broad and generic to give you an immediate starting place.
- **A writing prompt will get you writing, and keep you writing, much more effectively than the idea, “I should write.”** With a prompt, you have something concrete to respond to. And if you make it part of your personal writing practice to respond to **the ones that I send out each week**, you won't have to think them up yourself.



- **Take on challenging prompts; they stretch you into new territory as a writer—and as a person.** In my experience, and in my years observing my students, it is often the prompts you want to avoid that lead to the most revealing, compelling writing.
- **Don't give yourself an out.** Not every prompt will feel right (or comfortable) for you, but if you are serious about your development as a writer, I recommend that you try each of them anyway. If you were sitting in a writing class with me, you wouldn't get to pick and choose your prompts. I'd give the whole class a prompt and whatever it was, you'd have to find a way to respond immediately, without thinking. Do the same when you take this on as a practice at home. You'll go to some unexpected, but fruitful places.
- **Repeat effective prompts again and again.** Some prompts are so open-ended, you could use them every day for the rest of your life and never run out of things to write, prompts like, "I remember..." Or, "I wish..."
- **Use repeating prompts to excavate your deepest material.** If you're dealing with a subject that is huge in your life, say the death of someone close to you or a traumatic accident or a major life turning point, it can be useful to take the same prompt and do it every day for a month—twenty minutes or half an hour at a time. Sitting down every day and writing to, "The day my father died..." Or, "Before the accident..." Or, "After the accident..." or "During the war..." can lead you to explore a rich vein or untapped (or only partially tapped) material in much more depth. Even though there may be repetition in your responses, each day you will inevitably come up with some new material—you will remember different details, write from a different vantage point, or simply remember more. Mining these thirty days of writing will yield an amazing treasure trove of raw material to channel into your finished piece.



What's the Best Way to Respond to a Writing Prompt?

In my classes, we respond to writing prompts using the principles of “writing practice,” developed by author [Natalie Goldberg](#), and first described in her first groundbreaking book about writing, [Writing Down the Bones](#). Writing practice grew directly out of Goldberg’s experience in Zen Buddhist meditation. It is a form of meditation in action and can be a powerful path to creativity and self-knowledge.

The primary purpose of the writing practice guidelines below is to separate the creator from the editor. Most of us make the mistake of writing and editing at the same time. You write a few lines, you read them back—you decide you don’t like them or didn’t get it right, so you erase or delete them—and then you start again. In other words, you interject the editing part of your brain when you should be sticking with the raw, uncensored creative part of your brain. As one of my former students, Karen Rowe explains it, editing while you write is like putting your foot on the brake and the gas at the same time. It’s hard to get any traction.

When we do writing practice, the goal is to set the editor aside during the creation of the first draft. (Don’t worry; the editor is an essential friend. You will come back to him when it’s time to refine and polish your work.)

1. The basic unit of writing practice is the timed exercise. In the beginning, I suggest that you set a count-down timer for ten minutes—you can use an egg timer or your phone. When you hit start, you begin writing. When the timer goes off, you stop. Later, you can increase the amount of time, but ten minutes is a great length to start with. You’ll be amazed what you can write in ten minutes. Once you’re comfortable with ten minutes, increase your time to 15 minutes, then 20, then half an hour. Experiment to find the length that works for you. If you’re on a roll and have the leeway, you can extend your planned time, but starting with a limit is useful. Timed writing puts pressure on you to say what you need to say NOW, gives you courage to approach challenging topics because you know there’s a way out. And it’s a great strategy for fitting writing into a busy life.



- 2. Don't hesitate.** In the time it takes you to consider whether or not you want to respond to a prompt-or to reject it-you've lost the opportunity to jump in with your uncensored writer's mind-where the best and most fruitful first drafts come from.
- 3. Keep your hand moving.** Keep your hand moving for the whole writing period-be it ten minutes or two hours. Keeping your hand moving enables you to separate the creator from the editor so the editor can't creep in and sabotage your efforts. No matter what happens, keep your hand moving. As Natalie Goldberg likes to say, "If the atom bomb drops, you go out writing."
- 4. Stick with first thoughts.** First thoughts are the way you first flash on something—what you really see, feel, think, and want to say. First thoughts are not orderly, "proper," "politically correct," or polite. But they are the place from which your writing comes alive. First thoughts carry energy. So whatever flashes through your mind, write it down. Don't worry if it's logical or if it makes sense.
- 5. You're free to write the worst crap in America.** This is my personal favorite of Goldberg's rules. We call it writing "practice" for a reason. We don't expect pianists, football players or opera singers to get good without years of training, repetition, and practice. It's the same thing with writing. You have to be willing to write a lot of junk before you write something good. You don't decide to be a writer, pick up a pen, and write *War and Peace*. Expecting that you will write a lot of junk for a long time gives you a tremendous amount of freedom.
- 6. Don't worry about punctuation, grammar, syntax or spelling.** That's not the job of the creator. It's the job of the editor and your third grade English teacher. Your job is to get your wild mind on the page without worrying about form, structure or "doing it right."
- 7. Don't cross out.** When you do writing practice, you're training yourself to put down whatever comes through you. Crossing out is the editor sneaking in. When you're in the middle of writing, you don't know whether something is powerful or not. Sometimes our mistakes end up being our best writing.
- 8. Be specific.** Not car, but Plymouth. Not dog, but Yorkshire terrier. Not the flower in the window, but the geranium in the window. Not a codependent, neurotic man, but Harry, who runs to open the refrigerator for his wife, thinking she wants an apple, when she is headed for the gas stove to light her cigarette. Be careful of those pop-psychology labels. Get below the label and be specific to the person.
- 9. Lose control.** Let it rip. Say what you want to say, not what you think you should say.
- 10. Go for the jugular.** If something scary comes up, go for it. No one's ever died from writing



down the truth. If you avoid the things that scare you, the things that have energy, you'll spend all your time being polite and writing around them. If you keep avoiding something in your writing, it will be obvious.

11. Don't hold anything back for later. As Annie Dillard says in *The Writing Life*: "One of the few things I know about writing is this. Spend it all. Shoot it. Play it. Lose it. All. Right away. Every time. Do not hoard what seems good for a later place in the book or for another book. Give it. Give it all. Give it now. The impulse to save something good for a better place later is the signal to spend it now. Something more will arise for later, something better. These things fill from behind, from beneath, like well water. Similarly, the impulse to keep to yourself what you have learned is not only shameful, it is destructive. Anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you. You open your safe and find ashes."

Now all you have to do is get your prompts each week and keep your hand moving!

Laura Davis

The Writer's Journey

When you sign up for [The Writer's Journey Roadmap](#), I will deliver to your inbox an evocative quote, followed by a prompt to inspire your writing (just like the ones you'll work with in this book). You can save my weekly prompts for your own private use or you can post your responses on the [Roadmap blog](#) on my website. Many self-led writing groups use them on a regular basis.



Poetry is what you find
in the dirt in the corner,

overhear on the bus, God
in the details, the only way

to get from here to there.
Poetry (and now my voice is rising)

is not all love, love, love,
and I'm sorry the dog died.

Poetry (here I hear myself loudest)
is the human voice,

and are we not of interest to each other?

— Elizabeth Alexander



Writing Prompts to Explore & Inspire Courage

1

“I wish it need not have happened in my time,” said Frodo.

“So do I,” said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

— **J.R.R. Tolkien**
The Lord of the Rings

P R O M P T

Tell me about a time you felt deeply challenged or when you or the people you loved were in danger. What decisions did you make at that time? What decisions are you making now?

2

what they did yesterday afternoon

they set my aunts house on fire

i cried the way women on tv do
folding at the middle
like a five pound note.

i called the boy who use to love me

tried to 'okay' my voice

i said hello

he said warsan, what's wrong, what's
happened?

i've been praying,
and these are what my prayers look like;
dear god

i come from two countries

one is thirsty

the other is on fire

both need water.

later that night

i held an atlas in my lap

ran my fingers across the whole world

and whispered

where does it hurt?

it answered

everywhere

everywhere

everywhere.

— Warsan Shire

P R O M P T

Where does it hurt right now? Tell me a story of heartache, your own or someone else's. Stick with the story, staying close to the sensory details--the smells, sounds, what you saw, what you heard, what was said. This is not the place for a political rant. Get underneath the rant, and write about your fears, anger or confusion. Tell us the story of someone who is scared or hurt, grieving or in danger.

3

For One Who Is Exhausted: A Blessing

When the rhythm of the heart becomes
 hectic,
 Time takes on the strain until it breaks;
 Then all the unattended stress falls in
 On the mind like an endless, increasing
 weight.

The light in the mind becomes dim.
 Things you could take in your stride before
 Now become laborsome events of will.

Weariness invades your spirit.
 Gravity begins falling inside you,
 Dragging down every bone.

The tide you never valued has gone out.
 And you are marooned on unsure ground.
 Something within you has closed down;
 And you cannot push yourself back to life.

You have been forced to enter empty time.
 The desire that drove you has relinquished.
 There is nothing else to do now but rest
 And patiently learn to receive the self
 You have forsaken in the race of days.

At first your thinking will darken
 And sadness takes over like listless weather.
 The flow of unwept tears will frighten you.

You have traveled too fast over false ground;
 Now your soul has come to take you back.

Take refuge in your senses, open up
 To all the small miracles you rushed
 through.

Become inclined to watch the way of rain
 When it falls slow and free.

Imitate the habit of twilight,
 Taking time to open the well of color
 That fostered the brightness of day.

Draw alongside the silence of stone
 Until its calmness can claim you.
 Be excessively gentle with yourself.

Stay clear of those vexed in spirit.
 Learn to linger around someone of ease
 Who feels they have all the time in the
 world.

Gradually, you will return to yourself,
 Having learned a new respect for your heart
 And the joy that dwells far within slow time.

— **John O’Donohue,**

To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings

P R O M P T

Give your exhaustion a voice. Let it speak.

4

There is a Brokenness

There is a brokenness
 out of which comes the unbroken,
 a shatteredness
 out of which blooms the unshatterable.

There is a sorrow
 beyond all grief which leads to joy

and a fragility
 out of whose depths emerges strength.

There is a hollow space
 too vast for words

through which we pass with each loss,
 out of whose darkness
 we are sanctioned into being.

There is a cry deeper than all sound
 whose serrated edges cut the heart
 as we break open to the place inside
 which is unbreakable and whole
 while learning to sing.

—Rashani

P R O M P T

Write to your brokenness: your broken heart, your grief, or to any confusion, overwhelm or loss that you're carrying. Write to yourself with all the tenderness you'd shower on your own child or a child in your family that you love more than life itself. Begin with the words, "Dear One, I just want you to know...."

5

“There are those who try to set
Fire to the world
We are in danger
There is only time to move slowly
There is no time not to love.”

— Deena Metzger

P R O M P T

What does this quote mean to you?
What does it mean to move slowly when there is danger?

6

the hunt

Even running, she feels the teeth in her neck: a fury of hunger. Were there time or language, she would reason with this unhinged beast, lead him to the meadow where the others are dozing in the shade, and where there is so much to eat, the clan has lingered here for days, taking slow, patient turns through the grass. But in his certainty for blood, the arrow of his gaze flies past all vegetation, abundant as it is, and heads straight toward her, and in no time at all she knows what's coming if she stays where she is. And in that instant, a single demand emerges: Stay away from my children. And that is when the choices narrow and coalesce, and her feet go flying. Anywhere but here, she breathes. Anywhere but here.

— Maya Stein

P R O M P T

Tell me about a time you felt fiercely protective of something or someone you loved. Describe the fierceness that rose up in you so I can feel it.

7

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed individuals can change the world. In fact, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

— Margaret Meade

This is a two-part prompt. Complete one. Take a break. Then turn the page and do the second prompt. Don’t look ahead.

PROMPT • PART 1

Think back over your life. Tell me about a time you spoke out against injustice. A time you took action or helped change an unfair policy. A time you stood up on your own behalf or on behalf of someone else, regardless of the personal price you had to pay. A time you were an ally to someone or a time someone was a true ally to you. Think back. It may have been a big moment or a small one. A quiet one or a public one. Tell me the story of a time you challenged the status quo, confronted a bully or an abuser, broke a barrier, a glass ceiling, a closed club, or were part of changing history. Write about a time of courage from your personal history.

PROMPT • PART 2

Write about a time that you saw an injustice and shrank away. When you witnessed bigotry or bias or hate and participated in it—through your actions, words or silence. A time when you took part of cruelty, unfairness, violence or bullying or when you let it happen without objecting or making your voice heard. A time you used your privilege. A time you had the opportunity to speak out and remained silent. When you “took it,” witnessed it, or let it happen. When you couldn’t find the courage. Take us inside the moment when you failed to find the strength. When you failed to raise your voice. Try to get past whatever shame or regret you have about that time in your life and step inside it. Step inside the skin of the person you were. What got in your way? What silenced you? What triggered that cruelty or inability to respond the way you now wish you could have? Write with compassion for yourself, the person you were at that time, at that moment.

8

“It’s a dark time but here’s the silver lining. I remember when the earthquake and tsunami hit Japan in 2011. All the power was out, there was no heat or electricity, and yet, people reported that night that they had never seen the stars so bright. That struck me as so profound. Hope and strength are not things we’re born with, and not things we see on our sunny days. Hope and strength are muscles to be worked, and those muscles become strong through our struggles during the darkest times.

—**Hollye Dexter**

Facebook post, January 31, 2017

P R O M P T

Tell me about a time you discovered your own strength or were able to renew your hope in a bleak or challenging time.

9

“You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face.”

— Eleanor Roosevelt

P R O M P T

Tell me about a time you were afraid and acted anyway.

10

“Beautiful things are vanishing each day. There has never been a more crucial time to believe your creativity and your gifts. Trust me when I say that art creates hope, it connects, it heals. So please—write the damn book. Paint the picture. Take the trip. Stay inspired, stay hungry. Put your work into the world, and use your voice, because we need it now more than ever before.”

— Bianca Sparacino

P R O M P T

What is the most important gift you have to offer the world right now? If there’s anything standing in the way of you offering it, see if you can find a pathway past that obstacle in your writing.

11

“I am a frayed and nibbled survivor in a fallen world, and I am getting along. I am aging and eaten and have done my share of eating too. I am not washed and beautiful, in control of a shining world in which everything fits, but instead am wondering awed about on a splintered wreck I’ve come to care for, whose gnawed trees breathe a delicate air, whose bloodied and scarred creatures are my dearest companions, and whose beauty bats and shines not in its imperfections but overwhelmingly in spite of them...”

— **Annie Dillard**,
Pilgrim at Tinker Creek

P R O M P T

Tell me the truth about the world we live in.
The real truth. Don’t hold back.

12

“Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach. ... It is not given to us to know which acts or by whom, will cause the critical mass to tip toward an enduring good...One of the most calming and powerful actions you can do to intervene in a stormy world is to stand up and show your soul.”-

— Clarissa Pinkola Estes

PROMPT

Tell me about a time you found the courage to express yourself from the deepest part of you—a time you truly showed your soul.

13

“This is precisely when artists go to work. There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal. I know the world is bruised and bleeding, and though it is important not to ignore its pain, it is also critical to refuse to succumb to its malevolence. Like failure, chaos contains information that can lead to knowledge—even wisdom. Like art.”

— Toni Morrison

P R O M P T

What kernel or wisdom or creativity is waking up in you right now? Has ever woken up in a time of crisis or chaos? Tell me about a time the best in you came out when things were at their worst. Or when you saw this happen in someone else.

14

“If now isn’t a good time for the truth, I don’t see when we’ll get to it.”

— Nikki Giovanni

P R O M P T

Tell me the truth. About your experience. Or about a truth you’ve always known. About a truth that is toppling. About a truth you’re just learning about yourself or the world you live in. About a truth you believe in. About a truth you no longer believe in. Tell me about the assault on truth. Or how you determine what’s true. Tell me something true.

15

“We think that the point is to pass the test or to overcome the problem, but the truth is that things don’t really get solved. They come together and they fall apart.”

— Pema Chodron

P R O M P T

Tell me about a time this was true in your life.

16

“HATE: It has caused a lot of problems in this world, but it has never solved one yet.”

— Maya Angelou

P R O M P T

Tell me about a time you came up against hate. A time you were hated. A time you hated someone else—or a group of people--or a time you were taught to hate. Or tell me about a time you overcame hate or transformed it into something else. Be as concrete and specific in your story as you can.

17

“If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle.”

— Fredrick Douglass

P R O M P T

Tell me about a time you were part of a struggle for justice, for equality, for something you deeply valued.

Without

Without
 roaming, without
 constant choice, without a bright green
 white chocolate macha latte
 on demand. Without a full
 calendar or closet to match.
 Without my name on the door
 and my books displayed, learning solidified
 in view. Without my hair waving
 just the way I want it to, cowlick tamed.
 Without stopping at CVS to get one thing
 as I drive home hungry because I stayed late
 finishing clinical notes. Without relying
 on escape in the magic of Esalen to hold me
 or the power of a group of dancers to incite
 the ecstatic connection to spirit
 or truth.
 Without my sisters' hugs
 or just seeing them sprawled on the big couch,
 dangling a string for the cat, one's legs in another's
 lap, one's hands doodling
 trees and birds.
 Without audience or applause.
 Without those long oil massage strokes from Jay
 whose arms can span my whole body, from toes to head.
 Without considering that taking 3 minutes
 to take out the recycling will make me late for something,
 even if that something is a hoped for 7 hours of sleep.
 Without trust
 in my country. Without lazy
 disregard for the news as not pertaining to me
 today. Without a belief
 that I am deserving of vacation time, or dinners out,
 or a facial because I have been working
 so hard. Without visibility
 and the awareness of people's projections that might
 make me unsafe on the street. Without obligation.
 Without feeling like I am running, running,
 running
 too fast
 to consider what I can do without.

— Melissa Fritchle, 2020

P R O M P T

What have
 you learned
 you can live
 without?

19

“As one door closes, another opens. But we often look so long and regretfully at the closed door that we fail to see the one that has opened for us.”

– Alexander Graham Bell

PROMPT

What door is opening for you in your life right now?

20

Message from the Hopi Elders 2001

“We have been telling people that this is the Eleventh Hour. Now, we must go back and tell the people that this is the hour. Here are the things that must be considered. Where are you living? What are you doing? What are your relations? Where is your water? Know your garden. It is time to speak your truth.

“To my fellow swimmers. There is a river flowing now very fast. It is so great and swift, that there are those who will be afraid. They will try to hold on to the shore, they are being torn apart and will suffer greatly. Know that the river has its destination. The elders say we must let go of the shore, push off into the middle of the river, keep our heads above the water. And I say, see who is there with you and celebrate. At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally, least of all ourselves, for the moment that we do, our spiritual growth and journey come to a halt. The time of the lone wolf is over. Gather yourselves. Banish the word struggle from your attitude and vocabulary. All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration. We are the ones we have been waiting for.”

P R O M P T

What would it mean for you to push off from the shore right now?

21

Still I Rise

You may shoot me with your words,
 You may cut me with your eyes,
 You may kill me with your hatefulness,
 But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
 Does it come as a surprise
 That I dance like I've got diamonds
 At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
 I rise
 Up from a past that's rooted in pain
 I rise
 I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
 Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
 I rise
 Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
 I rise
 Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
 I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
 I rise
 I rise
 I rise.

— Maya Angelou
And Still I Rise

P R O M P T

Write the things that have burdened you and pushed you down...and end each stanza with the phrase, "and still I rise."

22

“Please remember to rest. They are hurling all of this at us at once to create burnout. It is important to stay informed, but please understand that the whirlwind of negative information that we are being inundated with is a method of warfare. This is a form of violence, intended to eventually subdue the masses. Take time to rest, recharge and reflect on the positive, as well. Take care of your body and mind. Meditate. Play. Interact with one another about daily-life stuff. Regroup, when you feel strong. These small battles are exhausting, but our numbers outweigh theirs. This is going to be a very long process. We need to take turns, standing in for each other, in order to stand up for each other, and ourselves as a whole. Heed the words of Audre Lorde: ‘Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare.’ Self-care, and self-collection, and kindness towards others, are acts of resistance.”

— Rebecca Solnit

P R O M P T

What are you doing to care for yourself right now?
When you feel under fire or threatened or scared or
too many things are piling in on you--what can you
do to take care of yourself? What gives you solace?
What helps you find hope?

23

“The experience of silence is now so rare that we must cultivate it and treasure it. This is especially true for shared silence. Sharing silence is, in fact, a political act. When we can stand aside from the usual and perceive the fundamental, change begins to happen.

— **Gunilla Norris**

P R O M P T

Tell me about a time when you were able to step into silence. When you found answers in silence. When stillness helped you find courage or your way.

A Prayer

Good Morning Beloved,
 I prayed for you last night in the resounding silence.
 I prayed this day would greet you with some of the grace you deserve.
 That hope would descend with the dawn and the future would live up to the prayers of our foremothers.
 This is not the hill to die on, for you are life itself.
 Beloved, I pray you reach inside for the knowledge of who you are.
 Reach into the faces that weep with joy when they see yours.
 Inside of the hands that held you as you learned to live this journey.
 Inside of your own heart that beats so furiously for change to happen on the outside.
 I pray beloved, that you will never let this broken world hold a mirror up to you. Their chosen glass is cracked and soiled.
 Do not let the well-meaning smiles make you a fool. It is that way by design.
 To exploit your right to see and be seen and trick you into memorizing a distorted idea of yourself.
 I pray you are not led into temptation - Do not peak into the oppressor's looking glass hoping to see the royalty you come from.
 I pray you are delivered from evil. Be vigilant: For it goes by many names. Greed, selfishness, white supremacy, lust, envy, malice.
 I pray your dual consciousness brings you closer to true deliverance.
 Oh beloved...you do not know the joy you bring!
 The part that has rarely been told before is that you, living out this prayer, is the simplest act of rebellion. You are the promise kept by God to His people.
 The descendant of a people who were never supposed to be human.
 The heir of resilience the oppressor wishes you'd forgotten.
 The beauty of a culture that blooms with each twinkle of your eyes.
 And the liberator of a country that will never deserve your forgiveness.
 I pray you free yourself, my Beloved, by giving it anyway.

— Laurel Elliot

P R O M P T

Write a prayer for yourself,
 someone you love, or the world.

Allow

There is no controlling life.
Try corralling a lightning bolt,
containing a tornado. Dam a
stream and it will create a new
channel. Resist, and the tide
will sweep you off your feet.
Allow, and grace will carry
you to higher ground. The only
safety lies in letting it all in –
the wild and the weak; fear,
fantasies, failures and success.
When loss rips off the doors of
the heart, or sadness veils your
vision with despair, practice
becomes simply bearing the truth.
In the choice to let go of your
known way of being, the whole
world is revealed to your new eyes.

— Donna Fauld

P R O M P T

What do you need to surrender to
right now? What force can't you
control? What do you need to allow?

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What's Broken

The slate black sky. The middle step
of the back porch. And long ago
my mother's necklace, the beads
rolling north and south. Broken
the rose stem, water into drops, glass
knobs on the bedroom door. Last summer's
pot of parsley and mint, white roots
shooting like streamers through the cracks.
Years ago the cat's tail, the bird bath,
the car hood's rusted latch. Broken
little finger on my right hand at birth—
I was pulled out too fast. What hasn't
been rent, divided, split? Broken
the days into nights, the night sky
into stars, the stars into patterns
I make up as I trace them
with a broken-off blade
of grass. Possible, unthinkable,
the cricket's tiny back as I lie
on the lawn in the dark, my heart
a blue cup fallen from someone's hands.

— Dorianne Laux

P R O M P T

Tell me the truth about what's broken.

Adrift

Everything is beautiful and I am so sad.
This is how the heart makes a duet of
wonder and grief. The light spraying
through the lace of the fern is as delicate
as the fibers of memory forming their web
around the knot in my throat. The breeze
makes the birds move from branch to branch
as this ache makes me look for those I've lost
in the next room, in the next song, in the laugh
of the next stranger. In the very center, under
it all, what we have that no one can take
away and all that we've lost face each other.
It is there that I'm adrift, feeling punctured
by a holiness that exists inside everything.
I am so sad and everything is beautiful.

— Mark Nepo

P R O M P T

What is living in you at this moment?
What duet of wonder and grief marks your world?

Walk Slowly

It only takes a reminder to breathe, a moment to be still, and just like that, something in me settles, softens, makes space for imperfection. The harsh voice of judgment drops to a whisper and I remember again that life isn't a relay race; that we will all cross the finish line; that waking up to life is what we were born for. As many times as I forget, catch myself charging forward without even knowing where I'm going, that many times I can make the choice to stop, to breathe, and be, and walk slowly into the mystery.

— Dana Faulds

P R O M P T

Tell me about a moment of joy in the midst of grief, uncertainty or sadness. Enter the moment slowly. Include as much sensory detail as you can, so your reader can experience that moment of joy too. Slow way, way down.

“Writing is a way of saying that you and the world have a chance.”

— Richard Hugo

P R O M P T

Tell me about your hopes for the world.

Any Common Desolation

can be enough to make you look up
 at the yellowed leaves of the apple tree, the few
 that survived the rains and frost, shot
 with late afternoon sun. They glow a deep
 orange-gold against a blue so sheer, a single bird
 would rip it like silk. You may have to break
 your heart, but it isn't nothing
 to know even one moment alive. The sound
 of an oar in an oarlock or a ruminant
 animal tearing grass. The smell of grated ginger.
 The ruby neon of the liquor store sign.
 Warm socks. You remember your mother,
 her precision a ceremony, as she gathered
 the white cotton, slipped it over your toes,
 drew up the heel, turned the cuff. A breath
 can uncoil as you walk across your own muddy yard,
 the big dipper pouring night down over you, and everything
 you dread, all you can't bear, dissolves
 and, like a needle slipped into your vein—
 that sudden rush of the world.

— Ellen Bass

P R O M P T

Make a list of 30 things you're grateful for
 and for each one, include the reason why.
 If you get to thirty and you have more to say,
 keep going. Keep adding to your list.



Online Classes with Laura

TUESDAYS WITH LAURA: WRITING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

Writing is a powerful way to express our feelings and document our experiences as we move deeper into this time of pandemic. Each of us is immersed in our own unique evolving story right now whether we are sheltering in place, working the front lines, recovering from being sick, grieving for a loved one or for multiple losses in our lives. Our stories during this remarkable time, all those sensory details, all those moments of fresh experience should be recorded. Join Laura every Tuesday from 10-1 Pacific time to write and share real life stories in a remarkably intimate community of writers from all over the world. Sliding scale. Pay what you can afford.

[More information](#)

WEDNESDAY MORNING WRITING PRACTICE

This ongoing class is for students who want to use writing as a way to express themselves, explore their deepening creativity, grow as human beings and as writers, and strengthen their relationship with their own unique writing voice.

The Wednesday morning class is not a critique group in which we polish finished pieces. Rather, it is a workshop in which we use class time to create new material. We alternate periods of writing with learning to listen to each other—not from a place of judgment or analysis—but from a place of focused attention and deep acceptance.

This class is appropriate for people who write to know themselves better, who have stories they want to tell, or who want to use writing as a daily discipline or practice. Both aspiring and published writers benefit from the honesty and intimacy of our meetings. Many choose to continue well beyond their first session.

The Writer's Journey is rooted in writing practice, as developed by Natalie Goldberg in her classic books, *Writing Down the Bones* and *Wild Mind*, and is enhanced by my thirty+ years as a successful author, group facilitator, writing teacher, and community builder.

[More information](#)



FEEDBACK CLASSES WITH LAURA

Thursdays, 9:00am – 12:30pm Pacific Time

Thursdays, 6:00pm – 9:30pm Pacific Time

Laura’s Thursday feedback classes are designed for students who want to make progress on a focused project of their choice. It is designed for students who are already engaged in working on a narrative project of their own: a memoir, a collection of family history, essays, a novel, short stories.

Each week, the writers in Laura’s feedback classes sign up to get the suggestions and support from the group, whose role is to respond to the writing with editing and encouragement, to hold “each other’s feet to the fire,” and to help everyone in the group reach their personal writing goals.

Ira Progoff calls writing, “this solitary work we cannot do alone.” These classes provide the support necessary to persevere in creative work.

Students wanting to join one of these classes must have a personal consultation with Laura to discuss their project and their writing goals. New students are invited to join these classes on a rolling admissions basis as openings occur.

More information

You can learn about all of Laura’s classes [here](#).

To learn about Laura’s workshops and to be notified when she starts doing in-person retreats and writing/travel trips again, join her mailing list [here](#). During this time of pandemic, you’ll also receive her personally curated biweekly list of [annotated resources](#).

“My hope was that I could keep my pen moving and be courageous enough to tell the hard stories clearly and well. In Laura’s workshop, I got all of that and more. I treasure this experience. It was perfect for me.”

— Jessica Bersi, Lodi, CA



About Laura



Laura Davis is the author of seven bestselling non-fiction books, including [**The Courage to Heal**](#), [**Allies in Healing**](#), [**Becoming the Parent You Want to Be**](#), and [**I Thought We'd Never Speak Again**](#). Laura teaches [**writing workshops online**](#) and in her hometown of Santa Cruz, California, with a focus on building-community and writing as a tool for self-knowledge and healing. Once it is safe to travel again, Laura will once again lead transformative [**writing retreats**](#) around the world.

In this time of pandemic, as a service, Laura culls and sends out [**biweekly resources**](#) and also offers an international writing class, [**Tuesdays with Laura: Writing Through the Pandemic**](#), available on a sliding scale down to free.

Laura lives with her partner of 31 years, Karyn. They have three grown children, three grandchildren and live in Santa Cruz, California. Laura loves to swim, hike, write, make kombucha, play mahjong, build community, and work toward social change. She has written a memoir, *Wholehearted*.

www.lauradavis.net

www.facebook.com/thewritersjourney

[Instagram.com/laurasaridavis](https://www.instagram.com/laurasaridavis)