

# EXPANSIVE WRITING PROMPTS ON GENDER, SELF-LOVE, AND THE INFINITE

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1. Write a pep talk to your younger self, from your current self. Recall insecurities, fears, and past challenges. Then highlight your triumphs since. Surprise the kid you once were with the person you are now, opening the present like a gift. Celebrate who you have become and who you are still becoming. Work hard to not minimize what you might identify as only tiny successes. There is no such thing as a tiny success in a lifelong journey toward living into one's essence. Honor your path and the grit it takes to climb to the summit of ourselves.
2. Write a letter from the part of the body you love the most to the part of your body you love the least, or vice versa. For example, your weightless eyelashes could write a letter to your heavy heart.
3. Write about your gender through the details of your home or dwelling. Show as much of the space as possible [Cher poster on your wall, drum kit you've never played, a fake leather couch, a pink rotary phone in your 'man cave']. What does it say about who you are? Pay attention to, but don't be limited by, what is being revealed about you through what you notice.
4. Write a character witness letter for someone you have forgiven or feel it would be healthy to forgive. For example, a parent who regrets not being more supportive when

you came out about your gender identity or sexuality. If no one comes to mind, I invite you to write a character witness letter for yourself.

5. Write a complaint letter to God. Work to unpack as many emotions as possible. Keep an eye open for feelings you wouldn't necessarily expect to be stirred. After, imagine you are God (you are) and write out God's response.
6. What is something you are afraid to say to yourself? One truth you have been avoiding acknowledging? Write one paragraph you are terrified to write.
7. I once wrote "Your name is a gift you can return if it doesn't fit." Write about your relationship to your own name, and highlight how it relates to your gender.
8. Write a praise song for one of the biggest challenges in your life. What has this thing taught you about your own extraordinariness? How can this challenge be an opportunity for you to fall more deeply in love with who you are?
9. Imagine yourself in the afterlife, fully awakened. What do you have to say about how you are living your life now? Are there changes that Afterlife-You are suggesting you make now? Are there compliments Afterlife-You can't help but give?
10. Write about the intersection of two identities in your life (i.e. Jewish & Woman, Black & Queer, Working Class & Femme). I've found this to be one of the most insightful and empowering writing prompts in my own life, as the intersections I am moved to speak and write about change significantly from year to year.
11. A very short poem from long ago: "I suffer from unrequited self love. I love myself. But I don't love myself back." For your prompt: Diagnose the entirety of your life's problems in three sentences or less.
12. Some say there are as many genders as there are people. Write about your very unique gender. Consider beginning each statement by saying, "My gender is..." but finish each

sentence, not with an adjective, but an image. For example, “My gender is holding a seashell to my ear and hearing the prayers of my mother. My gender is tattooing a heart on my middle finger.”

13. Imagine you open your front door and there you are, another you. Imagine falling radically in love with this YOU. Go on and on and on about what is dropping your jaw. Start with what you find easy to love about you, and gradually move towards celebrating what you find harder to cherish. This piece should be a celebration, a giant party thrown for the wonder that you are.
14. Write about an experience of a holiday you celebrated as a child through the lens of gender. For example, the Christmas you were given a doll when you wanted a truck, or the first Thanksgiving when your brother brought his boyfriend to dinner.
15. Write a poem personifying your country. What does your country dream about, hope for, and fear? What does your country think about your gender? If your relationship with your country has changed over time, speak to that. Unpack the why. Get specific.
16. Write a poem about the death of someone you love, while giving specific attention to how that person’s passing impacted your relationship to your own life and death.
17. Many believe that when we die we are released from all suffering. Human bodies have been said to be suffocating places for souls to build their homes. Years ago, however, my therapist woke me to an entirely new idea: many spiritual groups believe that when a human dies, the soul misses the body. As someone who has had chronic illness for much of my life, I’m captivated by the idea that I might one day miss every aspect of my body—even its pain. For this prompt, I ask you to write a poem about everything you would miss about your body if you no longer had one. Give special attention to what you or others have historically criticized. Consider the possibility that those parts may be what you will miss the most.
18. Describe a relationship you want to happen, that hasn’t yet happened. It can be with

someone else, or with yourself. Be so colorful with your imagery that you might manifest it into existence. Get detailed. Don't be afraid to dream.

19. Write a poem that takes a question intended as small talk (i.e. "how's your day going?") and answer it as honestly as you possibly can. Don't be afraid to go on and on. Extra points for run-on sentences.

20. Write a poem about a relational interaction in which you were inclined to blame someone else for the entirety of the issue. Seek to find even tiny places where your actions were contributing factors to the problem. This is not at all a practice in guilt or shame, but instead a practice in accountability and recognizing one's power. If a close friend tells me a lie, for example, I find it inspiring to ask myself if I'm being a safe place for the truth. (Note: Be very careful not to do this with a traumatizing event. I, for example, would not use this prompt to write about sexual assault.)

21. Write about the relationship between two of your family members. Choose two people whose relationship stirs the most curiosity inside of you. As not everyone has two family members, or two family members they wish to write about, you may also choose two people in your community whose relationship lights up your pen.

22. Whenever I'm feeling a feeling I don't want to be feeling (fear, grief, anger), my therapist encourages me to "Make it bigger!" The process of welcoming the emotion commonly allows it to move more quickly out of my body. Write a major rant in which you make all the ranti-ness even bigger. The more dramatic, the better. Be as sarcastic as you can. Give each complaint some flare. Notice how you feel seeing it all on the page. Better? Worse? Both?

23. My therapist reminds me often that, "Shame can't live in the light." Thus, when we speak about our shame we have the opportunity to release it from our bodies. I once wrote, "The worst thing that ever happened to me was not the worst thing that ever happened to me. Hating myself for it was." Your prompt is to write a poem in which those lines are your first lines. If the lines don't resonate with you—write about why they do not resonate with you.

Note: When writing about trauma be very careful to prioritize your wellbeing. There is a time for everything. If now is not the time, be sweet to yourself and skip this prompt.

24. Write about what your social media accounts hide. Who are you without a filter? Notice what you present to the world, and what you don't. What lives behind the scenes? What don't you want people to see? How would your life be better/worse if people saw it? 25.

Write a one sentence peptalk that YOU need to hear.

26. Write a poem from the perspective of an inanimate object that has something new and vital to say about how you are currently viewing the world. Let the object's wisdom shift your perspective. Examples of objects—a wishing well, a ticket stub to the last concert you went to with you ex, your first chest binder, the knitted hat your sister made you when you started chemo.

27. Write about a time when someone (maybe you) turned something awful into something beautiful.

28. Science proved an atom can exist in two places at the same time. Place someone in your life (or yourself) in their darkest moment. Imagine where that person might be ALSO at the same time? For instance their third birthday party, a 7th grade dance, the funeral of a loved one.

29. Write a poem for a love/friend/family member in which you acknowledge what could have torn you apart, but didn't. Highlight the challenges that brought you closer, and whenever possible—consider writing with a lens that has you laughing out loud.

30. Write a thank you letter for a suggestion someone has given you. The first suggestion that comes to mind for me is, "How would it feel to stop saying "sorry" so much?" Another is, "Try listing things you're grateful for the minute you wake up." How did it alter you?

31. Write a poem about a moment in which you saw yourself in someone else. Detail how

that new perspective shifted your life's lens. It is typically far easier for us humans to have compassionate insight when witnessing our behaviors in others. For example, if I spend time with someone who has a difficult time apologizing when they've hurt someone, I find it becomes easy for me to quickly identify and remedy that inclination in myself.

32. So much in the world has not gotten better with time. The climate is worsening. Gun violence is worsening. The Industrial Prison Complex is worsening. After many years of writing about what has not gotten better I have had to, for my own spirit and wellness, spend a lot of recent time writing about things I have seen actually improve. In my poem "First Love" I wrote about my experience falling in love with a woman, what my world looked like in the first year I came out, and what has changed for the better in my life in the two decades since. Your prompt: Write a poem about something you have witnessed positively change over time. The more personal you can get with this piece, the more impactful it will be.