

## Writing Prompts on the Special Theme: Growth

### The ENGL 234 Class

*The ENGL 234 class is "Introduction to Writing, Editing, and Publishing." In this course, students focus on the publishing industry through the prism of little magazines. In the process of studying little magazines, ENGL 234 students contribute to the production of Floodwall, the student-run, campus literary magazine at the University of North Dakota.*

### The Prompts

Although the special call for submissions on the theme of growth has closed, the readers of Floodwall would like you to have the sequence of "Growth" prompts to inspire your creativity!

1.) Growth: noun. The act or process, or a manner of growing; development; gradual increase. Size or stage of development: It hasn't yet reached its full growth. completed development. Development from a simpler to a more complex stage: the growth of ritual forms.

Sometimes, in order to grow, we need to change. Change, however, can be hard—is hard. It's a journey, an experience, a person, a challenge; anything. How or why we grow into the people we want to become can happen from anything we encounter in this world. Sometimes it's easier achieving or understanding the growth we want for ourselves through others, perhaps even characters.

Try any of these prompts:

- Write a scene where your character is acknowledging things they want or need to let go of. Are they willing to let them go, or will they try to fight against it?
- Write a scene where your character is working hard towards a personal goal. How will they achieve it and why is it important for them to achieve it?
- Write a scene where your character wants to move forward in their life. Does your character have any regrets? If so, what are they and how can they get past them?

2.) You wipe the fog off the mirror, look, and you are faced with the reflection you have known for twenty-some-years. On this solemn Sunday morning, you are left with the opportunity to reminisce on the moments that have led to this one. Now, you

realize, it is through growth that you have become the person you are today.

Assume the position of the omniscient person above, and tell us, what does growth look like in your life? Literal or abstract, physically or mentally, personal or collective—tell us your story

3.) Pencil lines on a door frame. Shirts that once fit becoming crop tops. Too-long pajama bottoms becoming flood pants. Finally being able to fit into the jacket that your mother swore you'd grow into. Mixing up your shoes with your dad's, not because of the style, but because you now have the same size foot. Growth can be shocking, a delightful surprise, humorous, and even scary at times. With these aspects in mind, write a piece of nonfiction, fiction, or poetry focusing on the rapidity of physical growth and the sudden realization of it.

4.) Find a significant item from your childhood, whether it's a piece of clothing, a stuffed animal, or baby blanket, it doesn't matter. Write out what this object means to you and any important memories you have with it. Then write how those memories impacted you overall. Write the changes that the memories you have with your item of choice influenced the decisions you've made as you've grown up. Then use the words in the passages you wrote to write a poem about your growth over time.

5.) Imagine seeing two photographs in front of a character. One is of that character and their best friend from when they are very young. The other is of them in the present. Write about how that character sees their best friend's changes throughout the years.

6.) A Petri dish is a small glass enclosure that scientists use to observe the growth of a microorganism in isolation. Have you made any observations while living as an isolated organism during the last year? Many introverts have relished the chance to organize themselves and expand at their own pace in their own space, freed from the pressure of surviving in an unforgiving environment. For many extroverts, self- and government-imposed isolation has instead been a nightmarish experiment in human psychological limits, leaving them stymied and stressed, unable to flourish without the nourishment of a diverse world. What would you put in your lab report after a year of gathering data?

7.) Growth can happen in big or small ways. You could grow 2 inches in a month or you grow out of a bad habit. Growing up can go faster than you expected. Think back to elementary school when everything was simple. Do you remember waking up on the weekend morning and the most important thing was which cartoon show was premiering that day. Walking to the kitchen, you can already smell breakfast being

made. Write about a simple day in your childhood, then parallel it to now as a young adult and reflect on how those small excitements slowly shifted into different forms of entertainment or seriousness. Capture the innocence of being young and the growth you've gone through in the years after.

8.) Write a poem or a short story that responds to one of the following scenarios:

- A garden is slowly dying, until the owner's son comes to visit and decides to do something about it.
- Person A's significant other, Person B, has died. Person A has been in a depression for two years until they meet Person C. C helps A move on from their grief.
- Person A has a fear of water, but agrees to a boat trip with some close friends. However, when one of them gets injured, A must overcome their fear in order to help.
- Person A has been terrible at playing any instrument they touch. But their school rules change, and now every student has to play in either the orchestra or band. A has no choice but to try and get good at an instrument.

9.) Consider and write about the theme of growth as being facilitated by our capacity to wonder—the ability to imagine not how things are, but, instead, how things might be. How does wonder and imagination facilitate growth in individuals? Is all imaginative, or creative, activity inherently progressive?

10.) Growth can be subjective; one individual may see more or different types of growth in themselves compared to an outside source looking in. When it comes to the past year or so many individuals have had the opportunity to focus more on themselves and their friends and family while in lockdown. In what ways have you been able to improve yourself and seen yourself grow in the past year or the past few years? Growth can be seen with learning new skills, picking up a healthy habit, expanding music taste, reading new book, and trying new food. The possibilities are endless for personal growth, and no achievement is too big or small.

11.) We want to see how students have seen the word "growth" represented in their lives. This prompt challenges you to interpret this as intellectual growth. Perhaps you're a college student adapting to new learning styles. Or maybe you have been watching your sibling navigate kindergarten. Whatever it may be, write about how you have viewed or experienced intellectual growth, whether that's yours or someone else's.

12.) Climate change is affecting the world, whether people believe it or not. The

actions of humans dictate the future of Earth. That said, what does the end look like for humanity? Desolate? Green? Or does someone else step in to clean up after the humans?

13.) Does growth even involve agreement, or are we thinking about this all wrong? We are all separate, yet when we come together, beautiful things can happen. However, unless we are willing to work together—terrible things can happen. Our question for you is this: how do policies or laws come into play here, and at what point is the emphasis on growth, from a societal standpoint, an unethical one? You can explore this question in any genre or form you'd like.

14.) “You’re late.” How many of us have been haunted by those accusing words? Think of a moment in life where you felt late—or were late. Missing the bus for middle school, turning in an assignment late, or letting an opportunity slip through your fingers. For every moment that you’re “late” to, imagine a world where you made it to those singular or multiple events. Then, describe your growth.

15.) Growth is rarely easy. To explore this, try writing one or more of the following:

- Consider a character. Step into their shoes. Write a scene, a monologue, a soliloquy.
- Write about getting everything you’ve ever wanted, only to find it hollow and unsatisfying. Did everything change, or just you?
- Write about taking the easy way instead of the right way. The damage it can cause.
- Write about wrong choices and betrayal. About reconciliation and unconditional love.
- Write about realizing you’ve been wrong about something, for a long, long time, and there are consequences—for you and others. You don’t know how to fix it, but you know you have to try.

16.) I recently watched a personal favorite film of mine, the 2002 Christian movie called *Time Changer*, where a Bible seminary professor from 1890 travels via a time machine to the year 2002. When he arrives in the present, he is shocked at how different the culture in America had become in just over a hundred years. Times were much simpler back then; there were no cars, TV, radio, computers, or social media. Despite the problem-solving these machines and forms of entertainment provided, he saw them as a distraction from God. Write a journal entry or short story of whether you view these advances in technology as a positive or negative (or both) growth to our economy, efficiency, and our overall well-being.

17.) Growth is the purest and most refreshing sign of life. The budding of the flowers blooming after a frigid and frosty winter. The enchanting green of fresh spring grass or the returning of color to the lifeless iced-over trees. Spring is the perfect time to jump into the idea of growth and what it means to you as an individual. As the elements regain their magic and go through their own journey of growth, take the time to reflect on what it means to you as a person and what you can do to discover your own magic through ideas, words, and art.

18.) Growth occurs all around us. You may see it in the two-mile run times you've logged for the past month, the lengthening of days after the winter solstice, or (hopefully) in the grades of that class you put blood, sweat and tears into. Think about what growth means to you. Where do you see it in the past and present? How does it impact the future? Write your interpretation of growth.

19.) A baby is left abandoned on your front doorstep. You don't know why he was left with you, but it feels like a bit of a miracle, as you and your spouse have been trying to have children with no luck for years. After taking him to the hospital and talking to the police, you and your spouse decide this baby is meant to be yours, and officially adopt him.

It's been fourteen years, and you know teenage boys tend to go through growth spurts, plus, his biological parents could have been tall. But your son is now ten feet tall, with the body mass to fit, and hasn't yet fully grown into his big feet. Write the story of this family and the son's continued growth.

# Floodwall



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