

WRITE NOW

Write Now Microstory Contest 2026

Celebrating the 90th anniversary of the University of Iowa Writers Workshop.

Writing Prompt A:



Writing Prompt B:



Honorable Mentions

Grades 3 & 4

"The Recipe" by Bailey W., Iowa (Prompt B)

Page 2

Grades 5 & 6

"The Feedback" by Sunvi L., Iowa (Prompt A)

Page 3

Grades 7 & 8

"Unsolved" by Ellie E., Iowa (Prompt A)

"Talking to the Top" by Sloan M., Iowa (Prompt B)

Page 4

Grades 9-12

"The Lecture" by Shannon F., Iowa (Prompt B)

Page 5

Current UI Student:

"To Write Is to Relive" by Atsary Tiem, Iowa (Prompt A)

"The Final Lesson" by Adelynn Wijaya, Iowa (Prompt A)

Page 6

Adult, University of Iowa Alumni

"The Portrait Watches" by Calan Smidt (05BA, 15MA), Iowa (Prompt A)

Page 7

Adult, University of Iowa Non-Alumni (Friends)

"There's No Rule Like an Old Rule" by Kathie Muir (Prompt A)

Page 8

Grades 3 & 4, Honorable Mention**“The Recipe” by Bailey W., Iowa (Prompt B)**

One day, someone was speaking in a calm voice, and everyone started to fall asleep, including Violet. Violet’s turn was in a half hour. Violet wanted to keep everyone awake the whole time. 25 minutes had gone by, and Violet was practicing her speech in her head. She was confident in herself. Finally, it was time for Violet to go up and speak. She got up there and looked down at her paper. She saw her great-great-grandma’s banana bread recipe. Oh no! Thankfully, she memorized her speech. Yay! No one fell asleep, and the audience loved it.

Grades 5 & 6, Honorable Mention**“The Feedback” by Sunvi L., Iowa (Prompt A)**

“Write something emotional,” said Professor Engle.

I wrote about the aftermath of my father’s death in the war. Fact-filled, yet it was overflowing with sadness and grief, relatable to any reader. Professor Engle read it. “Incredible work,” and the class circled around to hear his feedback. Smiling, I replied “thank you.”

Grades 7 & 8, Honorable Mention

“Unsolved” by Ellie E., Iowa (Prompt A)

“This is it,” George whispered. “Everyone except Laine, please leave my office.”

He picked the photos up off the desk, and Laine, his assistant, sat down across from him.

“This is the evidence we have been waiting for; these are pictures of the criminal from the Roseberry High lockdown. They show the culprit’s eyes, fingerprint, hair color...”

George looked up.

“You?”

A smile tugged at Laine’s lips, and she pulled a gun out from behind her back, pointing it at his head. “Some cases are better left unsolved, George. Once these pictures are gone, I can finally walk free.”

BANG!

“Talking to the Top” by Sloan M., Iowa (Prompt B)

My hands tremble as my name is called. The speech is now a crumpled mess in my hand. I glide toward the podium while I try not to vomit. It’s only 5 minutes. I tell myself. I swallow, beginning my speech.

The words flow and dance on my tongue without thinking. Everything is happening so quickly, my brain hardly has time to catch up. *I can’t believe I’m actually doing it!* I can hardly blink before it’s over. I pull my beanie on tighter, anxiously waiting to see my place. Then I hear them announce it. I won.

Grades 9-12, Honorable Mention**“The Lecture” by Shannon F., Iowa (Prompt B)**

“Mongolian battle tactics were quite barbaric, often catapulting plague-ridden corpses into enemy fortresses...” *What a horrible thing to be remembered by*, thought Zoe as she listened to the droning lecture. Her mind drifted to wondering what things will be recounted about the present world in lectures a thousand years from now. Will they still primarily focus on negative things, such as the lecture today? Or perhaps by then they’ll shift to dwell on the positives. She smiled, imagining herself in a lecture many years from now, learning about how the whole world had united to support one foreign soccer player.

Current UI Students, Honorable Mention

"To Write Is to Relive" by Atsary Tiem, Iowa (Prompt A)

The students gaze starry-eyed at the pages in my hand, crowding in awe for all the wrong reasons. They believe this is complete, that it is whole.

"A manuscript is not a finished product," I say to them. "What I hold captures an attempted reconstruction of a human experience. But translation, remember, is imperfect. We exchange crucial details for minima, brevity. We trade meaning for fascinating yet narratively irrelevant ideas. A manuscript is not a finished project, but a second beginning."

As I finish, the students' eyes shift from awe to understanding: to write is to live and relive again.

"The Final Lesson" by Adelynn Wijaya, Iowa (Prompt A)

The professor tells them to listen closely, so they crowd around him. The room isn't small; it's large enough to fit fifty people. But the four students lean in close anyway, as if he were a prophet revealing his final foretelling.

"Listen," he says, "to what makes a good story."

He proceeds to unveil his secrets in whispers. No one else speaks. The students hold their breaths as they simply listen.

The professor sets the paper aside and addresses his students. His eyes shine as he regards them.

"Now go," he says. "Go forth and write your own."

Adult, University of Iowa Alumni, Honorable Mention

“The Portrait Watches” by Calan Smidt (05BA, 15MA), Iowa (Prompt A)

Every Thursday, the portrait watched hopeful writers step forward. Another story. Another writer. Another chance to outlive its author. The professor received each page with careful hands, as if paper could fracture beneath the weight of possibility. Ink was cheap. Promise was not. The portrait had witnessed decades of voices arrive uncertain and leave unforgettable. It offered no applause, no criticism. Only its unbroken gaze, reminding every student that immortality has always begun the same way: with someone brave enough to hand over a single page. Years did pass. The portrait kept watch.

Adult, University of Iowa Non-Alumni (Friends), Honorable Mention

"There's No Rule Like an Old Rule" by Kathie Muir (Prompt A)

Beth struggled to find her topic until she remembered the age-old maxim to write what you know. Her initial indecision channeled into purpose. Satisfaction overcame doubt. Her mood calmed as she reconciled herself to the finished product. Too late for changes, too soon for results. Professor Havers accepted her paper with a dismissive nod, but she loitered nonetheless. He glossed over the title, "To Catch a Predator," without changing his expression. Reading further, his frown lines deepened, his eyes narrowed. He gave her a perplexed look and announced her failing grade just as the police came to arrest him.