Creative Writing

Competition Information
2026-27



IMPORTANT!

- An adult MUST proofread the story and help students correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar.
- WORD documents submitted MUST be checked to be sure they meet the requirements.
- Stories that do not meet the requirements when opened will be RETURNED to be fixed.

Entries due Friday, January 15, 2027
Entry fee $40

Wisconsin Future Problem Solving

Creative Writing Competition 2026-27



What is FPS Creative Writing?

FPS Creative Writing is an individual competition in which students develop short stories of 1500 words or less. The story has a single author, is set at least 20 years in the future, is related to one of four topics for the year, and is an imagined but logical outcome of actions or events taking place in the world today. It is written as though the future were the present.

Why Creative Writing?

To prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century, Future Problem Solving teaches students to think critically, creatively, and futuristically. The Creative Writing component of FPS strives to help students enlarge, enrich, and make more accurate their images of the future, while honing their creative writing skills. FPS Creative Writing personalizes the ever-growing perspective a student has on the future. A rubric-based authentic evaluation is provided, giving students feedback for continued growth.

Who can participate in Creative Writing?

Students may participate in Creative Writing in three divisions: Junior (grades 4-6), Middle (grades 7-9), and Senior (grades 10-12). For students who participate in the Global Issues Problem Solving component of FPS, Creative Writing can serve as an excellent complement to their work on any of the annual topics. Creative Writing is also an excellent offering for students who do not participate in other components of FPS; the writing involved may appeal to students who are not drawn to the team orientation of the other components. Creative Writing can be used as a stand-alone activity by an FPS coach, an English teacher, a parent, or any instructor with students who are interested in creative writing.

Creative Writing Topics 2026-2027

- Digital Dark Age
- Disappearing Cultures
- Influencer Marketing
- Health Security

Do students need to know the six-step creative problem solving process for Creative Writing?

The creative problem solving process is used in the Global Issues and Community Problem Solving components. Although knowing the process can help students to think about the future, it is not a prerequisite for Creative Writing. Since stories must relate to one of the annual topics, it is important that students complete background reading and research on their chosen topic.

How can I get started with my students?

The best way to become acquainted with the stories is for you and your students to read many of them. See the Links for Coaches page for more information. You can purchase Wisconsin's award winning scenarios with 27 stories.

Excerpt from *Asphodel*

Senior Division, Topic: Human Environment Impact
2021: 1st Place Wisconsin FPS, 3rd Place, Int'l FPS

"Darling, come down from there," Miriam calls below her, soft and bright, highlighted against the sky with Bodhi propped up on her shoulders, and Jayna is weak for the love of them.

"Just a moment!"

Jayna shifts, brittle bark crumbling beneath her fingers, looking out once more at the desolate landscape that stretches out before them; nothing but the skeletal remains of vegetation, bone white trees that bear no leaves. Gas hangs in the distance, a distinct, poisonous yellow clouding her view of the mountains that loom ahead.

She grinds her teeth a little. The gas looks thick, might actually *be* poisonous, and there's no telling what it'll do to her or Miriam, much less a child like Bodhi, Otherling though he is. But there it is, all the same, and they've been delayed enough. If they want to make it to safety at Elysium before Sun-dark and the deadly winter it heralds, they cannot afford the time it will take to go around.

How much help should I give?

The student's writing must be original. As a coach, you may read the student's work, ask questions that occur to you as a reader, and make general suggestions for improvement. Authors must receive adult help to correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. Students should complete multiple drafts.

How are the stories evaluated?

Stories are read and scored by experienced evaluators who consider these elements: creative thinking, futuristic thinking, idea development, style/voice, character development, mechanics/structure, and topic related research. See the Evaluation page for more info.

How do I enter student work for Creative Writing?

Follow the requirements for submitting entries as outlined in this document. Entry forms can be found at wisfps.org. Click on Registration & Fees. Entries are due mid-January.

What are the levels of competition?

Wisconsin selects three winning scenarios in each division. The writers of these winning stories will be invited to attend the opening activities at State Bowl, where they will read the stories at a division session. The stories will be published in an anthology. All writers who score well in the first round of evaluation will be invited to participate in a Creative Writing Team Competition at State Bowl. First-place winners are eligible to compete in the Creative Writing Competition at the International Conference World Finals in June.

FPS Creative Writing Submission Requirements 2026-27

Please distribute to students who are preparing stories for competition.

STORY CONTENT

At least 20 years in the future	The story is one that might take place as a logical outgrowth of actions or events that took place earlier. It is a prediction of the future and must be written *as though the future were the present.* Futuristic concepts and trends are incorporated into the story, but a specific date is not required.
Develop a character	We should really get to know at least one character – thoughts, feelings, actions. One or two main characters are enough, with perhaps one or two additional minor characters at most. There is not enough length to develop multiple characters.
Related to one of the FPSPI topics	 The story must have a recognizable relationship to one of the topics for the year. You can find information on the topics in this document. It should be obvious which topic you are using in the story. *Readings, Research, and Resources* has chapters with an overview and article summaries on the topics. See the Links for Coaches page to purchase.

DOCUMENT DETAILS – Coaches check all before submitting!

Max of 1500 words	Use a WORD doc computer count of words. The title is not included in the count.
Title on first page	Center the title on the first page of your story. Use bold 14-point font. No author's name, school, or affiliate may appear in the story document.
Double-spaced; 1" margins	Double-check this! Use double spacing, not space-and-a-half! Tab to indent paragraphs but do not put extra space between them unless to show the passing of time. Use 1-inch margins, not 1.25 inches.
12 point font	The font MUST be 12-point and easily readable. Use Arial, Cambria, Calibri, Times, or Times New Roman. DO NOT use script fonts or all caps.
Adult proofing	An adult MUST proofread your work and assist you to correct errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. The adult should not change your word choices. (See Guidelines for Adult Proofreaders for details on proofreading.)

ENTRY SUBMISSION – All must be submitted by the COACH. Label correctly!

Document	Format	Label document	Submit
Creative Story	Microsoft WORD only	Junior Smith Story Middle Jones Story Senior Anderson Story	By e-mail to lynn.wisfps@gmail.com Do NOT send files with Google Docs.
Story Entry Form	Microsoft WORD only	Junior Smith Entry Middle Jones Entry Senior Anderson Entry	
Publication Release	PDF scanned & e-mailed	Single student or batch from coach: Junior Smith Release (stud) Junior Coach Bauer Releases (coach)	
Fees	$40 per scenario. Check or cash mailed, POs mailed or e-mailed		If mail, by postmark date: Wisconsin FPS 3318 Conservancy Lane Middleton, WI 53562

All four parts of the entry must be e-mailed or postmarked by January 15, 2027

If your students use Google Docs,
the COACH must make all the conversions and corrections
and submit in the correct PDF and WORD formats

While your students may write their drafts in Google docs, we do NOT accept submissions that are sent via Google Docs or Google Drive. These are some examples of what we do not accept:

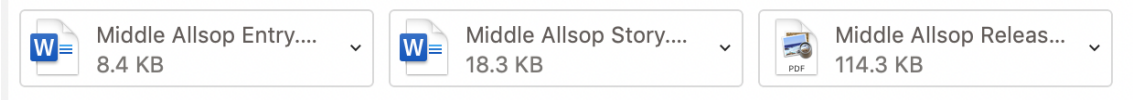




Conversion information

- Even though the examples on the left above show extensions of .pdf and .docx, when you click on them, they are NOT YET pdf and Word documents. They are still Google documents.
- After clicking any of the examples above, they must be DOWNLOADED to the computer desktop and then ATTACHED to an email. All computers have pdf software. To download the .docx ones, the computer must have Microsoft Word software.
- **After downloading the Story documents, you MUST recheck them for formatting and word count.** These are some things that may not convert correctly:
  - Word count – In 2020 a story with a word count of 1500 in Google Docs had a count of 1593 in Microsoft Word, which is the official count. This story had to be edited down to 1500 words.
  - Line spacing and paragraphing
  - Margins
- Note: Release PDFs must be scanned PDFs, not photos taken and turned into PDFs.

Submitted documents must be *attached* and look like this:



All documents MUST be titled correctly

- Division/Last Name/Release or Story or Entry
- There must be a space between each word
- The sample on the right above (MiddleNathansonRelease) is not labeled correctly as there are no spaces between the words; the rest are labeled correctly

Why so picky about the document titles?

- When titled correctly, the documents line up by division and then by last name when put into the same computer folder.
- This makes them easy to find. This is absolutely essential when dealing with 60-120 submissions, each with 3 documents.
- Organizing all of the documents and checking all of the word counts is already a time-consuming process. If labeled incorrectly, documents will be returned to be renamed and resubmitted!
- Note: **MANY** stories have errors in formatting: titles, margins, paragraphing, line spacing, fonts, etc. Please check these and indicate they are correct on the entry sheet.

Real World Topics



Digital Dark Age

Science & Technology

Practice Problem 1

How might we prioritize data to save and reduce the effects of information loss in the future?



Disappearing Cultures

Civics & Society

Practice Problem 2

How might the losses of endangered cultures across the world impact individuals and communities in the future?



Influencer Marketing

Business & Economics

Qualifying Problem

How might influencer marketing evolve as businesses strive to preserve their credibility while maximizing profits in the future?



Health Security

Science & Technology

Affiliate Finals Problem

How might health security efforts prevent, prepare for, and mitigate the impact of public health crises in the future?

World Finals Topic

TBD

We invite regional affiliate champions to attend our International Conference and compete alongside their peers in our world finals. We will announce a fifth problem topic on **March 1, 2027** for use at the **June 2027** competition.

Visit our topics center to learn more about each topic and access topic-specific resources.

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Practice Problem 1



Digital Dark Age

Science & Technology

How might we prioritize data to save and reduce the effects of information loss in the future?

Visit our topics center to learn more about our Digital Dark Age topic, view suggested readings and access additional resources.

Background

The Digital Dark Age is an inability to access previously collected documented files, photos, and other information stored in outdated file formats, software, or hardware. Data becomes corrupt, scarce, or otherwise inaccessible as technology changes and physical media decays.

Context

Technology is constantly evolving with what once was considered revolutionary is now outdated, and progressively discarded. Information technology does not exist in a vacuum; digital media requires supplemental technologies to retrieve the information. Discs, drives, and other mediums can deteriorate. Even when preserved, the information can be lost without its specific reader. Proprietary file formats fall prey to the Digital Dark Age, as they are less widespread and preserving them increasingly difficult. Conservators and other data specialists strive to ensure digital information remains available. The Internet Archive is one of many organizations dedicated to preserving digital information for future generations. Updating files to modern formats has many obstacles, including expense, expertise, and equipment demands. Many archivists do not have the resources to update file formats for all items in their catalogues.

Questions to Explore

- How should archivists decide which data to prioritize saving?
- What methods can be used to modernize outdated file types?
- How might the loss of information affect the future of humanity?

Central Themes

1. Fragility of digital information
2. Logistics and ethics of data preservation
3. Societal impact of memory loss
4. Innovation in digital preservation

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Practice Problem 2



Disappearing Cultures

Civics & Society

How might the losses of endangered cultures across the world impact individuals and communities in the future?

Visit our topics center to learn more about our Disappearing Cultures topic, view suggested readings and access additional resources.

Background

Disappearing cultures, also called endangered or vanishing cultures, represent the unfortunate phenomenon where unique and often ancient ways of life, traditions, languages, and customs face the risk of extinction. These cultures are typically marginalized and/or indigenous. They are threatened by factors such as globalization, urbanization, assimilation, environmental changes, conflict, and government policies.

Context

The loss of a culture is not merely the fading of customs and rituals; it often entails the disappearance of valuable knowledge, worldviews, and a rich tapestry of human heritage. Preserving and celebrating these diverse cultures is vital, not only for the communities themselves but for humanity as a whole. Culture contributes to the tapestry of human diversity and offers unique insights into alternative ways of living and understanding the world. Efforts to document, protect, and revitalize endangered cultures are ongoing, emphasizing the need for respect, cooperation, and the preservation of cultural diversity in an increasingly interconnected world.

Questions to Explore

- What role does cultural change as a result of globalization have on cultures?
- What strategies are being employed to revitalize and renew cultural practices?
- In the face of cultural loss, how are individuals and communities impacted?
- What are some ways to prevent the vanishing of cultures?

Central Themes

1. Globalization and cultural transformation
2. Cultural heritage and knowledge loss
3. Preservation and revitalization efforts

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Qualifying Problem



Influencer Marketing

Business & Economics

How might influencer marketing evolve as businesses strive to preserve their credibility while maximizing profits in the future?

Visit our topics center to learn more about our Influencer Marketing topic, view suggested readings and access additional resources.

Background

Influencers combine marketing with their presence in the public eye to persuade others. By establishing devoted fan bases for specific brands and profiting from their visibility, they have revolutionized the advertising industry. Marketing influencers impact a variety of platforms such as online sources, television, music, and print media. These strategies aim to build trust and credibility by associating products with a respected figure, thereby influencing consumer behavior.

Context

Influential media is a complex marketing environment. Influencers shape consumer behavior with seemingly authentic recommendations. This type of media has developed hybrid advertising, blending personal and commercial messaging. Brands invest heavily in these collaborations because they can easily reach targeted audiences, especially younger viewers. Combining personal content and advertising raises complex transparency, authenticity, and consumer trust issues. The industry now struggles to preserve credibility while maximizing profits.ment but also fields like education, cognitive science, and virtual reality.

Questions to Explore

- What risks do brands face when partnering with influencers whose personal actions might affect brand reputation?
- How does the integration of advertising content impact an influencer's perceived authenticity?
- What role do platform algorithms play in determining which sponsored content reaches which audiences?
- What are legal and ethical implications of disguising advertisements as personal content?
- How does commercialization of personal content affect follower trust and engagement?

Central Themes

1. The power of influence in marketing
2. Authenticity and credibility
3. Risks and responsibilities
4. The future of influencer marketing

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Affiliate Finals Problem



Health Security

Science & Technology

How might health security efforts prevent, prepare for, and mitigate the impact of public health crises in the future?

Visit our topics center to learn more about our Health Security topic, view suggested readings and access additional resources.

Background

Health security is a critical component of public health and global well-being, encompassing measures and strategies to protect populations from the threats of infectious diseases, biological hazards, and other health emergencies. It involves various activities, from disease surveillance, early detection, and rapid response to developing effective vaccines and medical countermeasures.

Context

Health security efforts are essential for preventing, preparing for, and mitigating the impact of public health crises, such as pandemics, bioterrorism, and natural disasters. Recent events, like the COVID-19 pandemic, have underscored the importance of robust health security systems and international cooperation in safeguarding public health globally. Investments in health security infrastructure, research, and emergency preparedness are vital to ensuring the resilience of healthcare systems and the protection of communities and individuals in the face of health-related threats. ractices, especially in the context of technology and the digital landscape.

Questions to Explore

- How can we ensure that everyone can have proper access to medical care?
- Is medical care something that can be equitized?

Central Themes

1. Comprehensive health security systems
2. Global health collaboration
3. Investment in preparedness and resilience
4. Equal access to medical care

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Tips for Creative Writing (Scenario) Coaches

General

- A great place to start is to review the evaluation criteria with students; then read a number of past stories, discussing them in light of the criteria.
- When submitting for the competitive round, follow the Submission Requirements carefully (1,500 words, title on the first page of the scenario, double-spaced, correct fonts and margins, etc.).

Topics: Review each of the four topics with students.

- Which topic interests them the most?
- Generate imagined futures for the topics.



Research: Students should read as much material on their chosen topic as they need to understand its various facets.

- See the Links for Coaches page to access information on purchasing chapters from the *Research Unit* publications about the topics.
- As students read, have them take notes on facts, which may be useful in their writing, as well as impressions or ideas they get while reading the materials.

Problem Solving Model: If students are familiar with the 6-step problem solving model, encourage them to use a shortened version based on their readings on the topic to help them clarify their thinking, as well as provide sources for a story theme.

- A suggested shortened version of the process includes 6-8 challenges for Step 1, an underlying problem for Step 2, and 6-8 solution ideas for Step 3.
- What outcomes and scenarios might result from using the problem solving model?

Characterization: Scenario writers should identify a central, identifiable, sustained character(s) – animate or inanimate.

- 1-2 main characters are usually enough for a story of this length.
- Character development should take place throughout the events of the scenario.

Futuristic Elements: Scenarios should read as though the future is the present.

- A strong portrayal of futuristic trends and predictions should be evident.
- Overly lengthy explanations and descriptions of technology and social trends can interfere with the flow of the scenario that should be placed 20 years in the future.

Post-Writing: Provide opportunities for writers to participate in peer review to improve and discuss their writing.

(Tips for Scenario Coaches continued)

Be an Active Coach!!

The student's work must be original. However, before submission each student's story should be read by an adult who will discuss the story with the student or provide written feedback. Use the evaluation criteria to guide your feedback.

Feedback: Legitimate assistance provides feedback and food for thought but does not make decisions for students about the writing.

- Point out strengths
  - (Good word choice here. Strong visual image. Etc.)
- Ask questions that occur to you as a reader
  - (Why did the spaceship land in the middle of the city? What happened to the rest of the travelers, who only showed up in the first paragraph? Etc.)
- Make general suggestions for improvement
  - (More visual description might give us a clearer image. You might want to let us know what she is thinking. More futuristic details might be good. Etc.)

Author Decisions: It should be up to the student author to determine what revisions to make in response to the questions and suggestions.



Guidelines for Adult Proofreaders

Share this page with adult proofreaders.

All authors **MUST** have adult an adult proofreader who will work with them on correcting formatting, spelling, punctuation, and glaring grammar mistakes. This does not need to be the coach. The proofreader **SHOULD NOT CHANGE WORD CHOICES**. All corrections should be discussed with the author. The copy submitted should be as error free as possible.

Work with the student to check each of these items in the document that will be submitted. On the entry sheet, put an X for each item that has been checked:

- ☐ The computer word count is a maximum of 1500 words. The title is not counted.
- ☐ The title is centered on the first page, NOT in the header. The title should be bold and 14-point font.
- ☐ A 12-point font is used for the story. The font used is Arial, Cambria, Calibri, Times, or Times New Roman. NO script or other unusual fonts should be used, except in small instances for a special effect.
- ☐ Margins are consistently 1 inch, NOT 1.25 inches, unless used for special effect.
- ☐ The text is set to double space, NOT space and a half. There are no extra blank lines between paragraphs, except to show the passing of time.
- ☐ All paragraphs, including dialogue, are indented. Tabs, NOT spacing, are used for indenting paragraphs. Other formatting is allowed for a few special effects in the story.
- ☐ Dialogue is punctuated correctly. The proofreader MUST be knowledgeable about punctuating dialogue. This can be challenging, especially for young students, but it must be done accurately.
- ☐ There are no mistakes in punctuation, spelling, and grammar.



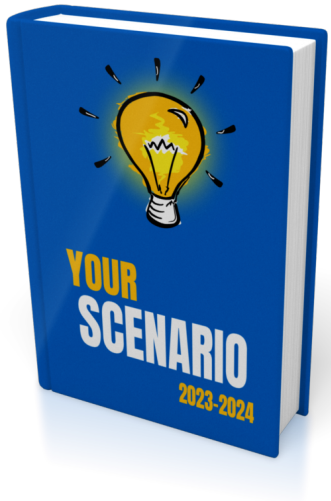
These items MUST be correct in the Word doc that is submitted. Do NOT submit a document that has not been checked.

Tips for Creative Writing (Scenario) Authors

General

- Creative ideas *and* good writing are both important in FPS Creative Writing.
- When submitting for the competitive round, follow the instructions carefully (word count, typed, double-spaced, title on the first page of the scenario, etc.). See the Submission Requirements for more information.

Pre-Writing



- Read and gather information in *Readings, Research and Resources; Omni*; *Futurist*; *Discover*, etc.
- Use creative problem solving generating tools to come up with a title that captures the essence of your story.
- Write an outline and rough draft of your story.
- Use key words or phrases to indicate the topic and the time period in which your story is set.

Technique

- A narrative, dialogue, diary, journal, and letter are among appropriate formats for writing the story.
- Conflict, adventure, suspense, humor (satire, parody) can be used in the development of the story.
- Use first or third person.
- Incorporate dialogue, if it is appropriate to do so.
- To give background information, "bits and scratches" in dialogue and/or thoughts in a sentence or two work best. Blocks of flashback may be too long for 1,500 words.
- Show, don't tell!
    - Telling: He got out of bed and sat at his desk to start the day.
    - Showing: Gradually, he rubbed the sleep from his eyes and shuffled out of bed, pulling on a worn corduroy robe before settling at his desk to start the day.

Character(s)

- Use a minimum number of characters, animate or inanimate (usually 1–2 protagonists).
- Introduce main character(s) as soon as possible.
- Place the lead character directly into the situation developed in the story.
- Demonstrate how things have changed and how the main character is affected.
- If conflict is a central part of the story, lead to the point where the character(s) has a chance to "win, lose or draw." This sets up a moment of suspense.

(Tips for Scenario Authors continued)

Creative and Futuristic Thinking

- Incorporate creativity into your writing – use inventive, innovative, original, resourceful ideas.
- Incorporate futuristic thinking into your writing – portray futuristic information and trends. (It is fun to explain how inventions affect our future lives, but don't "overgadgetize.")

Idea Development

- Involve the audience (readers) immediately in the introductory paragraph.
- Develop the idea of the story to point out positive social and cultural aspects or the consequences of doing without them.
- Form the climax as a logical outgrowth of the story line or character development.
- Provide a resolution to any conflict developed in the story.
- Provide a conclusion. Be sure to end; don't just stop without giving the reader something to think about.



Style/Voice

- Demonstrate a consistent voice/tone throughout the story.
- Exhibit the author's personal touch through vivid, colorful description that gives the writing life and spirit.
- Vary the sentence structure and use interesting vocabulary.
- Be aware of your audience. Involve readers by writing to elicit an emotional response from them.

Mechanics/Structure

- Use appropriate grammar, effective sentence structure, and conventions to enhance meaning.
- Use effective organizational strategies and appropriate transitional elements.

Post-Writing

- Edit, edit, edit! Do NOT submit a first draft.
- Read for revisions: Is the story whole, unified, coherent? Are paragraphs/sections clear, unified, coherent?
- Your coach should give you feedback for improvement based on the evaluation criteria.
- You **MUST** have an adult proofread your work before submission.

Links for Coaches

Use these links to learn about the Creative Writing program. This program is also known as Scenario Writing in some affiliates. These links are from fpspi.org and resources.futureproblemsolving.org. Share these links with students and adults.

Learn about the program

- Quick Start Guide: Creative Writing
- Creative Writing program page
- How much help may a student receive for Creative Writing?
- Do students need to know the 6-step process for Creative Writing?
- What do the Creative Writing registration fees cover?
- How to submit Creative Writing on FPSOnline

Learn more about Creative Writing narratives

- Tips for Creative Writing submissions
- What is futures thinking?
- How to research for Creative Writing checklist
- How is Creative Writing evaluated?

Learn about our topics

- 2026-27 Topics – Topics by hemisphere
- Digital Dark Age topic & suggested readings
- Disappearing Cultures topic & suggested readings
- Influencer Marketing topic & suggested readings
- Health Security topic & suggested readings
- Coming March 1: International Conference topic & suggested readings

Read examples of student work

- Student Work: Writing – Antibiotic Resistance (Junior)
- Student Work: Writing – Building Green (Middle)
- Student Work: Writing – Gamification (Senior)

Buy resources for Creative Writing topics

- All 2026-27 Topics – Research Unit
- Digital Dark Age – Research Unit
- Disappearing Cultures – Research Unit
- Influencer Marketing – Research Unit
- Health Security – Research Unit
- Coming March 1: International Conference topic – Research Unit

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Links for Coaches

Buy resources for Creative Writing support

Creative Writing champions publication – includes 6 future scenes and 8 champion stories

Teach problem solvers with free tools

Free Tool: Categories List for Generating and Focusing Ideas
Free Tool: Futures Wheel Graphic Organizer
Free Tool: Research Chart (KWL)
Free Tool: Advantages/Limitations Chart (ALoU)
Free Tool: Self Assessment
Free Tool: S.M.A.R.T. Goal Setting
Free Tool: SCAMPER (Boost Your Creativity)
Free Tool: Preparing to write about the future
Free Tool: Story Conflicts Notes
Free Tool: Story Plot Outline

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