

As Time Goes by – ‘500 word’ topics – “Master Sheet” – 2015 to 2020

Acknowledgement re Topics– ABC Open’s ‘500 Words’ On-Line Topic Collection (Archived by ABC in August 2019); member suggestions; Joy’s ‘Creative Boot Camp’ book; convenor’s brain waves, and more.

Year	Month	Topic	Brief	Your theme?	Decade?
2015	March	‘Lost in Music’	Music can have a powerful effect on our emotions and create a lasting impact on our memory. Describe an experience when you got lost in a single piece of music, and what made it so unforgettable.		
2015	April	'A Friendship Tested'	A true friend is there through thick and thin, but not all friendships survive under pressure. Tell us about a time when a friendship was put to the test. Did it strengthen your relationship, or push it over the edge?		
2015	May	‘Grandparents’	Describe your relationship with a grandparent using one fond memory. Draw on your senses to recall specific details and reflect on the impact he or she made on your life. It may be the time Gran nearly set the kitchen on fire with the Christmas pudding, or the time your 92 year-old Grandpa rode the Octopus with you at Luna Park. It could be a story about your Grandmother’s heritage and how she came to Australia; about the era your Grandfather represents, and the role he played in your upbringing or a special ritual you shared.		
2015	June	‘I quit’	Tell your story of quitting. Did you quit a sport, a job, a bad habit? Was quitting your act of defiance or were you giving up? ...“We've all quit something - a job, a musical instrument, a food group or a bad habit. Tell us your story of quitting. What brought you to breaking point? Was it exhilarating or challenging to quit? What strengths did you draw upon and how did people react? What new opportunities were created once you quit?”		
2015	July	‘Lost and Found’	‘Write about a time you lost something you owned, treasured, or believed in - and the lengths you went to, to get it back. Maybe it was a precious family heirloom you misplaced, an adventurous toddler who wandered out of sight, or perhaps you lost your way in an unfamiliar place. Take us on the search to find your lost thing. How did the loss affect you and those around you? Were you reunited? Was it back to business as usual, or did your life change in ways you could never imagine?’		

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2015	August	'Car Stories'	'So many formative moments happen in cars – tell us about a memorable experience you had in yours. It could be your first taste of P-plate freedom, a revealing in-transit conversation, or how an accident, a flat tyre, or parking ticket set off a chain of events in your day...or?		
2015	September	'For Better or Worse'	'Share your story of a long-term romantic relationship and what kept or has kept you together. How did it start? What did/have you learned through the ups and downs?' (ABC Open Topic, September 2015)		
		'Cringe'	Your eyes squint, your cheeks burn red, your teeth grate. Share a personal cringe-worthy tale of woe that you can't quite forget!		
2015	October	'A test of courage'	<i>'Has your courage ever been tested? Tell us a story of your bravery, or when you should have been brave but couldn't summon the courage.'</i> Has life ever presented you with a situation that forced you to dig deep, to do something that put you at risk? Maybe it was a split second reaction when you helped someone in harms way, or something you deliberated over for years, like a love letter. It could be as personal as telling a friend a difficult truth, or as public as protesting against what you believe is wrong. What was at stake, and what strengths did you need to draw upon in the face of pain or grief? What did you learn about yourself from doing something that was frightening?		
2015	October/November	'Stand Up Comedy Set'	An optional task – to create a 'stand up comedy set' on a topic dear to you. If you'd like some resources to help you with the task, go to		
2015	November	'Once upon a time' ... 500 word childrens' bed-time story set in Benalla District/North East Victoria...	Think about a story line for a bed-time story you made up for your children or your children loved, or perhaps that you loved as a child. Set it in Benalla, its surrounding district and/or North East Victoria. Read/Google ideas others have found work well in a bed-time story. Write a bed-time story of around 500 words for eg. a five-year old. The age group isn't mandatory...or even needing to be a bedtime story...go with your own creative juices!		
2015	Holiday Break/December	'What I was wearing'	Some items of clothing are linked to memories, emotions and experiences; The 'lucky job interview' undies, the jacket you wore on your first date, or a bikini that didn't fare well in water. Tell us how an outfit played a part during a significant moment... Choose one item of clothing that has a special		

			<p>meaning for you. Perhaps it was a hand-me-down, a unique find at a market or an expensive splurge. Why is it special? What significant moments occurred while you were wearing it? What do you think, feel and remember when you see it? Also, think about what it means to you now.</p> <p>Take or find a photo of the clothes to present with your story.</p>		
2016	Holiday Break/ January	'How I came here'	<p>Baghdad to Broome, city to country, rural to coast - tell us about your move for a better life.</p> <p>It could be a story of migration, a tree or sea change adventure, returning to your hometown, or moving for work or love.</p> <p>Where did you move from, and why? What challenges did you face? What connects you to where you live now?</p>		
2016	February	Holiday Topics	'What I was wearing' and/or 'How I came here' (Refer above)		
2016	March	Heartbreak	<p>Tell us about your experience of a broken heart. It could be a light-hearted story of a fling or online date gone wrong, or a deeper story of love. What were you hoping for, and what went wrong? Was there a positive side to the experience? What did you learn about yourself?</p>		
2016	April	My Other Life	<p>Are you a collector of model trains, a swing dance enthusiast or a weekend activist? Share a story about something unusual you get up to outside of work, or a side of yourself that other people don't normally see...</p> <p>Tell us about your unusual passion and how you first got involved in it. How does your 'other self' contrast with the side most people see? What satisfaction does your other life offer you that you don't get from your day-to-day life? How does your passion contribute to you as a whole person?</p>		
2016	May	Shaped by Childhood	<p>Describe one formative experience from your childhood, and how it helped shape the person you grew up to be.</p> <p>It could be a treasured family ritual, an early friendship, an influential teacher or your first experience of losing a loved one.</p> <p>Think about an experience that's influenced you and share it with us.</p> <p><i>Alternative topic: 'Anzac Day'</i></p>		

Year	Month	Topic	Brief	Your theme?	Decade?
2016	June	Faking It	<p>Have you ever inflated your credentials to land a coveted job, told a silly lie to save face in front of a new acquaintance or felt well and truly out of your comfort zone when you tried something new?</p> <p>Perhaps faking it helped you gain the experience or tools necessary to bring about real change, whether you were pretending to the world or just deluding yourself.</p> <p>How did you feel at the time, and how do you feel about it now? Did your fakery ever get found out? Did you surprise anyone, even yourself?</p> <p><i>Alternative Topic – The Year that Made Me</i></p>		
2016	July	Advice	<p>Tell us about one piece of advice that's stuck with you. It could be a famous quote or proverb, something your mum told you, or helpful words from a stranger. Did you follow the advice, or wished you had? Did it help or lead you astray?</p>		
2016	August	Experiences of the Unexplained	<p>Have you ever had a brush with the spiritual world, a stay in a haunted house, a moment of psychic synergy? Make us shiver in our boots with your story of an otherworldly encounter. Tell us the story as it happened, and how you see it now.</p>		
2016	September	'It happened in Vegas'	<p>Spill the beans on something from one of your holidays, something that just doesn't happen in everyday life. Ideas that could help to get you moving – look at photo albums, emails, letters, even Facebook – get yourself reminders of holidays and the events that happened on them, then describe one of those holiday moments in detail.</p>		
2016	October	'Unfinished Business'	<p>Tell us about something you want to get off your chest. A grudge you've carried. A life you might have led. A letter to a beloved, living or dead. A project, wish or dream left dangling precariously. How did your business become unfinished in the first place? Why did you decide on one course of action over another? How did your business become unfinished in the first place? Why did you decide on one course of action over another? How did that feel? When did it surface and why? What did you do, or would you like to do to finish it off once and for all? Give your unfinished business or life the lungs to sing or cry or laugh. Stop it from piling up and spilling over into everyday life in insidious or comical ways. Who knows the freedom that might ensue.</p>		

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2016	Festival	"The Sky is the Limit!"	This topic is based on the Benalla Festival theme for 2016 which celebrated Benalla's long association with aviation and the upcoming World Gliding Championships. The topic can be interpreted widely – the possibilities are unlimited. The sky really is the limit!		
2016	November	Running with Scissors	'Tell us about that moment when you did something reckless, that time when something really could have gone badly wrong. Tell us your stories where you knew what you were about to do was crazy or stupid, but you did it anyway. Maybe you believed 'it' wouldn't happen, or maybe you thought it would, and you didn't care. Was it just slightly illegal? Or was it just too fun to miss out on? Did you make a choice that left you breathless but wildly alive? Or did your world come crashing down? An affair, a physical risk, a mental challenge, a dance with danger, the possibilities are endless.		
2016 /17	Holiday Break	Own Choice	For example - 'The Year that made me' 'Christmas', 'New Year's Eve', 'Why I eg. became a ' ' Interesting I have known' ; 'U-Turn'; 'I Broke it', etc...		
2017	Feb	New in Town	Have you ever been the new person in town? Or did someone else's arrival have a profound impact on you? Share your story in 500 words.		
2017	March	Stock and Land	Tell us about a significant memory involving farming, agriculture or rural life. You must include mention of at least one animal or crop and one piece of farm equipment. If you haven't lived on a farm, you might like to write about a long-remembered visit to or experience of a farm or agriculture, something referencing rural life, ideally set in the north east. It could even be about memories of a visit to an agricultural show or about backyard chooks in urban settings. Write about something you haven't written about before which you'd like to share with your family and others		
2017	April	Failure	'Write about a failure you've experienced – from the commonplace to the catastrophic – in 500 words'.		
2017	May	I was there	Have you experienced a significant news, historical or cultural event first-hand? Share your personal piece of history in 500 words.		
2017	June	An Act of Rebellion	Have you ever challenged authority, defied expectations or fought for your beliefs? Choose a single, defining act of rebellion in your life & tell us about it.		

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2017	July	Travel Tales	Everyone has at least one good travel story to tell. Share your best story of adventure or misadventure in 500 words or less.		
2017	August	Odd One Out	Have you ever felt like you didn't fit in? Too old or too young? Wrong clothes or different culture? Write about a time you felt out of place and why'.		
2017	September	Fish Out of Water	'Have you had a unique experience when you were a 'fish out of water'? A time when you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Felt totally out of your element • Felt like an outsider • Were a foreigner traveling or living in a new country • Were a rookie on the new job • Were in another unfamiliar and uncomfortable situation Share your experience in 500 words.		
2017	October/ Festival	"Good Vibrations"	This was the topic for the Benalla Festival's writing competition –there are lots of wonderful angles through which to consider 'Good Vibrations'		
2017	November	Right Here, Right Now	'A time capsule of the present. Write a story about a situation currently unfolding in your life, right here, right now.'		
2017	Holiday Break - December	Lost in Music (R)	'Music can have a powerful effect on our emotions and create a lasting impact on our memory. Describe an experience when you got lost in a single piece of music, and what made it so unforgettable'.		
2018	Holiday Break - January	Things I've Left Behind	' <i>Things I've left behind</i> '—another rich opportunity to reminisce!		
2018	February	Grandparents (R) (choose another grandparent if you have already shared on this topic)	Describe your relationship with a grandparent using one fond memory. Draw on your senses to recall specific details and reflect on the impact he or she made on your life. It may be the time Gran nearly set the kitchen on fire with the Christmas pudding, or the time your 92-year old Grandpa rode the Octopus with you at Luna Park. It could be a story about your Grandmother's heritage and how she came to Australia or about the era your grandfather represents, and the role he played in your upbringing or a special ritual you shared.		
2018	March	A Friendship Tested (R)	'A true friend is there through thick and thin, but not all friendships survive under pressure. Tell us about a time when a friendship was put to the test. Did it strengthen your relationship or push it over the edge'		

Year	Month	Topic	Brief	Your theme?	Decade?
2018	April	What I Was Wearing (R)	Some items of clothing are linked to memories, emotions and experiences; The 'lucky job interview' undies, the jacket you wore on your first date, or a bikini that didn't fare well in water. Tell us how an outfit played a part during a significant moment". Clothes give us comfort and protection, and help us describe ourselves to the wider world. Some get worn out and thrown away, others become linked to strong memories. Choose one item of clothing that has a special meaning for you. Perhaps it was a hand-me-down, a unique find at a market or an expensive splurge. Why is it special? What significant moments occurred while you were wearing it? What do you think, feel and remember when you see it? Also, think about what it means to you now. If you can, take or find a photo of the clothes to present with your story.		
2018	May	Someone Who Shaped Me	How did you become who you are? Think about someone who has influenced your life and get typing.		
2018	June	Family Rituals	What are the weird and wonderful things that you do together that only your family understand? Tell us about your family ritual.		
2018	July	A Scary Moment	Your heart pounds, your hair stands on end.... Tell us a story about a moment when you were truly terrified.		
2018	August	On the Job	We spend much of our lives working. Our job, for better or worse, helps define us. Write a first-person story about a day at work you'll never forget.		
2018	September	How We Met	Our best friends, neighbours, partners, lovers were all strangers once. Tell us how you met a kindred spirit and what the relationship means to you.		
2018	October	Personal Challenge	Often the most rewarding challenges are the ones we set ourselves. Share a story about stepping outside your comfort zone in the name of self-improvement.		
2018	Festival	"Our Backyard"	<i>'Our Backyard – a celebration of special places and spaces'</i> , was the focus of the Benalla Festival's writing competition in 2018. Most members shared their story with the group, with some entering and receiving awards in the Festival. Reflect on the concept of 'Our Backyard' and write your own 'Our Backyard' story.		
2018	November	Endings	Our lives are made up of many phases that shape who we become. Reflect on a time when something important in your life ended, and how it affected you.		

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2018 /19	Holiday Break	Family Trait	Did you inherit a family trait? What is it and how does it play out in your life?		
2019	February	'Family Trait'	Welcome to new members followed by sharing of 'Family Trait' stories.		
2019	March	'I Broke It'	A broken plate, a broken bone, a broken record, or even being broke. Tell us about a time you broke something, and what repercussions you face.		
2019	April	'Faking It'	Have you ever inflated your credentials to land a coveted job, told a silly lie to save face in front of a new acquaintance, or felt well and truly out of your comfort zone when you tried something new? Perhaps faking it helped you gain the experience or tools necessary to bring about real change, whether you were pretending to the world or just deluding yourself. How did you feel at the time, and how do you feel about it now? Did your fakery ever get found out? Did you surprise anyone, even yourself?		
2019	May	'Time'	There are so many ways in which we use the word 'time'...'We talk about spare time, stolen time, free time, time well spent, leisure time, wasted time, quality time, holiday time, extra time, not enough time. We say time is precious, for all time, time is short, it was such a waste of time, time flies, time and eternity, we had a good time, take your time, time stood still, where does the time go? How much time do you have? She'll do it in 'her own good time' and more. <i>Choose and write about an element or two relating to the theme 'Time' which has meaning in terms of an event or events in your life stories.</i>		
2019	June	'Ideas Piggy Bank'	(1) Create an 'Ideas Piggy Bank' in a shoe box to bring along containing objects and artefacts that enliven your memories, through scent and feel. Maps, menus, theatre programs, an old report card, vials of perfume, a garment, treasured photographs, a souvenir, an expired passport can sometimes trigger a work rich with detail". (2) Select two items from the piggy bank as creative prompts – what do they mean to you? What were you doing, why; what were you thinking at the time this object related to your life? (250 words for each object)		
2019	July	Your Different Drummer	How strong is your instinct to go with the flow? When has it served you well? When has it been counter productive?		

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2019	August	Fear of Failure	"Fear of Failure" - What flops, embarrassments and incomplete endeavours in life slowed you down and which ones fortified your resolve? What did you learn from them and how did you cope? What role does 'fear of failure' have in your life now?		
2019	September	If Only I'd...	<i>'If Only I'd...'</i> Over to you!		
2019	Festival	'Fiesta of Festivities'	<i>'Fiesta of Festivities: a celebration of events and festivals that bring the community together'</i> . Now what do you make of Benalla Festival's topic/theme for the 2019 Benalla Festival's writing competition? 500-800 words.		
2019	November	'Triggers'	Keep a notebook close by in which to note any 'triggers' which led you to reminisce about a time in your lives. You may have been talking to someone, watching television or a film, driving somewhere, reading a book. Choose one to three of these and write about the memories evoked – keeping the total words to 500 – 750 words.		
2020	Holiday Break	'I'm really proud of...'	Write about something in your life that you are really proud of!		
2020	February	'Family'... Aunt, Uncle, or Cousin	'Write about an Aunt, Uncle or cousin who has a special place in your memory'.		
2020	March	'Making Waves'	Is there a time in your life when you've been accused of making waves? It could be in your personal life, the workplace, socially...even politically. ...So, what have you done that's caught people's attention, and changed the usual way of doing things? It can be funny, sad, poignant, illuminating— it just needs to be captivating!		
2020	April	Taking the plunge/Winging It	Do you have a story about taking a risk and winging it? Often this involves taking the plunge, then winging it, or maybe you just 'took the plunge'. Over to you!		
2020	May	Anzac Day	Looking back over your lifetime, write about your memories of Anzac Day and its place in the cultural rituals of your family and the communities in which you have lived, moving from the personal to the political if you wish. <i>"A chance to reminisce about memories of Anzac Day (or Days) which have stayed with us over time"</i> .		
2020	May	Turning Point	A chance to write about a turning point in your life--however large or small!		
2020	June	I Grew Up In...	Over to you! (Feel free to shorten the prompt stem to 'I grew up...' eg... 'I grew up longing for....', 'I grew up wishing....'.)		

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2020	July	Ideas Piggy Bank (R) and/or	(1) Create an 'Ideas Piggy Bank' in a shoe box containing objects and artefacts that enliven your memories, through scent and feel. Maps, menus, theatre programs, an old report card, vials of perfume, a garment, treasured photographs, a souvenir, an expired passport can sometimes trigger a work rich with detail". (2) Select two items from the piggy bank as creative prompts – what do they mean to you? What were you doing, why; what were you thinking at the time this object related to your life? (250 words for each object)		
	July – Altern.	Car Story (R) (2015)	So many formative moments happen in cars – tell us about a memorable experience you had in yours. It could be your first taste of P-plate freedom, a revealing in-transit conversation, or how an accident, a flat tyre, or parking ticket set off a chain of events in your day, etc.		
2020	August	'Right Here, Right Now' (R)	'A time capsule of the present. Write a story about a situation currently unfolding in your life, right here, right now.' Revisiting this previously popular topic right here, right now, could draw out elements of our experience of the Covid-19 pandemic...		
2020	September	'I came down with a thud'... or 'Out of the Blue'	Share your memories of a time when 'you came down with a thud' or when something happened 'out of the blue' in 500 words.		
2020	October Festival	'This (eg) (Downsizing) (Number 8) Life '	The Australian newspaper's weekend Review considers original submissions of 450 – 500 words for their 'This (...) Life' story each weekend. Our topic for October, 'This (...) Life' draws upon this format, with the option open of course to also submit your story the Australian for publication! Works may be edited for clarity. Email: this life@theaustralian.com.au (Examples June27-28 'This (Downsizing) Life' by an 80+ year old about planning to farewell loved home; July 4-8 'This (Number 8) Life' about growing up as 'Number 8' in a family of nine children.		
2020	November	'Triggers'	Keep a notebook close by in which to note any 'triggers' which led you to reminisce about a time in your lives. You may have been talking to someone, watching television or a film, driving somewhere, reading a book. Choose one to three of these and write about the memories evoked – keeping the total words to 500 – 750 words.		

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2020	Holiday Break	One Moment, This Year	Looking back on 2020, what single moment stands out for you? Whether it be loss, love, discovery or disappointment, share your unforgettable moment. (ABC Open 500 words January 2014)		
2021	February	'What a Coincidence' or 'Serendipity'	(Further details to be added)		
Topics to write about at some time because you find you need a substitute topic, or 'just because'...!					
		'As Time Goes By'	A chance to reminisce, and perhaps even philosophize, about things which have happened across your life span		
		The Year that Made Me	A topic drawn from ABC programs as a feature item when interviewing actual or future Australian living treasures. Write about a year which made a particular difference in your life's journey.		
		Someone Who Shaped Me	How did you become who you are? Think about someone who has influenced your life and get typing.		
		How We Met	Our best friends, neighbours, partners, lovers were all strangers once. Tell us how you met a kindred spirit and what the relationship means to you.		
		'U-Turn'	A single decision can turn your day - or life - around. Share how a sudden change of direction altered what happened next.		
		'Anzac Day'/'Christmas'/'Easter'/'Melbourne Cup Day'/'New Year's Eve' etc...	Looking back over your lifetime, write about your memories of a key date in the annual calendar, its place in the cultural rituals of your family and the communities in which you have lived, moving from the personal to the political if you wish. <i>"A chance to reminisce about memories of which have stayed with you over time"</i> .		
		'The Four Seasons'.... 'Winter', 'Spring', 'Autumn' 'Summer'	A chance to reminisce about memories of a particular season of the year which have stayed with you over time...		
		'Why I ...'	Over to you!		
		Desert Island Discs	You're stranded! Just before you left on your trip you loaded five of your 'all time' favourite pieces of music on your device. What did you choose, and why? What meaning does it have for you?		

Some topics which haven't been selected as monthly topics for the group to date because they could be difficult to share in class – however perhaps you would like to write about one or more of them which you are able to write without becoming very distressed....					
Year	Month	Topic	Brief	Your theme?	Decade?
		Like it or Not	Share a moment in your life where you've faced an obstacle or disappointment – and how you dealt with it. (ABC Open 500 words January 2013)		
		First Memory	Some childhood memories stay with us despite the passage of time. Share a story taking us back to one of your earliest memories. (ABC Open 500 words May 2014)		
		Caught Out	'Caught Out!' (ABC Open 500 words December 2012)		
		Things We Do For Love	Love brings out the best and the worst in us. Write about a time when you did something brave, crazy or regrettable in the name of love. (ABC Open 500 words December 2012)		
		Bully	One person can make you feel small or insignificant. Share a story about your experience with a bully. (ABC Open 500 words, November 2014)		
		My Secret Fear	It's one of our most primal emotions, but some fears are too terrible – or embarrassing – to share with others. Tell us about a time you were forced to face a secret fear. (ABC Open 500 words, December 2014).		
		'For Better or Worse'	'Share your story of a long-term romantic relationship and what kept or has kept you together. How did it start? What did/have you learned through the ups and downs?' (ABC Open Topic, September 2015)		
		My Big Secret	'Are you ready to get that secret off your chest? Maybe it was a spontaneous act of dare devilry that friends would never believe, a youthful transgression, or an embarrassing experience you've never been able to laugh about - until now. Describe the incident, the stakes at play, why you've kept it a secret and what it feels like to share it now that you are older and wiser.' (ABC Open 500 words, November 2015)		
	One of your own topics	?			