

# HELLO!

Thanks for downloading this piece of the RE«MIND memoir writing workshop 😊

**This is a juicy writing prompt** with three options PLUS a second approach PLUS a level-up on the exercise.

It also offers some resources on the pace of written, spoken, and heard words, which might get you rethinking how you listen to podcasts – and if you have a podcast of your own, how you record it, as well.

## ***About the RE«MIND workshop...***

If you enjoy this writing warm-up and would like to dig into the full memoir writing workshop, **the self-study version of RE«MIND will be available soon**. You'll be able to start it when you want to and set a pace you prefer, plus there will be an option to join your fellow writers in our Facebook group.

[Click here to learn more about the workshop](#) and **add yourself to workshop's notification list** (which doesn't sign you up for anything else), or if you have questions, click here to send me a note » [Contact Crys](#)

Happy writing!



# MEMOIR WARM-UP #3

## THE LAST MINUTE

**You've probably noticed that inspiration is everywhere.** Whether we're writing or painting or doing digital collage, we're always surrounded by sparks for our imagination and – when it comes to writing memoir – our recollection.

It's our nature to notice things out in the world that are somehow relevant to what we have in mind. A photograph, a sentence in a book, or a line from a song or a television show can **resonate psychologically, perhaps almost physically, when it connects to something we've been thinking about.**

Stylist and writer [Renee Magnusson](#) calls these *secret messages* because, in that moment of connection, those words – available to anyone – bring clarity, validation, or revelation to her specific circumstances as if the words were meant only for her.

For my part, **I watch TV and movies with a notepad or my smartphone handy**, so I can jot down or tap in the secret messages that are clearly meant just for *me*. 😊

Same thing when I'm listening to audiobooks: I regularly tap the Bookmark button to flag any description or bit of dialogue that rings true, then circle back later on and transcribe them into Evernote (my digital junk drawer).

So, you started something when you dipped into memory for your Where I Am From poem and then played with your food in your last warm-up. At least, I think and hope so!

**Now that you've begun looking, you may notice there is more to see.**

From my experience, familiar objects might now glow with new meaning, and habitual tasks, particularly housekeeping tasks, leave lots of room for the brain to work. Now, swishing your hands through dishwasher may conjure memories that your mind set aside long ago. And of course, any word you read or see might be meant only for you.

**If you keep going with this work, connections will keep coming.** So, keep a little notebook or your smartphone handy to collect your secret messages, and jot, tap, or talk them into safekeeping. **Those fragments of thought will become the titles, headlines, centerpieces, and keystones in – or the theme for – your memoir.**

Like with this final warm-up exercise...

# YOUR WRITING EXERCISE

When I heard this, I immediately thought of you—

**“You’ve got a minute to live, fill it with words.”**

*Tony Stark, Iron Man 3*

In the movie, that line was delivered with great urgency, and the fellow on the receiving end was facing a loaded weapon. Fortunately, we’re not that pressed, and the stakes nowhere near that high. We have some time to work and, compared to the Play With Your Food warm-up exercise, a heckuvalot more space!

Your eat tweet had room for just 15 or 20 words, but this time you can write up to 400 words, and I’ll explain why in just a bit. For now, here’s your exercise—

**Your life will end in 60 seconds.**

**In the minute you have left to live, what would you tell us?**

*Say what needs saying in 120-160 words  
or 200-250 words or around 400 words.*

## ***The why behind those word counts***

How many words would fill a minute? I looked it up, and it depends on whether the words are said, read, or heard, with notable gaps between the three—

### **The Spoken Word**

On average, US English speakers **talk at 120-160 words per minute** for audiobooks, conversation, and radio. (Presenters speak a bit slower; auctioneers go much faster.)

### **The Read Word**

The average US adult **reads at 200-250 words per minute**. (It’s faster if we read often, slower if it’s technical information that we take time to translate and absorb).

### **The Heard Word**

People can effectively **listen at up to 400 words a minute**. (Students can listen to their class material at around twice the spoken rate and absorb it just as well.)

## Another Approach

The original exercise asks, “...what you would tell us?” That audience of us was intentionally generic.

For another approach, try getting specific:

- Think back to a specific moment in your life and tell yourself what you most need to hear before that door in time closes in exactly one minute. (max. 160 words)
- Write one last letter to someone from your past or present which they can read in under a minute. (max. 250 words)
- Choose someone from your life – past or present, living or dead – to speak to with your last, limited words. What would you need them to hear from you if you could speak as fast as they could listen? (max. 400 words)

## Level-Up This Exercise

**Write your last-minute words in 400 words.**

AND THEN

**Edit that down to 200-250 words.**

AND THEN

**Edit that down to 120-160 words.**

And then compare one version to the next, especially the first version to the last. What was taken out? What was left in? Did the longest version lose half its meaning or intention when edited to half its length? What else do you notice?

Really good writing comes from ruthless editing, so this is a valuable practice.

***“This letter is longer than usual because I have not had time to make it shorter.”***

*Blaise Pascal, French mathematician and philosopher*

# WRITE ON

So, how's it going? Was this warm-up too easy? Too challenging? Just right? How about the first two warm-ups? Send me an email to let me know!

And if you'd like to share your work privately, feel free to email it to me. I'll welcome it and cheer you on without offering feedback or keeping score.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Crystal Wood". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Resources:

[Average Speaking Rate and Words per Minute](#) by Dom Barnard

[What Is the Average Reading Speed and the Best Rate of Reading?](#) by Mark Thomas

[Now Hear This, Quickly](#) by Douglas Heingartner