

A smiling man with a beard, wearing a green zip-up jacket and dark pants, is sitting on a stone wall. Behind him is a canal with a small boat and historic European-style buildings under a cloudy sky.

101

WRITING PROMPTS

FOR VETERANS

BY JOHN H DAVIS

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ABOUT ME



John H Davis

John is a combat veteran and the author of the award-winning book **Combat To College**. He's a Harvard graduate and has spoken to congress as a legislative fellow for the Veterans of Foreign Wars. John authored the **Veterans Guide to Moving Abroad** and the **Combat To College GROW Method**, a coaching program for student veterans.

To Connect:



In my own battles with PTSD, I've come to understand the importance of having as many weapons as possible. Therapy is one tool, but the VA only provided me with one form of therapy: theirs and it simply wasn't sufficient. I started writing initially to help myself, then student veterans, and then expanded into the veteran community. Writing has provided me with an outlet to find closure on my military career, boost my mental health, and figure out my identity and goals after the military.

Writing is first and foremost a way to organize our thoughts. That's why we make pros and cons lists in our decision-making processes. The veteran mind can be a warzone and writing can help calm the internal chaos. Writing will slow you down, which in a fast-paced world is something a lot of people desperately need. Veterans tend to judge ourselves harshly, we hold ourselves to the highest of standards and beat ourselves up when we fall short. Writing can open the door for self-acceptance over judgment.

You'll encounter a wide variety of prompts written for veterans by a veteran. It's important we approach our civilian lives with the acknowledgement the military is part of who we are, it's in our DNA. We're all forever changed from the military, no one coming out of the military is the same person that went in. Occasionally we get trapped in the grind of life and don't consider what we're doing, why we're doing it, or what would make us stronger, healthier, and happier.

All veterans have incredible stories that deserve to be told, thoughts that deserve to be heard, and values to share. I see a lot of what I'll call "normal veterans" not telling their stories but most of the military isn't Navy Seals. The military is made up of normal people trying to do extraordinary things, not superheroes. We're just people doing our best in tough circumstances. We're underpaid and overworked and then have to learn how to re-enter a society that underappreciates and undervalues us. That takes a toll on our mental health and takes away from the importance of our roles in the world. You're part of history, and that history deserves to be heard, written about, or documented somehow.

Veterans tend to lean towards a negative inner dialogue, sarcasm, and dark humor. I know because I do it. We have an embrace the suck mentality and writing is one strategy to rewire us to learn to be happier and healthier. Putting pen to paper is an intensely personal experience and these prompts are intended to get you to consider your past, present, and future. To think about who you are, where you've been, and where you're going.

The most important questions are the ones we ask ourselves.

HOW TO USE THESE VETERAN PROMPTS

- However the hell you want, it's your project.
- This is designed to be flexible, you did enough years following orders. This is your journey now and you're in the driver's seat.
- Write in a way that feels good to you. Use bullet points, a narrative, or tell a story. It might feel better to use voice notes if writing feels awkward.
- You can do all of it or skip around, do one a day, do one a week, one a month or whatever fits your life.
- The prompts are designed to provide structure, but you can write your way and create your own prompts.
- You can print and write here, or you can purchase your own journal.
- You can interpret the prompts however you want.

TIPS

1. Don't let self-judgment hold you back. It doesn't matter if your handwriting sucks, or you're not William Shakespeare.
2. These prompts are for you, not anyone else. But you can choose to share with people you trust, or those you want to understand you better (or feel free to share with me).
3. Write as little or as much as you like, skip around, ignore some and expand on others.
4. It can be helpful to set a reminder on your phone to write regularly.
5. It can be useful to write a certain time of day, or in a certain place. I enjoy writing at cafes or restaurants, in public is where I do my best writing.
6. Be patient with yourself, don't expect immediate brilliance.
7. Make it fun, don't make it a chore.
8. Try setting a timer and writing for five minutes.
9. Look for the side angle, big picture, or unusual take.
10. Write without thinking.

BENEFITS OF WRITING FOR VETERANS

- ✓ Improved Mood
- ✓ Greater Clarity
- ✓ Closure From Our Military Past
- ✓ Increased Psychological Well-Being
- ✓ Reduced Stress and Anxiety
- ✓ Improves Memory
- ✓ Regulate Emotions
- ✓ Find inspiration
- ✓ Enhance Creativity
- ✓ Amplify Problem-Solving Skills
- ✓ Overcoming Fears
- ✓ Conquer Negative Thoughts
- ✓ Deepens Self-Discovery
- ✓ Identify Wants and Needs
- ✓ Combat PTSD
- ✓ Reflect On Your Military Experiences
- ✓ Plan For The Future
- ✓ Boost Motivation

DISCLAIMER

Writing is a powerful mental health tool, but it should not replace your therapy, medication, or professional advice. I'm not a doctor and this is not professional mental health advice.

VETERAN WRITING PROMPTS

■ What's one thing the VA didn't give you that you needed? Or need now?

■ What has your military pain taught you?

■ What do you wish your average civilian knew about veterans?

■ Describe a military experience that ultimately made you stronger?

■ What encouragement would you give to a fellow veteran in your position?

■ The military problem-solving process is: Identify the problem, Gather information and knowledge, develop criteria, generate possible solutions, analyze possible solution, Compare possible solutions, make and implement the decision. Is there a current problem you can apply this to? What and how?

■ If you could talk to congress about the military, what would your message be?

■ What technique did you learn in the military that could benefit your current situation?

■ What military pain are you holding onto? How could you release it?

■ What do YOU need to forgive YOU for?

■ Am you comfortable in civilian life? What area is the most challenging?

■ What's one actionable step you could take today to move forward on your goals?

- You can't change your military past, but you can change your civilian future. Write about where you want to be in five years.

- Why do too many veterans struggle with substance abuse issues?

- What's something that triggers me from the military and how do I work through it?

■ What do I need to reflect on from the military to gain peace?

■ Is there an uncomfortable truth that I need to face about myself as a veteran?

■ What's something the military did for me that affected me positively?

■ How has my military mentality contributed to my own pain, to my own PTSD or my own suffering?

■ How does my military background affect my romantic relationships?

■ Who did I serve with that I could reach out to for some good advice and kind words?

- What about military culture do you love? And what about military culture do you hate?

- The military is about routine and consistency, how can you better prepare your body and mind for sleep each night?

- What do you wish your family and friends knew about your military experiences or PTSD?

■ How are you there for other veterans in ways you aren't there for yourself?

■ What is my greatest military wound? Both physical and mental.

■ Write about the military mentor that impacted you the most, what do you want to say to them?

- What kind of useless knowledge do you have in your head now that you learned in the military but now is good for nothing?

- What are some activities you can do that could help you work through your PTSD?

- Describe how you mentored someone in your military career, reflect on your impact.

■ Why do you think the inner dialogue of veterans tends to lean negative?

■ Write about a civilian who's helped you on your healing journey.

■ What's the greatest lesson you learned in the military?

■ What was the first moment you realized that you're "not in the military anymore Todo."

■ What keeps your military mind awake at night?

■ Who's one veteran you'd like to meet and why?

■ How do your military values give you strength in dark times?

■ You've lived three lives, a pre-military life, a military life, and a post-military life. How can you take the best of each version of you into your future?

■ What pet peeves do you have about civilians?

■ If you could change something about the current military, what would it be?

■ What veteran do you know that inspires you? Could or should you tell them about their impact?

■ What lessons from the military should kids know?

■ Describe your most powerful military memory.

■ What specific event do you not understand from the military and why?

■ Do you feel good about your purpose in civilian life? Why or why not?

■ What makes you angry about the military today?

■ If you could do your military career over, what would you do differently?

■ Where do you think you'd be today if you never joined?

■ What advice would you give to someone joining the military today?

■ What resources do you wish were more available in the military community or through the VA?

■ If you could have a beer with any veteran you served with, who would it be and why?

■ What set of standards should civilians learn from the military?

■ Reflect on the pressing issue of veteran suicide, how can we help one another? Is there something you could do?

■ What from your military experiences affects you negatively today?

■ In what ways do you see the world differently because of your military background?

■ What do you miss most about the military?

■ What would you say to a veteran seeking purpose post service?

■ What military organization needs to exist that doesn't for veterans?

■ Have you ever felt betrayed by the military? How?

■ Does America take care of its warriors? Why or why not?

■ Describe the perfect veteran day.

■ Would you ever refuse to help a veteran in need, why or why not?

■ Do people value the military the way they used to? Why or why not?

■ When were you most proud of your service?

■ In the military we throw around the word leader a lot, in what ways are you a leader in civilian life?

■ Describe a situation when you were close to quitting in the military and kept going.

■ Write about your toughest goodbye from the military.

■ How can civilians better understand us, our experiences, and backgrounds?

■ How does your military background affect your relationship with your family and friends?

- You had incredibly difficult experiences in the military, think back to the toughest and describe how you can use that to conquer your current situation.

- What values and lessons from the military can you bring to your current environment?

- Write a message to a military friend who positively impacted your military journey.

- Write a message to someone who negatively impacted you during your military service, a toxic leader. Don't send it.

- Write about your relationship with your military and think about how it's changed from when you first joined, to your service, to getting out, to now.

- Why are you proud to have served?

■ Describe your military highlights reel, what are some of the coolest things you did?

■ If you could sit down with the commander in chief, what would you say the military needs?

■ What was your most embarrassing memory from the military?

■ What does being a veteran mean to you today? Has that changed?

■ What are your thoughts on the military industrial complex?

■ How can America better take care of veterans?

■ If you could have stolen one item from your service what would it have been and why?

■ Do you want your kids to join the military? Why or why not?

■ How can the military better help us transition to civilian life?

■ In what ways could your family and friends better understand your military experiences?

■ Do you have any military habits or behaviors that are just not serving you anymore?

■ Do you ever downplay your military experiences? Why?

■ Do you feel your military past is holding you back from leading a happy life? How so?

■ What's one thing about your service that you're truly grateful for?

■ Why do some veterans not take advantage of their benefits?

■ What's your favorite military movie and why?

■ Should everyone serve in the military?

■ What is one thing you wished you did in the military?

■ What's something you did in the military that you're not proud of?

■ The military is a true community, do you still have the same sense of belonging in your civilian life?

■ What happened when you were the furthest out of your comfort zone in the military?

- How do you feel about the VFW and American Legion? What can be done to improve the national veteran organizations?

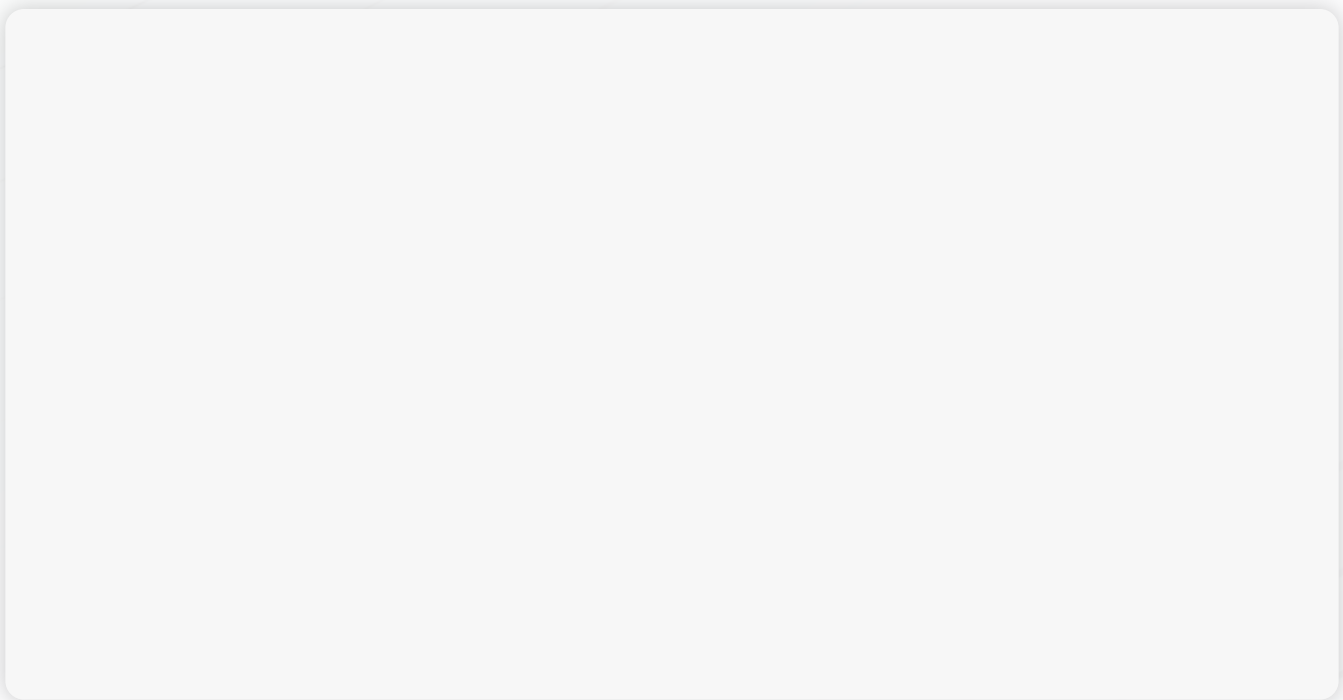
- What freedoms do you have now that you didn't have in the military?

- What's the thing you miss now about the military but didn't appreciate it when you were in?

■ Where would you have liked to be stationed or deploy to that you weren't? Why?

■ What do you think civilians' perception of a "veteran" is?

WRITE YOUR OWN PROMPTS



*I'd be interested in seeing what prompts you come up with,
feel free to email them to me at*



CONCLUSION

Even if we're not officially in the military anymore, in a sense we're still psychologically in it. Especially considering the veteran life isn't a linear experience, our service throws a existential wrench into our lives. We live in what can feel like a parallel reality to our civilian counterparts. Here's where writing can be beneficial because sometimes you don't understand your thoughts until you write them down. Most importantly, you don't need to be a "writer" to write, just a human with something to say.

Writing became my therapist, it's available 24/7. It helped me close the door on the military and move into my future. I found it impossible to really express myself verbally to civilian therapist. Writing my thoughts lets me see my demons for what they are.

Writing makes us more aware of ourselves, including what we can be too blind to see. We live in an increasingly paperless and even thoughtless world, but a lot of personal development can emerge through the practice of writing. I'd to thank you first for your service, and secondly for taking the time to read my project.

John H Davis

NEXT STEP

If this resonated with you, check out my book **365 Days of Veteran Affirmations** available on Amazon. I made this free because we have to help ourselves and one another.

If you're interested in writing a book or creating something, feel free to reach out to me.

Email is usually the best way to reach me, I think there's a lot of veterans out there with stories to tell and if I can help you tell yours, I will. Writing a book is somehow simultaneously far easier and also somehow far harder than you might think. Writing is the easier aspect of being a writer, the editing, publishing, marketing, and promoting is the complicated side. As a veteran, I find the self-promotional aspect of writing the most unnatural part.

Any support of buying my books, sharing my articles, or engaging with me on social media is appreciated.