

Exercise 1—The Emotional Snapshot

Purpose: Build moment-to-moment emotional awareness by learning to describe, name, and interpret emotional states with clarity.

Duration: 20–30 minutes

Instructions:

Step 1 — Pause and Observe

Sit comfortably and close your eyes. Take three slow breaths. Notice whatever emotion is present right now—don't search for something dramatic. Accept whatever arises: boredom, mild anxiety, contentment, restlessness. Your only job is to observe without judgment, suppression, or storytelling.

Step 2 — Describe the Emotion in Five Sentences

Without naming the emotion yet, write five concrete sentences describing how it manifests **right now**. Each sentence should focus on one channel:

1. **Body sensations:** Where do you feel this physically? (tension, warmth, hollowness, tightness, lightness, etc.)
2. **Thinking patterns:** What's the quality of your thoughts? (racing, sticky, scattered, clear, looping, etc.)
3. **Sense of pace or urgency:** Does time feel fast, slow, pressured, or spacious?
4. **Surrounding environment:** How does the room/space feel to you in this state? (claustrophobic, distant, vivid, muted, etc.)
5. **Quality of attention:** Where does your focus naturally land? What feels hard to concentrate on?

Be specific. Avoid vague language like "I feel bad" or "I'm stressed."

Step 3 — Identify Triggers or Origins

Trace backward: What event, thought, interaction, or physical sensation sparked this emotional state? Name the specific moment it began, even if it seems trivial. If you can't identify a trigger, note that too—sometimes emotions arrive without clear cause.

Step 4 — Name the Emotion

Now that you've described it fully, choose the most **precise** emotional label you can. Don't settle for broad terms like "upset" or "bad." Push for specificity: disappointment, resentment, overwhelm, wistfulness, dread, excitement, relief?

If multiple emotions are layered, name them all.

Emotion: _____

Step 5 — Ask What the Emotion Wants

Every emotion carries information—a need, boundary, value, or request. Complete this sentence honestly, without dismissing or minimizing what arises:

"What this emotion wants is..."

Examples: rest, validation, control, connection, closure, space, action, clarity, safety.

Reflection Questions:

- What surprised you about describing the emotion indirectly before naming it?
- Did the emotion shift, intensify, or dissolve as you wrote? What does that reveal?
- What would it look like to respond compassionately to this emotion rather than resist or rush past it?
- If this emotion belonged to a character, how would understanding its "want" change how you'd write their next action?

Want to go deeper?

If you'd like more exercises that really get at the core of your personal emotional patterns, consider taking the free [Writer's Emotional Compass](#) or [Writer's Emotional Map](#) assessments. These assessments are designed to reveal your unique patterns, show you what strengths you can leverage, and identify areas worth developing. Both assessments are available at emotethis.net.

And if you're ready for personalized support, explore the [Coaching Services](#) for one-on-one guidance in developing your emotional intelligence as a writer, or check out [Manuscript Consultation Services](#) for expert feedback on strengthening the emotional architecture of your work.

EMOTION. STORY. IMPACT.