

## Concept List: Surprise/The Unexpected

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### Five Ways You Might Use This Concept List

1. Pick five verbs, five nouns, and five descriptors and see what materializes.
2. Need a new scene or setting? Head straight toward the ‘Things/Places’ section.
3. When my stories drag, I aim for the ‘Verbs’ section. I mean, really, how can you turn down ‘assume a false identity’?
4. The ‘Abstractions/Intangibles’ category keeps me focused on themes in my stories, especially if I’ve leaned too hard on the ‘Verbs’, ‘Varieties/Examples’ or ‘People/Animals’.
5. ‘Activities/Events/Processes’ can give a kick in the seat of the pants to the mushy middles.

# Surprise-The Unexpected-Amazement Concept List



## surprise/amazement/the unexpected [People/Animals]

1. Academy Award winner
2. blind date (person)
3. burglar
4. celebrity look-alike
5. child prodigy
6. Cinderella team (unlikely winners)
7. clairvoyant
8. commando
9. company (visitors)
10. contestant
11. Coyote the Trickster
12. crowd of curious onlookers
13. daredevil (stunt performer)
14. dark horse
15. deus ex machina
16. doctor young enough to be your child
17. drop-in visitor
18. extraterrestrial
19. faith healer
20. Funt, Allen
21. genius
22. ghost
23. guerrilla
24. Houdini, Harry
25. Lazarus
26. live mannequin in store window
27. long-lost love
28. long-lost relative
29. loose cannon (unpredictable person)
30. lottery winner
31. magician
32. mind reader
33. monster
34. ninety-day wonder
35. overnight sensation

36. person who reminds you of someone else
37. prankster
38. prizewinner
39. psychic
40. rattlesnake
41. shock jock
42. sports announcer
43. Stern, Howard
44. surprise baby (totally unexpected)
45. surprise visitor
46. surprise witness
47. sweepstakes winner
48. tightrope walker
49. twins
50. unlikely couple
51. unlikely hero
52. visitor from outer space
53. winner



## surprise/amazement/the unexpected [Things/Places]

1. air-raid siren
2. ambulance siren
3. amusement park
4. attention-getter
5. award
6. award for best actor
7. award for best actress
8. award for best picture
9. B-2 Stealth bomber
10. bad haircut
11. banner headline

12. bottle floating in the ocean
13. buried treasure
14. cereal-box prize
15. chocolate-covered ant
16. chocolate-covered grasshopper
17. cold toilet seat
18. Coney Island
19. Cracker Jack
20. crop circles in English grain fields
21. Dear Jane letter
22. Dear John letter
23. delivery room
24. detour sign
25. Dewey Defeats Truman (headline)
26. dip in the road
27. door prize
28. draft notice
29. exclamation point
30. eyes
31. falling star
32. fire
33. first gray hair
34. flag gun (toy gun that shoots flag)
35. flat tire
36. foreign object in food or beverage
37. fun house
38. gift
39. grab bag
40. gusher (volunteer oil well)
41. Halloween mask
42. haunted house
43. headline
44. hidden camera
45. house of horrors
46. invention
47. jack-in-the-box (toy)
48. jackpot
49. joker (playing card)

# Surprise-The Unexpected-Amazement Concept List

50. joy buzzer (practical joke)
51. laboratory
52. land mine
53. late birthday card
54. leather/plastic seat when hot/cold
55. letter (mail)
56. letter bomb
57. mail
58. manna
59. Mickey Finn
60. National Enquirer headline
61. pie in the face
62. Pompeii
63. puzzle
64. raised eyebrows
65. red headline
66. roadside attraction
67. round eyes
68. rubber snake
69. secret passage
70. secret room
71. special effects
72. squirt gun
73. squirting flower (practical joke)
74. surprise gift
75. tack placed on a chair seat
76. telegram
77. test (thing)
78. time bomb
79. trapdoor
80. Trojan horse
81. UFO (unidentified flying object)
82. unpublished manuscript
83. view (vista)
84. wedding announcement
85. whoopee cushion (practical joke)
86. worm in a tequila bottle



surprise/amazement/the unexpected  
Abstractions/Intangibles

1. ace in the hole
2. amazement
3. amount of destruction
4. anticipation
5. April Fools' Day
6. archaeology
7. awe
8. awful truth, the
9. bad luck
10. bad news
11. bag of tricks
12. bang (loud, sudden noise)
13. battlefield confusion
14. beginner's luck
15. bequest
16. bonanza
17. burglar alarm (sound)
18. Christmas bonus
19. cliffhanger
20. cost
21. creativity
22. detective story
23. disbelief
24. doozy (humdinger)
25. effect
26. election returns
27. element of surprise
28. emotions (feelings)
29. excitement
30. expense
31. facial expression
32. fast-breaking story

33. fortune (luck)
34. good luck
35. Hollywood gossip
36. horror
37. hush (sudden absence of sound)
38. idea
39. imagination
40. incongruity
41. innovation
42. instant success
43. joy
44. last-minute details
45. late-breaking news
46. late returns
47. lead story
48. long shot (race entry)
49. lucky guess
50. magic
51. message
52. mystery
53. news
54. news scoop
55. nine days' wonder
56. O. Henry story
57. parapsychology
58. plan of attack
59. play on words
60. posthumous revelation
61. prophecy
62. remark
63. scare (sudden fright)
64. science
65. science fiction
66. secret (something kept hidden)
67. serendipity
68. sharp sound
69. shocking news
70. shocking truth
71. sonic boom
72. stealth technology
73. story that ends with a twist
74. sudden insight

## Surprise-The Unexpected-Amazement Concept List

75. superhuman strength in emergency
76. suspense
77. suspense novel
78. technology
79. thriller (fiction/drama)
80. time to pay holiday bills
81. trouble
82. unintended consequences
83. verdict
84. virtual reality
85. voice from the past
86. wedding night
87. whodunit (mystery novel)
88. whoop (loud shout/shrill cry)
89. windfall (unexpected good luck)
90. world's record



### surprise/amazement/the unexpected [Verbs]

1. act as if nothing has happened
2. ad-lib
3. amaze
4. ambush
5. announce a contest winner
6. attack from the rear
7. attract attention
8. become the man of the family
9. bite down on a hard object
10. bite into a worm
11. blurt out
12. break the news
13. bump from a flight
14. bump into
15. burst
16. burst into song
17. buy a pig in a poke
18. catch a person off guard
19. catch unawares
20. clothesline (grab by encircling neck with arm)
21. collapse
22. come to a screeching halt
23. cover your eyes
24. crash a party
25. crash into a crowd
26. defy convention
27. disappear into thin air
28. discover
29. draw a crowd
30. drop a bombshell
31. drop a glass
32. drop in on
33. electrify
34. elevate a table (medium's trick)
35. explode
36. fake (practice deception)
37. fall overboard
38. fall through the ice
39. fart
40. fear (be afraid of)
41. feel a shiver up and down your spine
42. feel overwhelmed
43. feel your hair stand on end
44. feign surprise
45. find
46. find a body
47. find a body in a car trunk
48. find a worm in your food
49. find out
50. flinch
51. gape
52. gasp
53. gawk
54. get caught
55. go against the tide
56. goose (jab)
57. have an ace up your sleeve
58. hide behind a door
59. hit a ball through a window
60. hit a bump
61. hook an old shoe
62. jerk awake (jump)
63. jolt
64. jump (verb)
65. jump for joy
66. jump out at
67. jump out of bed
68. jump to your feet
69. jump up
70. kiss
71. leap to your feet
72. let the cat out of the bag
73. lie in wait
74. lift a car with your bare hands
75. lose in the last moments of a game
76. lose your concentration
77. lose your passport
78. love (verb)
79. moon (expose buttocks)

## Surprise-The Unexpected-Amazement Concept List

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| 80. notice police car in rear-view mirror | 115. squeal (utter high, shrill cry)     | 143. watch a child grow up  |
| 81. open a gift                           | 116. stab someone in the back            | 144. whirl and kick   |
| 82. open presents                         | 117. stare at                            | 145. win (vs. lose)   |
| 83. plan (devise/prearrange)              | 118. start (jump suddenly/involuntarily) | 146. win a game in the last seconds   |
| 84. play a record on the wrong speed      | 119. startle                             | 147. win in the last moments of a game  |
| 85. play a trick on a person              | 120. step on an animal's tail            | 148. win the lottery  |
| 86. plow into (ram)                       | 121. stumble upon (happen upon)          | 149. yell FIRE!   |
| 87. pop a balloon                         | 122. stumble upon a secret               |  |
| 88. pop a paper bag                       | 123. stun (astonish)                     | <u>surprise/amazement/the unexpected</u>  |
| 89. pop out of a cake                     | 124. surprise                            | <u>Activities/Events/Processes</u>  |
| 90. pounce                                | 125. switch political parties            | 1. Academy Awards   |
| 91. pronounce a live person dead          | 126. take by surprise                    | 2. accident   |
| 92. pull a ball (in baseball)             | 127. take your breath away               | 3. accidental discovery   |
| 93. pull a rabbit out of a hat            | 128. throw a curve                       | 4. adventure  |
| 94. pull down the basketball backboard    | 129. throw for a loop                    | 5. adventure of a lifetime  |
| 95. pull the rug out from under           | 130. throw into water with clothes on    | 6. Aha! experience  |
| 96. push a person into a swimming pool    | 131. tingle                              | 7. air-raid drill   |
| 97. rain during vacation                  | 132. toilet-paper a house or yard        | 8. anticlimax   |
| 98. read tea leaves                       | 133. trap (catch/ensnare/trick)          | 9. assassination  |
| 99. realize                               | 134. trick (dupe/deceive by cunning)     | 10. attack (physical/verbal assault)  |
| 100. receive an award                     | 135. turn the tables                     | 11. attention-getting stunt   |
| 101. recoil                               | 136. uncover                             | 12. avalanche (natural disaster)  |
| 102. reveal                               | 137. underestimate                       | 13. avalanche (political)   |
| 103. run into an old acquaintance         | 138. unearth                             | 14. awards ceremony   |
| 104. scare (frighten/alarm)               | 139. unwrap                              | 15. baby born in car or taxi  |
| 105. scream                               | 140. vanish                              | 16. baby mix-up at hospital   |
| 106. shock (cause surprise/horror)        | 141. walk into a trap                    | 17. baby's first word   |
| 107. shriek                               | 142. watch (observe)                     | 18. behavior  |
| 108. shudder                              |  | 19. behavior change after marriage  |
| 109. sneak up on                          |  | 20. behind-the-back pass  |
| 110. spook                                |  | 21. birthday party  |
| 111. spring (verb)                        |  | 22. blind date (event)  |
| 112. spring a surprise                    |  | 23. blowout (release of air/steam/fire)   |
| 113. spring from behind                   |  | 24. bolt from the blue  |
| 114. spring open                          |  | 25. bomb (long pass/throw)  |
|   |  | 26. brake failure   |

## Surprise-The Unexpected-Amazement Concept List

- |     |                                   |      |                                  |      |   |
|-----|-----------------------------------|------|----------------------------------|------|---|
| 27. | bulb lighting up in clown's mouth | 68.  | fake (simulated movement)        | 101. | launch-on-warning                               |
| 28. | bulletin (latest news report)     | 69.  | fake kick                        | 102. | live broadcast                                  |
| 29. | bureaucratic bungling             | 70.  | fake surrender of troops         | 103. | lottery   |
| 30. | bust (police raid)                | 71.  | fender bender                    | 104. | love at first sight                             |
| 31. | camel's nose sticking into tent   | 72.  | fifty-two pickup                 | 105. | magic trick                                     |
| 32. | card trick                        | 73.  | finding out you were adopted     | 106. | police raid                                     |
| 33. | carjacking                        | 74.  | fire drill                       | 107. | middle-of-the-night phone call                  |
| 34. | carnival                          | 75.  | first strike                     | 108. | military coup                                   |
| 35. | cave-in                           | 76.  | first view of newborn baby       | 109. | miracle   |
| 36. | celebration                       | 77.  | fish strike (hook a fish)        | 110. | mistake   |
| 37. | champagne shower after victory    | 78.  | flashback (memory)               | 111. | moonwalk (first man on moon)                    |
| 38. | cheap shot                        | 79.  | flash fire                       | 112. | morphing (transforming image into another)      |
| 39. | chemical reaction                 | 80.  | flash flood                      | 113. | mudslide  |
| 40. | circus                            | 81.  | freak show                       | 114. | mutiny  |
| 41. | circus act                        | 82.  | furor                            | 115. | natural disaster                                |
| 42. | cloudburst                        | 83.  | gag (joke)                       | 116. | news bulletin                                   |
| 43. | coincidence                       | 84.  | gambling                         | 117. | news flash                                      |
| 44. | corporate takeover                | 85.  | game (diversion)                 | 118. | nuclear attack                                  |
| 45. | costly mistake                    | 86.  | glossolalia (talking in tongues) | 119. | October surprise (alleged hostage release plot) |
| 46. | coup de main                      | 87.  | gooseflesh (goose bumps)         | 120. | oral apraxia (inability to speak)               |
| 47. | coup d'etat                       | 88.  | guerrilla marketing              | 121. | outtake television show                         |
| 48. | courtroom drama                   | 89.  | guerrilla warfare                | 122. | pain from cold food or beverage                 |
| 49. | culture shock                     | 90.  | guest appearance                 | 123. | pain from hot food or beverage                  |
| 50. | dangerous animal on the loose     | 91.  | hoax                             | 124. | peekaboo (child's game)                         |
| 51. | data loss                         | 92.  | home run                         | 125. | Peel-a-gram                                     |
| 52. | death (event)                     | 93.  | hook (boxing blow)               | 126. | pleasant surprise                               |
| 53. | denouement                        | 94.  | horror movie                     | 127. | pop quiz  |
| 54. | disaster                          | 95.  | hotfoot (practical joke)         | 128. | practical joke                                  |
| 55. | discovery                         | 96.  | impulse buying                   | 129. | pratfall  |
| 56. | disease                           | 97.  | Indian raid                      | 130. | pregnancy                                       |
| 57. | divine intervention               | 98.  | invitation to the White House    | 131. | psychic fair (trade show)                       |
| 58. | double take                       | 99.  | January thaw                     | 132. | psychic phenomena                               |
| 59. | early snowfall                    | 100. | landslide                        | 133. | quarterback sneak                               |
| 60. | earthquake                        |      |                                  | 134. | raid  |
| 61. | electrical shock                  |      |                                  | 135. | random drug testing                             |
| 62. | emergency                         |      |                                  | 136. | random shooting                                 |
| 63. | emotional shock                   |      |                                  | 137. | reaction  |
| 64. | explosion                         |      |                                  | 138. | reading of the will                             |
| 65. | expose'                           |      |                                  | 139. | return of a long-lost ring                      |
| 66. | extraterrestrial landing          |      |                                  |      |   |
| 67. | eyes popping out                  |      |                                  |      |   |

## Surprise-The Unexpected-Amazement Concept List

- |      |   |      |                                    |     |                                     |
|------|---|------|------------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------------|
| 140. | reuniting loved ones on TV                      | 181. | surprise party                     | 9.  | beyond your wildest dreams          |
| 141. | rockslide                                       | 182. | takeover (economic maneuver)       | 10. | bowled over                         |
| 142. | room search                                     | 183. | telecast (TV broadcast)            | 11. | breathless                          |
| 143. | rubbernecking                                   | 184. | terrorist attack                   | 12. | bug-eyed                            |
| 144. | runaway car or truck                            | 185. | terrorist hijacking                | 13. | dazed                               |
| 145. | scandal   | 186. | thumb in a box (practical joke)    | 14. | don't know your own strength        |
| 146. | science fiction movie                           | 187. | tidal surge                        | 15. | dumbfounded                         |
| 147. | scientific research                             | 188. | traffic accident                   | 16. | early                               |
| 148. | shark attack                                    | 189. | trick (ruse/prank)                 | 17. | electrifying                        |
| 149. | shell game (gambling game)                      | 190. | tsunami (tidal wave)               | 18. | embarrassed                         |
| 150. | shock treatment (free-market reforms in Russia) | 191. | turnabout                          | 19. | extraordinary                       |
| 151. | shock wave                                      | 192. | twist of fate                      | 20. | fake (not genuine/)                 |
| 152. | shower (party)                                  | 193. | unforeseen consequences            | 21. | flabbergasted                       |
| 153. | sickness  | 194. | unprovoked attack                  | 22. | floored (surprised)                 |
| 154. | sighting  | 195. | upset (unexpected defeat)          | 23. | hit by a wild pitch                 |
| 155. | singing telegram                                | 196. | visitation (holy figure appearing) | 24. | ill-timed                           |
| 156. | site inspection                                 | 197. | volcanic eruption                  | 25. | impromptu                           |
| 157. | slap in the face, a                             | 198. | wake-up call                       | 26. | in shock                            |
| 158. | sleight of hand                                 | 199. | wave of change in Eastern Europe   | 27. | instantaneous                       |
| 159. | snap inspection                                 |      |                                    | 28. | late entry                          |
| 160. | sneak attack                                    |      |                                    | 29. | magical                             |
| 161. | sortie (quick raid)                             |      |                                    | 30. | mind-boggling                       |
| 162. | special recognition                             |      |                                    | 31. | new                                 |
| 163. | spectacle                                       |      |                                    | 32. | odd                                 |
| 164. | spontaneous recovery                            |      |                                    | 33. | off-the-cuff                        |
| 165. | spontaneous remission                           |      |                                    | 34. | once in a blue moon                 |
| 166. | sports  |      |                                    | 35. | on the spur of the moment           |
| 167. | squall  |      |                                    | 36. | out of a clear blue sky             |
| 168. | stagecoach robbery                              |      |                                    | 37. | out of season                       |
| 169. | standing ovation                                |      |                                    | 38. | out of the blue                     |
| 170. | startle reaction                                |      |                                    | 39. | out of the ordinary                 |
| 171. | sticker shock                                   |      |                                    | 40. | outrageous                          |
| 172. | stock market crash                              |      |                                    | 41. | overwhelming                        |
| 173. | stock plunge                                    |      |                                    | 42. | panned by critic, loved by audience |
| 174. | storm   |      |                                    | 43. | pregnant                            |
| 175. | stupid pet tricks                               |      |                                    | 44. | right under your nose               |
| 176. | sudden impulse                                  |      |                                    | 45. | sensational                         |
| 177. | sudden recollection of buried past              |      |                                    | 46. | shocking                            |
| 178. | sudden stop                                     |      |                                    | 47. | shocking pink                       |
| 179. | surprise attack                                 |      |                                    | 48. | sneaky                              |
| 180. | surprise ending                                 |      |                                    | 49. | speechless                          |
|      |   |      |                                    | 50. | spontaneous                         |



### surprise/amazement/the unexpected [Descriptors]

1. against all odds
2. amazing
3. astonished
4. astounding
5. at a loss for words
6. awe-inspiring
7. awesome
8. back from the dead

## Surprise-The Unexpected-Amazement Concept List

51. startled
52. strange
53. strange but true
54. struck by lightning
55. stunned
56. sudden
57. supernatural
58. surprised
59. temperamental
60. tongue-tied
61. unannounced
62. unaware
63. uncommon
64. unexpected
65. unforeseen
66. unique
67. unlikely
68. unplanned
69. unpredictable
70. unprepared
71. unscheduled
72. unthinkable
73. unusual
74. when you least expect it
75. wide-eyed
76. without warning



surprise/amazement/the unexpected [Miscellaneous]

1. abdication of Edward VIII, 1936
2. And behind door number...
3. As I live and breathe!
4. attempted Soviet coup d'etat, 1990
5. Bad news travels fast.
6. Beep-beep!
7. Black Monday (stock market crash, 1987)
8. Boo!
9. Candid Camera (t)

10. Close Encounters of the Third Kind (t)
11. Close your eyes!
12. C-r-r-unch!
13. Do I have a surprise for you!
14. Entebbe Airport raid, 1976
15. Eureka!
16. Extra! Extra! Read all about it!
17. Fall of the Berlin Wall, 1989
18. Find a trout in the milk.
19. For crying out loud!
20. Good grief!
21. Good heavens!
22. Good idea!
23. Guess which hand!
24. Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? (t)
25. Guinness Book of World Records (t)
26. Hands up!
27. Happy Birthday!
28. Here's a pretty kettle of fish!
29. Hit the deck!
30. How could you?!!
31. How time flies!
32. I can't believe my eyes.
33. If I'd known then what I know now...
34. I nearly jumped out of my skin!

35. I saw it with my own eyes!
36. I sprang from my bed to see what...
37. It'll knock your socks off!
38. It's a bird...plane...Superman!
39. It's a boy!
40. It's a girl!
41. It's a whopper!
42. It seemed like a good idea at the time.
43. It takes some getting used to.
44. Kent State protest and killings, 1970
45. Miracle Worker, The (t)
46. My, how you've grown!
47. No!
48. Nobody ever tells me anything.
49. Oh!
50. Oops!
51. Open your eyes!
52. Out of the mouths of babes...
53. Pearl Harbor attack, 1941
54. Police! Freeze!
55. Queen for a Day (t)
56. Ripley's Believe It or Not! (t)
57. Rumor has it...
58. Saved by the bell!
59. Stick 'em up!
60. Surprise! Surprise!
61. Surprise me!
62. Ta-da!
63. Tet offensive, 1968
64. Thank your lucky stars!
65. That's highway robbery!
66. This is a stickup!
67. This is going to fly!
68. 'Twas the Night Before Christmas...
69. Twilight Zone (t)

## Surprise-The Unexpected-Amazement Concept List

70. We interrupt this  
program...
71. Wham!
72. What did you expect?
73. What if...?
74. Where were you  
when...?
75. Wow!
76. You'd better sit down for  
this.
77. You gave me your word!
78. You haven't changed a  
bit!
79. You're fired!
80. You shouldn't have!