

## Secondary Poetry Writing Guide

This manual is designed to provide students and teachers with a guide to the poetry writing process. It includes:

- a variety poetic forms
- tips on crafting a poem
- an editing checklist
- suggestions to generate creative ideas
- a marking criteria

Start early enough to produce your most polished writing. You'll be surprised at how much you can improve your work by drafting, editing and refining.

### What makes a good poem?

A good poem will make the reader:

- feel something
- transport to another place
- appreciate the beauty of nature

Poems can:

- inform, inspire or excite
- tell a story, persuade, or carry a tune

Poems allow us to use creative expression that connects with an audience in unique and imaginative ways. Some poems follow a formal structure with clear structural guidelines, whilst others are more free style and seem to break all the rules.

With poetry,

*—there are so many “rules”, but at the same time, no rules at all.*

Source: <https://self-publishingschool.com/how-to-write-a-poem/>

### The structure of poems

Poems can be made up of:

- Lines
- Stanzas (verses)
- Rhyming patterns (schema)
- Couplets - a pair of lines that usually rhyme and have the same meter
- Shape - the shape of the words on the page and the space around them
- Language choices – imagery - figurative language
- Meter - the number of syllables in a line - the pattern of emphasis on each syllable

## Poetic Form

Some poetic forms are simple and some more complex. Below you will find a few examples but keep in mind that the list is endless. Let this list guide you, not limit you!

**Lyrical Poem** – What is your favourite song? Have a close look at the lyrics. What do you notice? Basically, song lyrics are poems that express the feelings and emotions of the author, written in the first person, Lyrics are set to music, so need to have rhythm and sometimes they rhyme.

### “We are the Champions”

I've paid my dues time after time  
I've done my sentence but committed no crime  
And bad mistakes, I've made a few  
I've had my share of sand kicked in my face  
But I've come through

And we mean to go on, and on, and on, and on

We are the champions, my friends  
And we'll keep on fighting till the end  
We are the champions, we are the champions  
No time for losers, 'cause we are the champions of the world

I've taken my bows and my curtain calls  
You brought me fame and fortune  
And everything that goes with it, I thank you all

But it's been no bed of roses, no pleasure cruise  
I consider it a challenge before  
The whole human race and I ain't gonna lose

And we mean to go on, and on, and on and on

We are the champions, my friends  
And we'll keep on fighting till the end  
We are the champions, we are the champions  
No time for losers, 'cause we are the champions of the world

We are the champions, my friends  
And we'll keep on fighting till the end, oh  
We are the champions, we are the champions  
No time for losers, 'cause we are the champions

- by Freddie Mercury

<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/queen/wearethechampions.html>

**Didactic Poetry** – Didactic poetry is specifically written for the purpose of teaching a lesson of some sort, usually with a moral intention. Didactic poems are not required to follow a particular structure, rhythm or rhyming scheme, though many do. Like the example below, by Rudyard Kipling, which uses iambic pentameter rhythm and ABABCD CD rhyming patterns.

### If

If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;  
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
But make allowance for their doubting too:  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
Or being hated don't give way to hating,  
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;  
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim,  
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same:  
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,  
And stoop and build' em up with worn-out tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
And lose, and start again at your beginnings,  
And never breathe a word about your loss:  
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch,  
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
If all men count with you, but none too much:  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!

- by Rudyard Kipling

Sources:

<https://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/if-by-rudyard-kipling>  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/didactic-poetry>

**Ballad** – A ballad is a structured narrative poem that was originally set to music. Ballads are made up of quatrains (4 line stanzas) with a regular rhythm and usually a rhyming pattern of ABCB but there are variations. The example below uses an AABB rhyming pattern.

### Annabel Lee

It was many and many a year ago,  
In a kingdom by the sea,  
That a maiden there lived whom you may know  
By the name of Annabel Lee;  
And this maiden she lived with no other thought  
Than to love and be loved by me.

*I* was a child and *she* was a child,  
In this kingdom by the sea,  
But we loved with a love that was more than love—  
I and my Annabel Lee—  
With a love that the wingèd seraphs of Heaven  
Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,  
In this kingdom by the sea,  
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling  
My beautiful Annabel Lee;  
So that her highborn kinsmen came  
And bore her away from me,  
To shut her up in a sepulchre  
In this kingdom by the sea.

The angels, not half so happy in Heaven,  
Went envying her and me—  
Yes!—that was the reason (as all men know,  
In this kingdom by the sea)  
That the wind came out of the cloud by night,  
Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love  
Of those who were older than we—  
Of many far wiser than we—  
And neither the angels in Heaven above  
Nor the demons down under the sea  
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul  
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;

For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams  
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes  
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side  
Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,  
In her sepulchre there by the sea—  
In her tomb by the sounding sea.

By Edgar Allen Poe

[Annabel Lee by Edgar Allan Poe | Poetry Foundation](#)

**Prose Poetry** – prose poetry is really just prose writing that uses some poetic techniques and qualities such as an emphasis on imagery and manipulation of sentence structure. Poetic prose is arranged into paragraphs that can be different in size and structure rather than regular stanzas.

### **The Adventures of a Turtle**

The turtle carries his house on his back. He is both the house and the person of that house.

But actually, under the shell is a little room where the true turtle, wearing long underwear, sits at a little table. At one end of the room a series of levers sticks out of slots in the floor, like the controls of a steam shovel. It is with these that the turtle controls the legs of his house.

Most of the time the turtle sits under the sloping ceiling of his turtle room reading catalogues at the little table where a candle burns. He leans on one elbow, and then the other. He crosses one leg, and then the other. Finally he yawns and buries his head in his arms and sleeps.

If he feels a child picking up his house he quickly douses the candle and runs to the control levers and activates the legs of his house and tries to escape.

If he cannot escape he retracts the legs and withdraws the so-called head and waits. He knows that children are careless, and that there will come a time when he will be free to move his house to some secluded place, where he will relight his candle, take out his catalogues and read until at last he yawns. Then he'll bury his head in his arms and sleep....

That is, until another child picks up his house....

- by [Russell Edson](#)

Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50777/the-adventures-of-a-turtle>

**Sonnet** – literally, 'little song'. A 14-line poem with a variable rhyme scheme. Perhaps the most commonly known sonnet is the *English (or Shakespearean) sonnet*, which arranges the 14 lines into one stanza with a rhyme scheme of ABAB CDCDEFEFGG. See example below.

### **Sonnet 18: Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?**

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;  
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:  
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

- by William Shakespeare

**Pantoum** – One of my favourites! The fun with pantoums is that each line appears twice throughout the poem. In a twenty line pantoum, the following lines will be the same: 1+20, 2+5, 3+18, 4+7, 6+9, 8+11, 10+13, 12 +15,14+17, 16+19. The rhyming pattern is: ABAB BCBC CDCD DEDE EAEA

### **The Christmas Preface**

There, in the hay's warmth and the steaming sty,  
The Word born to the frailty of flesh  
Cracks our mortality with a weak cry  
And seals our life within his endlessness.

The Word born to the frailty of flesh,  
He lies wrapped in the cloths of mystery,  
And seals our life within his endlessness,  
In infant finitude eternity.

He lies wrapped in the cloths of mystery,  
The straining of small limbs, unopened eyes.  
In infant finitude, eternity  
And love invisible we recognize.

The straining of small limbs, unopened eyes  
Draw us from torchlight to the light of glory,  
And love invisible we recognize  
Shaping the child's dream of the Christmas story.

Draw us from torchlight to the light of glory.  
Crack our mortality with a weak cry,  
Shaping the child's dream of the Christmas story,  
Here in the hay's warmth and the steaming sty.

by James Matthew Wilson, from the December 2015 issue of *First Things*  
Source: <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2015/12/the-christmas-preface>

These are just a few samples of an endless array of poetic possibilities. If you have a favourite that is not on the list, don't be afraid to use it! One of the best things about poetry is that it allows your imagination to soar.

So go for it!

## Generating Ideas

Having trouble getting started? Here are some simple activities to get the ideas flowing:

- Starting with real life experiences for inspiration. Write down your response to one or more of the following. Leave some space around it.
  - Something that makes you laugh
  - A challenge you have overcome
  - Your favourite movie/game/band/sport etc.
  - Your ideal job/house/holiday/school/pet etc.
  - An embarrassing experience
  - Something that terrifies you (maybe a phobia)
  - Something you can see right now

Create a word bank around your answer.

You now have some key words to start your poem.

- Stream of consciousness writing.
  - Start writing about the first thing that comes into your mind - Follow your thoughts wherever they lead you.
  - Don't worry about correct spelling, grammar or punctuation.
  - Keep writing continuously for 4-5 minutes.
  - Once you're done, read back over your writing and highlight the interesting words or phrases.
  - Use these highlighted fragments as the beginning of a poem.
  - Now you can fill the gaps.
- Word association.
  - Start with the words, '*Playing with Story*' in the middle of a blank page. Brainstorm every word, phrase, and idea that you can associate with this theme. Choose your favourites to get started.
- Try using one of the visual prompts below to get your ideas flowing...



## Visual Prompts



## Image references

[Oz Angeles: Retired and Old Super Heroes](#)

[4-3544-Island-Lake-camping.jpg \(990x530\) \(trendipia.com\)](#)

[Overcoming-Fears-and-Accepting-Tears-C.jpg \(4613x3075\)](#)

[travel2.jpg \(2100x1331\) \(netdna-ssl.com\)](#)

[young-man-and-woman-singing-on-stage-in-concert-in-front-of-adoring-fans-low-angle-view\\_1888226.jpg \(1300x976\) \(stockunlimited.net\)](#)

[3554a0d5d5f29bce349b79830a91c2c4.png \(1018x768\) \(pinimg.com\)](#)



## Editing checklist

You've finished your first draft. Congratulations!

Now put your poem down for at least 24 hours (or even a whole week if you have time) to let it "settle". Come back with a fresh view. Have someone else read your poem and note any parts that don't make sense, or where it doesn't flow well. Read over your poem again. Be honest and be prepared to delete words or lines and swap things around. If you are using a computer, the best way to do this is to save a copy of your draft before you begin deleting, then it won't feel like you are throwing your work away permanently. Repeat this process as many times as you need to until you are happy with your poem. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I know what form of poem I have chosen to write? E.g. tanka, pantoum, free verse etc.?
- Does my poem follow the structure of its form? E.g. does my limerick follow an AABBA rhyming pattern and?
- Does the rhythm of my poem flow?
- Is my poem engaging? Does it keep me interested?
- Does the poem evoke emotion - excitement, sadness, amusement...?
- Could I have chosen more interesting or descriptive words in my poem?
- Have I used a variety of techniques in my poem to make it more interesting? E.g. imagery, alliteration, theme etc.? (see Criteria 6 in the Marking Criteria below).
- Have I checked my spelling?
- Does my poem link to the theme in some way? (*Playing with Story*)
- Have I included the poetic form in my title?

## Secondary Poetry Marking Criteria

The criteria assessed in the writing task are:

Criterion	1	2	3
1. <b>Reader Engagement</b> – Poem contains content which engages and affects the reader.			
2. <b>Poetic Structure</b> – Use of poetic structure that is sustained and relevant to poetic form.			
3. <b>Relevance to theme</b> – Poem content relates to the theme of <i>Playing with Story</i> .			
4. <b>Cohesion</b> – The portrayal of ideas, meaning and purpose is clear and effective.			
5. <b>Vocabulary</b> – Articulate use of a wide range of precise and effective words and phrases.			
6. <b>Techniques</b> - The use of effective structural and language techniques such as: – figurative language including imagery, sensory language, personification, metaphor, simile, onomatopoeia, hyperbole, symbolism, tone/mood, allusion, metonymy, theme, etc. – creative use of language including nonsense words, spoonerisms, word play, neologisms, innuendo, parody, puns etc – structural including alliteration, assonance, juxtaposition, repetition, etc.			