Primary Poetry Writing Guide

This manual is designed to help guide students and teachers through the poetry writing process. It includes some ideas about a variety of different types of poems, tips on crafting a poem, an editing checklist, a page of suggestions to generate creative thinking and a marking criteria. As with any mode of writing, start early enough to produce your most polished work. You'll be surprised at how much you can improve your writing by drafting, editing and refining.

What makes a good poem?

A good poem will make you feel something, transport you to another place, make you appreciate the beauty of nature, inform, inspire or excite you. Poems can 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 guidelines to follow, 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 structured with rhythm and sometimes rhyme.
Poems can be freeform, with no strict structural boundaries
The building blocks of poetry:
- Lines
- Couplets
  - A pair of lines that usually rhyme and have the same meter
- Rhyming patterns (schema)
- Stanzas (verses)
- Meter
  - The number of syllables in a line
  - The pattern of emphasis on each syllable
- Shape
  - The shape of the words on the page and the space around them
- Language choices
  - Imagery
  - Figurative language

Poetic Forms

There is an endless list of different forms of poetry. Some are simple and some more complex. On the next few pages you will find a few examples. Let this guide you, but don't be limited by it.

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                    A
                   dark
                green giant
             is standing, silent
            as a deserted forest,
          in the corner of my lounge.
                 A hundred
              brightly coloured
            baubles like sparkling
        fruit hang from spiky branches.
      And tinsel, like a great golden snake,
    wraps and curls itself around its body.
                   But
                   best
                  of all
             are the presents
              piled around its
              burnished base.
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And then, a few days later, 6 to be precise - unless your giant of the forest is real, its branches will be plucked from its trunk and packed away in a big box for another eleven months until it is time to brush the dust off and put it back up on December first.

Source https://thomascozzolino.wixsite.com/5th-grade/shape-poem

Haiku example:
Sowing, ignorant
of the method – it will grow
maybe anyway.
- by Paul Goodman
Source: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=29468

Limerick Verse – A verse made up of five lines with a rhyming pattern of AABBA and an anapestic rhythmic pattern (da DUM da da DUM da da DUM). The third and fourth lines are sometimes fused into a single line with internal rhyme. Limericks are traditionally cheeky and a little bit irreverent.

Limerick Verse The man from Brazil

There was an old man from Brazil,
Who thought he could use his new drill,
He plugged it straight in, put a hole in his chin,
Now he's laying down feeling quite ill.
-by Narelle Lethlean

Limerick Poem - A limerick poem is made up of a series of Limerick verses.

Happy Mother's Day Limerick Poem

There's a lady in each of our lives
Who endured all the lows and the highs
That her children went through
Like the mumps or the flu
Or the joy of a pleasant surprise

She strengthened our family ties
And wiped away tears from our eyes
She forgave all our flaws
And our social faux pas
And she baked really great apple pies

She saw through almost all of our lies
And plied us with sodas and fries
When our manners were good
And we did what we should
She was righteous and caring and wise

So to Mothers, both present and past
For the many good deeds you've amassed
I honor you all
With this verse on my wall
And I hope that your day is a blast

-    by © Neil - Published: May 2014

Sources
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms?category=209&page=2
https://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/happy-mothers-day-limerick

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. The example below uses an AABBCC rhyming pattern for the first six lines in each verse, and the seventh line is a refrain, which is a line that is repeated throughout the poem/song (in this case, the refrain has a slight variation, but that is perfectly ok, as long as it is still recognisable).

The Sound of Silence

Hello darkness, my old friend
I've come to talk with you again
Because a vision softly creeping
Left its seeds while I was sleeping
And the vision that was planted in my brain
Still remains
Within the sound of silence

In restless dreams I walked alone
Narrow streets of cobblestone
'Neath the halo of a street lamp
I turned my collar to the cold and damp
When my eyes were stabbed by the flash of a neon light
That split the night
And touched the sound of silence

And in the naked light I saw
Ten thousand people, maybe more
People talking without speaking
People hearing without listening
People writing songs that voices never share
And no one dared
Disturb the sound of silence

"Fools" said I, "You do not know
Silence like a cancer grows
Hear my words that I might teach you
Take my arms that I might reach you"
But my words like silent raindrops fell
And echoed in the wells of silence
Within the sound of silence

-    by Paul Simon
Simon & Garfunkel
© Universal Music Publishing Group
Source: https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/simongarfunkel/thesoundofsilence.html

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

Tanka example:
Drag racing drivers
polish their revved up hot rods.
Chests puffed out with pride
admiring their reflections
in yellow or red or blue.
-    by Narelle Lethlean

Compiled by Narelle Lethlean, Learning & Outreach, Albury LibraryMuseum

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 ABABCDCD 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

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

The Ballad of Rum
A dog wandered into our garden one day,
A friendly old mutt, didn't look like a stray.
We never discovered (from) whence he had come,
But we brushed him and fed him and the kids called him Rum.

Now as family members, even dogs must work hard,
So we put Rum on duty next door in our yard,
Bright eyed and watchful by night and by day,
But not much of a guard dog, I'm sorry to say.

He barked at the cats and he'd bark at a toad,
He barked at the cattle outside on the road,
He barked at the horses - so where did he fail?
You see, Rum liked people, and he just wagged his tail.

Compiled by Narelle Lethlean, Learning & Outreach, Albury LibraryMuseum

He liked the yard labour, an amiable bunch.
They fed our dog tidbits and scraps from their lunch.
Rum wolfed it all down, but to our dismay
He seemed to get fatter with each passing day.

Then one night when Rum was laid at his ease,
A burglar crept in just as quiet as you please.
He saw no alarms, heard no siren howling,
No guard dog for sure, there'd be barking and growling.

But Rum was awake and he'd seen him alright,
Delighted with company this time of the night,
He flew through the yard, his new friend to greet,
And his weight bowled the burglar right off of his feet.

The intruder got up and ran off with a wail
And Rum right behind him still wagging his tail.
He departed the yard he'd come in to burgle
Like a champion athlete clearing a hurdle.

But Rum couldn't jump gates, so sadly instead
He picked up the thief's wallet and went back to bed.
Next morning the evidence everyone viewed,
When Rum brought it to us, (just a little bit chewed).

Once given the wallet, the police didn't fail
To capture the burglar and put him in jail.
His confession like wildfire spread through the town,
How a big vicious guard dog had knocked the thief down.

We all howled with laughter when we heard the story,
And Rum was our hero, he was basking in glory.
There's been no attempts since to burgle our yard,
For everyone knows now that Rum is on guard.

- by © Peter R Wolveridge - Published: December 2015
Source: https://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/the-ballad-of-rum

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!

*I suggest including the form of your poem in the title so that the judges know what structural elements to look for. Eg. 'Ballad of the Caterpillar' or 'The Joys of Isolation – a Limerick Poem'

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.

  - A memorable holiday

  - An embarrassing experience

  - Something that terrifies you (maybe a phobia)

  - Your favourite season

  - The most disgusting food

  - Your favourite animal

  - Something you can see right now

Create a word bank around your answer. You now have some key words to start your poem. Now create a contrast or use juxtaposition to include an idea that deals with change. Eg. Your perfect holiday turns into a disaster or the most disgusting food becomes your favourite etc.

- 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. Do this for 2-3 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. Fill the gaps.

- Start with the word 'CHANGE' in the middle of a blank page. Brainstorm every word, theme and idea that you can link to this theme. Choose two on which you can build your poem.

- Try using one of the images below to get your ideas flowing…
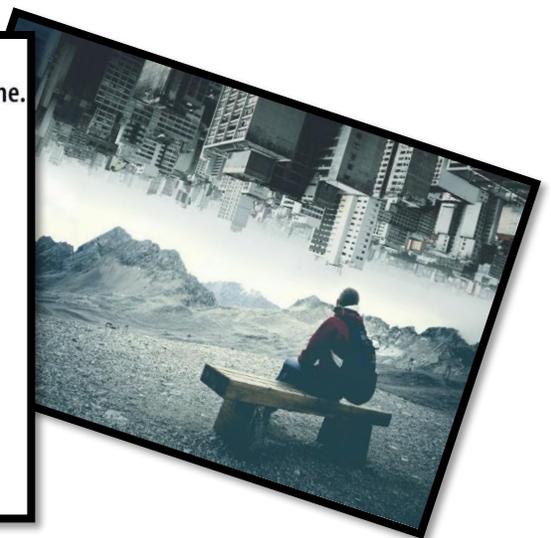
Editing checklist

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?

- ❏ Does the rhythm of my poem flow?

- ❏ Is my poem engaging? Does it keep me interested?

- ❏ Does the poem make me feel something - excited, sad, amused…?

- ❏ 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. assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia etc.?

- ❏ Have I checked my spelling?

- ❏ Does my poem clearly relate to the theme of *change* in some way?

- ❏ Have I included the poetic form in my title?

Primary Poetry Marking Criteria

The criteria assessed in the writing task are:

Criteria	1	2	3
1. **Reader Engagement** – Poem contains content which engages and affects the reader.			
2. **Poetic Structure** – Use of poetic structure that is sustained and relevant to poetic form.			
3. **Relevance to theme** – Poem content relates to the theme of *Change.*			
4. **Cohesion** – The portrayal of ideas, meaning and purpose is clear and effective.			
5. **Vocabulary** – Articulate use of a wide range of precise and effective words and phrases.			
6. **Techniques** - The use of effective structural and language techniques such as: – figurative language including imagery, sensory language, personification, metaphor, simile, onomatopoeia, hyperbole, etc. – creative use of language including nonsense words, spoonerisms, word play, neologisms and puns etc – structural including alliteration, repetition, configuration of shape etc.			