

Listen to Mother play. She practices and practices a piece, and sometimes a magic happens and it seems the music starts to breathe. It sends a shiver through you. You can't explain it, really; it's a mystery. Well, when words do that, we call it poetry.

—**Michael Bedard in *Emily*, a children's book about Emily Dickenson**

...poetry is "the art of language...a fusion of typography, sound, figures of speech and theme (paraphrased)..."

—**Lewis Turco, *The Book of Forms***

Hints About Poem Making

Sometimes poetry...

- Is written in verse (or not). Counting syllables equals poetry in "verse." Not counting syllables equals prose-poetry.
- Is rhymed (or not).
- Uses lineation or typography (formatting) to consider how the words look on the page and how the lines sound and how meaning is changed as a result of lineation
- Expresses ideas, facts or emotions in a concentrated style more powerful and imaginative than ordinary language, especially using beauty of thought or language
- Tells a story
- Only gives a snapshot or images of or sense of something
- Can be purely nonsense or abstract
- Is political or speaks to social or environmental justice
- Uses creative license
- Notices and points to the world in an unusual way
- Uses literary devices such as:

Simile: a comparison made using like or as. For example:

*she wore earrings, green as peas
& lipstick like coral
her hair—a blaze on her head*

Metaphor: a comparison made by saying that one thing is something it is not really. For example:

*at the starting line of our romance
—a red Corvette she revved her engine*

ready to race

Repetition: of words, phrases, rhythm, meter, rhyme, sounds. For example:

*now the breath
now the mist
now the silence*

*now the lake
now the palm
now the soil...*

Assonance: repetition of vowel sounds. For example:

she reached for the ripened peach

Consonance: repetition of ending sounds. For example:

amethyst glint of sunset in mist

Alliteration: repetition of beginning sounds. For example:

soft, sweet, scent of new mown hay

Sensory Imagery: creation of pictures with words using color, sound, smell, touch, and taste. For example:

*in the crisp morning:
brown bacon sizzling
barefeet slapping
on the cold kitchen floor*

Rhythm: counting, arranging, or accentuating syllables to create meter or cadence, or a sense of musicality. For example:

*after the flow
the midnight glow
after the wandering waves*

*there we did lie
my lover and i
afloat on the salty sea*

Personification: giving human qualities to non-human entities. For example:

grass & the summer breeze
—a samba
under the smiling moon

Writing Samples:

- *I Hear America Singing*, Walt Whitman
- *Why We Oppose Pockets for Women*, Alice Deur Miller

Writing Exercise: List Poem

Try writing an inventory or list of interesting or unusual things and give it a title that reveals how those things are related. Here are some ideas. Use one of these or one of your own to get started.

- I have come to understand that:
- Ten Things You May Not Know About Me
- How to End an Argument
- Tricks Dogs Teach Humans
- How to Manage Chaos
- How to Find a Husband (or Wife)
- What We Cannot See
- Things That Unravel
- How to Make Love
- What Plants Think
- What the Cardinal Wants
- What the Furniture Says at Night
- Rooms We Live In
- What We've Lost
- How to Lose Your Mind
- What to Do With What You Have
- Things I Wanted But Do Not Want Now

Hints for Revision:

- Think of revision like math (from Mark Statman, *Listener in the Snow*)
subtraction: cut out the most common and easiest language
division: break lines or sections (be purposeful) or decide to use prosaic form
multiplication: of sounds, words, images
addition: of detail, imagery, leaps of imagination

Writer's Idea Box: list poems

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- Turn the page over and start writing again without looking at your work
- Turn the poem upside down or sideways; maybe you can break it open and put it back together
- Re-write a problematic line five different ways
- Change the look of a poem on the page
- Consider punctuation & spelling
- Substitute more powerful words for words with less punch
- Have you allowed the poem to take its own direction?
- If there is rhythm, have you stayed with the pattern?