

How to Be a Poet

1. Write Poetry
2. Read Poetry

...That's it!

Word List Exercise

Make a list of as many *delicious, wonderful, effervescent, luminous, juicy, luxurious, spicy, voluptuous, magnificent, delirious, magical* **words** as you can think of in **5 minutes**.

GO!

(compote, mango, opulent, ruby, turquoise, shatter, blink, humectant...)

The Senses

Invoking a moment in more than one physical sense gives depth and richness to a poem.

Think of an abstract concept or an emotion

(anger, longing, contentment, hope, forgetting, time, soul, eternity, indecision, joy, freedom, sharing)

What does it smell like?

Taste like?

Feel like to the touch?

Look like?

Sound like?

Now put them all together:

Time is a dusty room, filled with feathers
the almost scent of lost flowers no one
remembered to name
Time rankles, catches on the brambles
of our skin like lace

Music heard in passing,
through the armored window
of a dark car

My Real Name*

Use words from your word list. Make crazy combinations. Make names for yourself you never thought possible. Make sentences into names, etc. Examples: rose-colored tree root / delicious-lemon dance-mama / smoke-fruit / the mountain who learned to cry...

My real name is...

Yesterday my name was...

But tomorrow my name will be...

In my dreams my name was...

The world thinks my name is...

But in the silent secret heart of my heart my name is...

*based on an exercise in Poemcrazy by Susan Goldsmith Wooldridge

Fragments Exercise

An exercise in creating tension and invoking a moment by hinting at a larger story.

Look around you where you are in this moment.

Choose an object and describe it with one or two adjectives

Think of a memory or story about that object (whether real or imagined) and write one or two sentences that tell part of the story

Now place the object and/or its story in an unexpected setting.

Example:

That ornate, golden picture frame
the one with the photo of our trip to Maine
lies in a bed of sand,
wrapped in blue linen

The Song of...*

When we use poetry to declare who we are, we can be anything, our horizons expand into infinity...

Listen to “The Song of Amergin” – an early Gaelic poem

Write your own “Song” beginning each line with “I Am”:

If you were a color, what color would you be?

What animal?

What tree/plant?

What element in nature?

What sound?

What song?

What movement?

What shape?

What place?

What number?

Refer to your word list for inspiration if you get stuck.

*based on an exercise in Poemcrazy by Susan Goldsmith Wooldridge

A Letter to a Landscape

Think of your favorite natural place

Write some quick notes on the details: the smell of sweet grass, the sound of mourning doves, the texture of the cedar trees, the roll of hills, the flat expanse of the sky...

Be specific – if you know the common names of some of the flora and fauna in the area, use them

Now imagine you have been away from this place for a long time, but are preparing to return.

Write a letter to that place, letting it know how much you've missed it and look forward to seeing it again.

Start your letter with the line:

I am coming home.

If I Knew I Could Not Fail

**What would you do if you knew you
could not possibly fail?**

Make a list of your wildest dreams

Feel free to include elements that don't exist "in real life"

Remember to use the senses: touch, taste, smell, sound, sight

Refer to your word list for inspiration

Write a poem with the first line:

If I knew I could not fail....

Speaking in Another Voice

Look around your space and choose an inanimate object to write about. You may also choose a plant or a pet. Anything goes, but for this exercise we are not choosing other human beings.

Write a short poem from the perspective of this object or being you've chosen.

Here are some prompts:

How do they see themselves? Are they proud, disappointed, smug?

What deep questions do they ponder at the end of the day when the house is quiet?

What are they dying to teach us if we would only listen?

What other places would they visit if they could?

What is their secret name?

Dreams are Poems Written by Your Subconscious While You Sleep

I mean, I don't know this for sure, but it sounds almost right.

Think of a dream you had that affected you in a profound way (preferably a good dream and not a nightmare unless you really feel you want to explore that).

This may be a recent dream or a dream you had long ago that you've never forgotten.

Write down the main points and images from your dream.

Feel free to elaborate, exaggerate, or make up parts. Your dream may just be a starting point.

Don't forget the senses: taste, sound, sight, touch, smell

Write a poem that communicates your whole dream and how it made you feel.

Chant Writing Exercise

Think of a simple common nursery rhyme or song – that’s the rhythm pattern you’re going to use for this exercise. (Ex. Mary Had a Little Lamb, Jack Be Nimble Jack Be Quick, etc.)

Choose a subject for your chant (to greet the morning sun, to say before going to sleep, to instill confidence, to invoke your Muse before making art or writing poetry, etc), or feel free to write “nonsense” just to get a sense of fitting words to rhythm.

Write a simple 4 line rhyming chant on that subject with your rhythm pattern in mind.

Try some alliteration: Silky slipping and sharp

Remember the senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, smell

Don’t worry if it isn’t a perfect rhyme, and feel free to modify the rhythm to suit your own inner sense of what works.

Some Good Books

(but definitely not all the good books)

Poemcrazy by Susan Goldsmith Wooldridge

A Poetry Handbook by Mary Oliver

Saved by a Poem by Kim Rosen

Other Writing Books:

Bird by Bird by Anne Lamott

Writing Down the Bones by Natalie Goldberg

The Artist's Way by Julia Cameron

Finding Water by Julia Cameron