

Tips on writing poetry in free verse

Write in two stages:

1. *Generating material*: free write, write from the heart, don't stop to think.
2. *Creative editing*: review, *strategize* – what works, what doesn't, how can I make this a standout?

Generating material: free write using a writing prompt such as a photograph, a newspaper headline, a significant incident or event in your life - capture what you feel, what you see, express what matters – abandon the 'editor' in you and fill your page with unfiltered, unstructured, seemingly random thoughts and feelings. It helps to write for at least ten minutes without stopping (don't lift your pen from the paper, or don't stop tapping your keyboard).

Creative editing - scrutinize your words, be selective and discerning. Ask yourself what you want to express and how can you best express it? Experiment, change the order of things, avoid 'empty' words, use a thesaurus to help you find words that best reflect what you want to say, the more conscious you are of selection and placement the more effective your poem will be. Be bold, you've got nothing to lose - you can always go back to an earlier version.

Think of each word and line as a strategic messenger: word choice, length of lines and placement of line breaks all impact meaning:

- How long will each line be?
- Where will you break the line to emphasize a particular thought, or word? Will your line break be surprising, will it startle, will it highlight a certain phrase or double-meaning?
- How will line breaks and word choices influence the sound of the poem? When people read your poem they will hear word sounds, and they will pause slightly at the end of each line.
- How will line lengths influence the pace of the poem? Shorter lines speed up, longer lines slow down – how will this enhance or reflect the content of the poem?
- What words are emphasized by placement at the end of each line? Those at the end of a line will inherit more importance than the words in the middle.
- How does the poem look on the page? Is it light and delicate or are the lines packed solidly – does the appearance support and enhance the meaning of the poem? Do you want to stack your lines evenly along the left margin? Or do you want your poem to take a shape that enhances or illustrates what it is about (if it is about the breakup of a relationship perhaps you want to 'break it up' on the page).
- Will your lines be grouped together into *stanzas* that organize ideas?
- Give specific tangible details, rely on the senses to evoke what you want to express,

Avoid the predictable, be innovative, take risks, and express the unexpected.