

Poetry Workshop: From Page to Stage

Cairns Library 19 Sep 24

- *What is Poetry?*

- Poetry is a written art form which uses language in a concentrated, imaginative, and often rhythmic way to evoke emotions, convey ideas, or tell a story.
- Poetry often engages rhyme, symbolism, metaphors and allegories to create multiple layers of meaning.
- Poetry is versatile and can range from structured forms like sonnets and haikus to free verse, where the poet has more freedom to experiment with form and language.
- Poetry transforms experiences, thoughts and feelings into a powerful and evocative lyrical experience, inviting readers to explore deeper meanings and emotions.

- *What is Spoken Word?*

- Spoken word is an act of 'performance poetry' where the focus lies more on the spoken delivery of the poem rather than the written text.
- Spoken word combines elements of storytelling, theatre and poetry and often includes rhythm, tone, and body language to convey emotions and meaning.
- Spoken word is typically performed live in front of an audience and can cover a wide range of topics, from personal experiences to social and political issues.
- Spoken word is a powerful and expressive way to communicate ideas and connect with listeners.

- *A Brief History in Poetry...*

Poetry is one of the oldest forms of literature, with roots that stretch back thousands of years. It began as an oral tradition, where stories, rituals, and cultural knowledge were passed down through generations through rhythmic and memorable verse. In ancient civilizations, such as Egypt, and India, poetry was used to convey religious texts, myths, and laws.

During the Classical period and in the Middle Ages poetry became a formalised art, with poets creating works that explored themes of love, heroism, and the human condition. Poetry from this time often followed strict forms.

The Renaissance brought a renewed interest in classical forms and themes, with poets like Shakespeare, Petrarch, and John Milton pushing the boundaries of language and poetic form. This period laid the foundation for much of modern Western poetry.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, poetry underwent significant changes, with movements like Romanticism, Modernism, and the Beat Generation challenging traditional forms and experimenting with new styles and themes. Poets like Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, T.S. Eliot, and Langston Hughes explored personal expression, social issues, and the complexities of modern life.

Today, poetry continues to evolve, incorporating diverse voices and styles from around the world. Forms like free verse and spoken word have gained popularity, making poetry a dynamic and accessible form of artistic expression.

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- *What are 6 types of Popular Conventional and Contemporary Poetry?*

Conventional Poetry Types:

Sonnet:

A traditional form of poetry with 14 lines, typically written in iambic pentameter. The most famous variations are the Shakespearean (or English) sonnet and the Petrarchan (or Italian) sonnet. Sonnets often explore themes of love, time, and beauty.

Haiku:

A traditional Japanese form of poetry consisting of three lines with a syllable pattern of 5-7-5. Haikus typically focus on nature and the changing seasons, capturing a moment or a feeling in a concise, evocative way.

Ode:

A formal and often ceremonious lyric poem that addresses and praises a person, thing, or event. Odes are typically elaborate and dignified in style, and they often explore deep emotions and philosophical thoughts.

Contemporary Poetry Types:

Free verse:

A modern form of poetry that does not follow a specific meter, rhyme scheme, or structure. Free verse allows poets to experiment with the rhythm and flow of language, focusing more on expression and imagery than on traditional forms.

Prose poetry: This form of poetry is written in prose, rather than verse, but still employs poetic techniques such as imagery, metaphor, and heightened language. Prose poems often blur the line between poetry and prose, creating a piece that reads like a short story or essay but feels like a poem. It's a flexible form that allows poets to explore narrative and poetic expression in a more free-flowing, paragraph-like structure.

Spoken word:

A contemporary form of poetry that is written to be performed aloud. Spoken word often includes elements of storytelling, performance, and social commentary. It emphasizes the rhythm, tone, and delivery of the poem, making it an engaging and powerful way to communicate ideas and emotions.

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- *Starting from a Blank Page... How to Write Poetry.*

1 Focus on imagery and sensory details:

Poetry often relies on vivid imagery to create a strong emotional impact. Use descriptive language that appeals to the senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch—to help the reader experience the scene or emotion you're conveying. Show, don't just tell, what you're trying to express.

2 Tap into emotion:

Poetry is a powerful medium for expressing emotions. Whether your poem is about joy, sorrow, anger, or love, strive to convey genuine feelings that resonate with your readers. Be authentic and honest in your expression, and use language that evokes an emotional response, allowing your audience to connect with the sentiments you're expressing. The more personal and specific your emotions, the more universally they can be felt.

4 Experiment with form and structure:

Whether you're following a traditional form (like a sonnet or haiku) or writing in free verse, pay attention to how the structure of your poem affects its rhythm, pacing, and overall impact. Don't be afraid to play with line breaks, stanza length, and the arrangement of words on the page to create a unique effect. Read your poem aloud to yourself!

5 Use figurative language:

Incorporate metaphors, similes, personification, and other forms of figurative language to add depth and layers of meaning to your poem. These devices help to convey complex emotions and ideas in a condensed and powerful way, making your poem resonate more deeply with readers.

6 Revise and edit:

Poetry often benefits from careful revision. Take the time to refine your language, tighten your structure, and ensure that every word and line serves a purpose. Editing helps clarify your message and enhances the poem's overall impact. Read it aloud!

Performing poetry: What Works ~ What Doesn't

Performing poetry can be a powerful way to connect with an audience. Here are four tips to help you succeed and what to avoid:

1 Know your material:

Familiarize yourself with your poem so well that you can perform it naturally. Practice until you're comfortable with the words and their rhythms.

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2 Use expression and emotion:

Convey the emotion and meaning behind your poem through your voice and facial expressions. Engage with the content of the poem to make it resonate with your audience.

3 Control your pace and volume:

Vary your pace and volume to highlight different parts of the poem. Pausing for effect and modulating your voice can help emphasize key lines or moments.

4 Connect with your audience:

Make eye contact and use body language to engage with the audience. Your connection with them can enhance their experience and make your performance more impactful.

What to Avoid:

1 Overacting:

While emotion is crucial, avoid exaggerating your expressions or gestures. Authenticity often resonates more than dramatic flair.

2 Rushing through:

Slow down - Don't speed through the poem. Give each line its due consideration and allow the audience to absorb the words.

3 Ignoring the audience:

Failing to engage with your audience can make your performance feel disconnected. Make sure to establish a presence and interact with them.

4 Reading directly from the page/phone:

While it's fine to have your poem as a reference, try to avoid reading it verbatim. Memorizing or familiarising yourself with the content allows for a more dynamic and engaging performance.

⇒ Experimenting with these elements can help you find your unique voice and improve your poetic craft.

- *Let's Talk Nerves ~ Performance Anxiety Strategies*

It's normal to get nervous about public speaking. But spoken word means you are reading and performing a highly personal text which can be extra daunting. Here are a few tips to get you stage ready:

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1 Take a few deep breaths

Before you head on stage, close your eyes and take a few full breaths. Focus on your inhalation, the way your inbreath expands your chest and abdomen and then release the air slowly. Count to 4 on your inbreath and to 8 on outbreath. Repeat 3 times. Taking conscious, full breaths calms our nervous system but also, over time, enhances our lung volume. This will not only centre yourself but also enhance your speaking ability.

2 People connect with raw and honest emotions

Don't be afraid to stumble through words or to show emotions. If emotions arise for you, allow them to show and, if needed, add a dramatic pause to recentre yourself. People relate and resonate with deep emotions, as it will evoke their own. Embrace your nervousness, all of your emotions and don't ever feel embarrassed.

Emotions are your performance superpower!

3 Practice. A lot.

Nothing works better to calm the nerves than knowing your material. Even if you plan to have your poem with you during your performance, practice speaking it at home, in front of the mirror, to friends, record yourself and measure time. This will instil confidence and friends and recordings are great forms of feedback.

4 Crutch or no crutch?

Make sure you rehearse your poem exactly in the way you plan to perform. If you read off your phone, make sure you put it on 'do not disturb' and ensure your screensaver is disabled. If you are using paper, make sure the font is clearly legible and your pages are in the correct order and quick to either flip or discard.

You decide to free-wheel? *Amazing!* Yours will be a memorable performance, but be certain you know your material inside out. Or, do you need prompts in your back pocket, just to be safe..? 😊

- *Resources: Where to go for inspiration*

Australian Poetry:

The peak body for poetry in Australia, Australian Poetry offers resources for poets, including publications, events, workshops, and competitions. They also provide access to the *Australian Poetry Journal* and other publications that feature works by Australian poets. Website: australianpoetry.org

Red Room Poetry:

A leading organization dedicated to creating, promoting, and publishing contemporary Australian poetry. Red Room Poetry offers educational resources, poetry projects, and competitions. They also run initiatives like the *Poetry Object* and *Poetry in First Languages* programs.

Website: redroompoetry.org

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Cordite Poetry Review:

An online journal dedicated to the publication and promotion of contemporary Australian poetry. Cordite features poetry, essays, interviews, and reviews, and is known for its thematic issues from established and emerging poets.

Website: cordite.org.au

Poetry Foundation:

Offers a vast collection of poems, poet biographies, and essays. It also features podcasts, educational resources, and a searchable database of poems.

Website: poetryfoundation.org

Academy of American Poets (Poets.org):

Provides access to thousands of poems, biographies of poets, and educational resources. It also hosts the "Poem-a-Day" series and offers lesson plans.

Website: poets.org

The Poetry Archive:

A collection of recordings of poets reading their work, offering an auditory experience. It includes classic and contemporary poets from around the world.

Website: poetryarchive.org

Poetry Society of America:

Features articles, interviews, and resources related to poetry. It also offers information on poetry events, awards, and workshops.

Website: poetrysociety.org

Verse Daily:

A daily feature of a new poem from a range of contemporary poets.

Website: versedaily.org

Poetry Daily:

A new poem every day, selected from books and journals, along with poet interviews and information about upcoming poetry collections.

Website: poems.com

The Writer's Almanac:

Hosted by Garrison Keillor, this site features a daily poem along with historical literary notes, making it a rich resource for poetry lovers and writers alike.

Website: writersalmanac.org

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- *Poetry read or referenced*

We are Three: Rumi, born 1207, Blakh, Afghanistan

All the Hemispheres: Hafez, born 1325 in Shiraz, Iran

Sonnet 18: William Shakespeare, born 1616, Stratford-upon-Avon, UK

A World of Dew: Kobayashi Issa, born 1763, Shinano Province

On Children: by Khalil Gibran, born 1883, Bsharri, Lebanon

Desiderata: Max Ehrmann, Terre Haute, Indiana, 1872

Howl: Allan Ginsberg, New Jersey, 1926

Still I Rise: Maya Angelou, St. Louis Missouri, 1928

Note on a Pillow: Kwame Alexander, New York, 1968

Life Chant: Diane Di Prima, Brooklyn, 1934

Medusa: Maja Amanita, Poland/Melbourne, 1980