

# Writing Poetry

## A Few Tips for Beginners

If you are planning to send one or more poems to our **Daniil Pashkoff Prize** but currently staring at a blank page, here are a few tips to get you started:

I'll start with a warm-up exercise to get your creativity into gear, followed by 2 exercises.

Think of writing as sports – but of the mind, not the body. If you haven't practiced running in ages, you wouldn't expect to run a marathon in under 3 hours. Writing takes practice. Luckily, writing exercises are usually great fun – and may also lead to unexpected discoveries...

### Warm-up: FREE WRITING

You'll need a fast pen. Ask a friend or family member to write down 3 nouns or use another method to arrive at 3 random nouns. Set an alarm for 3 minutes, look at the first word and start writing – anything that comes to your mind and as fast as you can! Don't think. Be spontaneous. Never allow your pen to stop, but make it fly across the page. After 3 minutes, reset the alarm and repeat the process with the second noun. And again. Put the written pages into a folder afterwards and don't look at them again for at least a week...

### Exercise 1: TIME TRAVEL

Think of writing as a time machine – one that requires no physics degree or expensive fuel (unless you count coffee). Explore your own personal life or even that of your family, as though it were an undiscovered country. Focus on moments of change. Try to recall stories told to you by grandparents or parents. How did the events shape them, and did they shape you, as well?

If you feel you don't have sufficient data, think of Camus who said: "Fiction is the lie through which we tell the truth." In other words: feel free to make things up. A poem may come from personal experience but fueled by imagination it may also resonate with other people's lives.

### Exercise 2: TA(L)KING PICTURES

Think of writing as taking snapshots – but without the limitations of a camera. Observe.

Where are you right now? Are you sitting at your desk? In a café? Look around you. What do you see? If you had a camera, what kind of picture would you take? A close-up of the coffee stains on your table? A picture of a barista operating the buttons and levers of his espresso machine like a virtuoso? Describe what you see, but use the description only as a starting point. Add sounds and smells. Emotions. Speculation.

You think a poem about a barista is boring? No, it's not!

## Keeping a Writers's Journal

Many writers keep a **notebook** to jot down ideas or impressions of people and places. Some writers add drawings or pictures from magazines.

Give it a try: What do you see on your way to school or work? Who is standing at the bus stop with you? Where are they going? Are they there every morning? You see pigeons or crows on the pavement? Where will they fly next? What will they see? Give them a voice.

Eventually, you'll have plenty of material that you can mine for poems and stories.

## Finding the Right Form and Style

Not all poems rhyme. Not all poems have a recognizable rhythm. But many do. Some poems are short, others are long narratives. Some poems match the sound of the words to the content (e.g. using a lot of sh-sounds to imitate the waves of the sea). Other poems use sounds to contrast or even undermine what is said. There is no simple right or wrong. Experiment with stanzas, line breaks, rhymes and half-rhymes. Manipulate reader expectations. Read the poem out loud to see if words stand out because of their sound. Most of all: Have fun!

## Rewriting

Wordsworth said that poetry is "emotion recollected in tranquility."

If you've written a poem, leave it to settle for a while. Many first drafts are either too wordy or too unspecific. Come back to it a few days later and give yourself time to tweak and trim and polish. Try swapping every-day words for words that are more fitting – either in sound, rhythm or emotion. If you feel you can't cut out words or lines that you are pleased with, even though they upset the balance of the poem, write them down in your Journal and use them as the core of a new poem.

Good luck!

**Stephanie Lammers**

**Writers Ink. e.V.**

PS: The internet is full of creative writing exercises and tips – but your best bet is to simply read poetry – and not just the classics but modern poetry. A lot of poets even read their works on youtube. There is amazing poetry out there. Go, find it!