



POETRY PROMPTS

These prompts can be used in order to stimulate writing for spoken word poetry. I encourage students to 'free-write' – write out their stream-of-consciousness thinking – for 10 to 15 minutes at the beginning of each Slam Club meeting. Students then have time to 'mine' their writing for the gems – discovering ideas, phrases, and lines that are worth pursuing or morphing into a spoken word piece.

- Write an Anaphora poem. An Anaphora is "the repetition of a word or expression several times within a clause or within a paragraph". In poetry the repetition of the phrase can be just at the beginning of each line, setting the tone as a meditation or a mantra, or it can be utilized more subtly within the poem. The poem can be free verse or prose style.
- Write a free verse poem using "sparrows".
- Write a series of questions and answers to compose a poem.
- Write a poem that describes a walk through a house from the perspective of a child.
- Write three different impressions of "saturation". (e.g.: color, sound, aroma, urban-ness, etc.)
- Write a poem using the prompt: "chain-link fence"
- Write a three part poem using "metronome".
- Write a poem concerning the "absence" of something. Consider the absence as a positive, or a negative.
- List ten items that you would buy at an auction, or tag sale. Write a poem including those items. You may choose to title your poem, "Things Found At An Auction". Variation, have someone else create a list for you.
- Write a poem that starts with a one word title, two words in the first line, three in the next, and continues by adding one word per line. (Variation: use as a prose exercise.)
- "This and That"- Write a list of phrases such as "salt and pepper", "cats and dogs", "love and war". Write a poem with the first stanza about the first word and the second stanza about the second word.
- Write a poem based on the concept or idea of a "Möbius strip".
- Write a poem that begins with a description of an event, telling what appears to be happening. Then give a description of what is really occurring.
- Write a poem using, "paper and chalk".
- Write a poem using the following title: "Another Language", or "Translation".
- Write a poem using the following start: "What good is a day..."
- Write a poem about the "ultimate" poem, or what a poem "should" do.

- Write a poem in the disguise of a postcard message. Continue by writing a reply postcard message.
- Create a poem using three trinkets. Such as, a shell, a silver charm, and a feather.
- Write a poem using the phrase "a foreign language".
- On a slip of paper write a list of 15 "free association" words. Use the 15 words in a poem. Variation: Create and exchange a list with another person. Then use their list of words to write a poem.
- Write a poem using, "how to...". For example, "how to write a poem", "how to break my heart", "how to distinguish a flower from a frog".
- Write three shaped-verse poems. Shaped-verse poems are a form of "pattern poetry", where the letters, words, and lines of the poem are arranged to form a picture/outline of the subject of the poem. An example is a poem in the shape of a Christmas tree discussing your thoughts about Christmas itself, family traditions, and so on.
- Write a poem that repeats a selected word in each line. Consider using foreign translations of the word. (cat, gato, catze).
- Write a poem with a seasonal theme.
- Write a poem about seasonings. For example, "Salt and Saffron".
- Write a poem using the title, "Paradise of Strangers".
- Write a poem using, "Between Silences".
- Write a poem using "Writers Anonymous" as your title. (Or, "Hi My Name Is ____")
- Transitory - Write a poem based on transitory things.
- Make a list of your favorite lines from poetry. Use these lines in a collage or create a pocket journal that has one line per page. Memorize them. (And then, optionally, for you Mark Strand fans, eat them.)
- Write a poem about something that "spirals".
- Write a culinary poem celebrating food.
- Write a poem that is representative of language/communication.
- Write a poem about a very small object.
- Write a poem using images of things that are connected, such as "paperclip(s)", or "trains".
- Write a poem that is about the "un-truth".
- Write a poem about things that are transparent.
- Write a poem that starts at the end, moving backwards.
- Write a poem using the theme of, "x-ray", or seeing through layers.
- Write a poem that focuses on sound.
- Write a poem about playing Jacks, Hopscotch, or another such game.
- Write a poem in three parts about three different people and their interaction with an item that is the same. The object can be passed between them, or it can be the "same" possession and not the "actual" object the other people have.
- Write a poem that uses the style of a devotion and prayer.
- Write a poem that is written in the style of magnetic poetry. For your word bank you can use one or two pages from a book, magazine or newspaper. You might want to

make a photocopy of the pages and cut the words apart, or just transcribe them randomly to your word bank.

- Write a poem that is based on a painting.
- Write a poem that refers to "Romeo and Juliet".
- Write a poem using the title, "Lines of Conversation".
- Write a poem using the title, "Love Poem Number 137".
- Write a poem using the title, "You Need to Have a Plan".
- Use the word Pattern in the first line and/or the last line of your poem.
- Write a poem that begins with you waking up.
- Write a poem that begins with a proclamation. If you need a phrase to get your juices going, try "I will".
- Write the final line to your poem first, and then write the poem to get to that ending. I am choosing to end my poem with "His hallucinations make him giggle" which others are welcome to use.
- Pick three words that you absolutely love the sound of and set out to use them in your poem.
- Use the same (or similar) words in both your first line and last line, but change the order or the meaning of the words from the first line to the last line.
- Write a poem that involves an animal.
- Write a list poem about things you have done in your life.
- Use the word "secret" twice in your poem.
- Use a letter count as a constraint for your poetry, either writing a brand new poem or rewriting an old poem to fit the new pattern. You can either count the spaces and punctuation between words as letters or count only the actual letters. Keep in mind that you don't have to use the exact same number in every line, you can also develop a pattern such as 20-25-20-25.
- Write or rewrite a greeting card poem so that it has meaning to you, or at least is funny.
- Write a poem using Skeltonic Verse.
- Write a poem about a specific but minor memory you have from more than five, but less than ten years ago.
- Write a Tanka. Feel free to write more than one if you like.
- Write a definition poem. A definition poem takes a word or a concept and attempts to define it, provide perspective, redefine it, or create a definitive example of it.
- Write a poem that is set at or near where you live.
- Write a poem in the form of a letter (epistle).
- Write a poem that begins and ends with three single syllable words.
- Write a poem that begins with a line of advice or instruction, such as don't give up or take a left at the willow tree.
- September 21st is the last day of summer in the northern hemisphere and the last day of winter in the southern hemisphere. With that in mind, write a poem in which the seasons play a role.
- Write a poem in which a similar or identical phrase is repeated three or more times throughout the poem.

- Write a poem using iambic pentameter. If you aren't familiar with iambic pentameter, it is discussed in full here.
- Write a poem that begins with the word "I".
- Write a poem as that uses every letter of the alphabet at least once.
- Write a poem about a natural event.
- Use one of the lists of words above or pick your own morpheme and use it to add adnomination to your poetry.
- Pick two or three words from your last poem use them as the first three words of this poem.
- Write a poem that gets shorter with each line.
- Write a poem about the end of something.
- Write a poem about something you believe.
- Write a poem that includes at least one description of an object that is six or more words long.
- Write a poem that uses some sort of meter. If you want a challenge, attempt a meter you haven't worked with before. For an extra added challenge, try to work in the word belly.
- Write a poem about an event in your life that you have strong feelings about (it doesn't have to be painful) without stating how you feel about the event. If you want an extra challenge, end every third line with the letter "R".
- Write a poetic parable. Feel free to play with the form. Sometimes it is more interesting when the lesson is just a bit absurd.
- Write about something in your life that you do every day. If you want an added challenge, make the first and the last lines the same or similar.
- Write a blank verse poem. Blank verse has meter, but no rhyme. The typical meter for blank verse is iambic pentameter, but you can try other meters as well. If you want an added challenge, include the word "line".
- Write a Pantoum. Feel free to experiment with the form until you write something to your own liking. If you enjoyed this, try a sestina or villanelle.
Write a poem that tells a story. For an added challenge, use a word count. Write four stanzas, each with 30 words.
- Write a poem as if it were an entry in someone's journal or diary or even their Twitter account. If you want an added challenge, limit your stanzas to 145 characters so they mirror the limitations of texting.
- Write a poem in ten minutes. It should have at least 100 words. For an added challenge, work in the word "speed".
- Create your own found poem. If you are looking for inspiration, use Google News to find an article to your liking.
- Write a poem that uses exactly the same number of characters on every line. You can pick the length, but once you start you have to stick to it. For an extra challenge, try writing about an event that has happened in the past 24 hours.
- Write a poem that ends with the word "quiet".

- Either use a set of hyponyms as the structure for your poem or write a poem around the phrase, “He was blue, she was a rabbit.”
- Write a poem that uses something other than traditional end rhyme.
- Write about something you can see from the window of your home.
- Write a poem about a place you have been or a journey you have taken.
- Call an old friend and write a poem after the conversation
- Find an original way to describe a chair and make that the first line of your poem.
- Write about the first time you did something.
- Write a poem that demonstrates strong emotion without ever stating what that emotion is.
- Write a poem about a contest, a win, or a loss.
- Write a poem as if it were a letter to a friend.
- Include the word right or rights in your poem.
- Start your poem with a piece of advice.
- Write a poem about your childhood. Explore an actual event that had some emotional significance to you. Avoid using any description of how you felt about the event then or how you feel about it now. Instead, try to make the emotion of the event come through in your descriptions of what happened. Feel free to post your poem in the comments or on your own site with a link back to here. This will give other people the opportunity to read your poem.
- Write about an event in your life that happened within the past week. Take some time to think about the week and look for event that has some emotional meaning for you, but not so much that it would be painful for you to write about. Sometimes smaller moments have more meaning. Feel free to post your poem in the comments or on your own site with a link back to here. This will give other people the opportunity to read your poem.
- Find a news or opinion article that was published on the web this week. I recommend using Google News because it can take you just about anywhere. Look for a story that has some emotional or philosophical impact on you and use that story as the basis for your poem. If you post your poem here, be sure to post a link to the original article so we can see the inspiration!
- Get out of the house and write in a new place. Write about the place you choose to go to. Don’t just rely on what you see. Describe the smells, the tastes and the sounds if you can. Try to give your readers a full picture of the place you choose.
- Write a persona poem that incorporates one of the past two concepts. It should either address a social issue or it should provide a strong sense of place. One great way to do the latter is to write a poem in a public place, and to observe the people around you until you find someone interesting that you can imagine a back-story for.
Take at least five minutes to meditate in a quiet room free of outside influences before you write today’s poem. Try to clear your head of stray thoughts. Once you feel like you are clear and calm, write your poem. Let the topic be about whatever comes to mind after your meditation. If you have never meditated before, simply sit in a chair with your eyes closed and try to relax.

- Write a list poem that uses a single line for each item on the list. Feel free to choose one of the topics above, or use anything else that comes to mind. As always, post the poem in the comments section if you would like to share it.
- Write an elegy about a person or event that is meaningful to you. You don't necessarily have to approach the most tragic event in your life. Don't try to take on an event that is still too difficult for you to deal with. Look for something that you can handle.
- Write a poem using a specific meter. The meter can be of your own choosing or even your own making, as long as you put a pattern into place. As always, feel free to post your poem in the comment section of this post.
- Write a three or more stanza poem that uses a metered style for the first two stanzas and a non-metered format for the remaining stanzas. As always, feel free to post your poem in the comments section for others to see.
- Read a poet you don't like. Try to figure out what they do that upsets you and determine whether or not this assessment is fair. Try to think of ways that you would approach the same subject matter using your style. Write a poem that addresses some of the same subject / style / tone of the poet you dislike but do it in your own style.
- Write a poem using syllabic verse. You can assign length either by line or stanza. If you are stuck for a way to begin, start with this two-word ten-syllable line: Incompatible Participation
 Read a poet you don't like. Try to figure out what they do that upsets you and determine whether or not this assessment is fair. Try to think of ways that you would approach the same subject matter using your style. Write a poem that addresses some of the same subject / style / tone of the poet you dislike but do it in your own style.
- Today is a two-part assignment. The first part is to think about your method of writing poetry. The second part is to shake up your process. If you have a lot of structure, try loosening up. If you write very loosely, try adding some structure to the process. Find a new place to write or use a different tool. The change doesn't have to be major, but if you post your poem, please tell us what you changed.
- Write a poem that uses at least two different forms of repetition. Try to embrace at least one form of repetition that you don't ordinarily use.
- Revisit a previous poem, perhaps one you especially liked or one you had trouble with, and write another poem following those same parameters.
- Wikipedia's Random Button is a great and magical thing. Click it and write about whatever subject comes up.
- Include the words "formal" and "casual" at some point in your poem.
- Write a poem that has a variable line length rather than a set meter. Use either enjammed or endstopped lines.
- Write a poem that begins with a negative image or statement and ends with a positive image or statement.
- Write a three stanza poem that shows a progression with each stanza. The three stanzas should serve as a beginning, middle and end respectively. It might help to picture the poem as a three act play.
- Try something that scares you (just a little) and then write a poem about it.

- Write a poem that discusses a real moment in your life without discussing its larger meaning or attempting to lead the reader to a conclusion.
- Include a verb in every line of your poem.
- Write a poem that begins and ends with the same word.
- Write the first draft of your poem in paragraph form and then change it into a free verse poem. Don't be surprised if you have to change lines, words and phrases. That is a part of the process.
- Look at some old photographs and write about a memory or a thought that they give you.
- Write a poem that either uses no words longer than five letters or no words shorter than five letters.
- Write the final line of your poem first, then figure out a way to get there.
- I feel like ending with something technical but random. Don't include any word with a single "A" in it, but do include at least one word with two "A"s in it.
- Write a poem that takes place inside a vehicle (car, truck, train, plane, boat, etc.)
- Write a poem in which you use three different words for the same or a similar color.
- Write a poem that uses two or more different settings / locations.
- Write a poem that includes at least three different flavors and two odors.
- Write a poem in which each line has six words and makes a statement or at least expresses a complete thought.
- Write a poem in which every stanza either begins with a question or ends with a question.
- Write a poem in the form of a joke.
- Write a poem that takes place at a public gathering such as a meeting, a carnival, a sporting event or a concert.
- Write a poem about building or creating something by hand.
- Write a poem that involves cutting, chopping or dividing something.
- Write a poem about having to defend yourself or someone else.
- Write a poem in which you discuss three things that you or your persona wants.
- Write a poem that repeatedly uses numbers.
- Write a poem that involves a plan.
- Write a poem that take place at a specific time of the day.
- Write a poem that involves consequences.
- Write a poem that takes place in or otherwise involves a classroom.
- Write a poem about waiting for a specific event.
- Write a poem about getting lost or losing something.
- Write a poem about getting or sending a message (postcard, letter, phone call, email)
- Write a poem that includes something that malfunctions or breaks down.
- Write a poem about training for something or working towards a distant goal.
- Write a poem about a person or a place that has several different names (it's actually quite common).
- Write a poem in which something gets opened or closed.

- Write a poem in which something gets faked or simulated.
- Write a poem about a rivalry.
- Write a poem about a place that has changed considerably over time (construction, destruction, renovation, disrepair, etc.)
- Write a poem that involves flirtation.
- Write a poem that includes a path, a trail, or a map.
- Write a poem that involves a long-term relationship (love, friendship, family, group, etc.)
- Write a poem about one or all of the four seasons. (Some ideas for brainstorming: What does the season look, feel, smell like? What memories do you associate with that season?).
- Write a poem using three of the following words: expensive, lampshade, bruise, convincing.
- Write a poem about something that happened to someone you know. Write about it as if it had happened to you.
- Write a poem about your shadow. (Some ideas for brainstorming: How does it change when you move? What does it look like in different kinds of light, in different situations? What would happen if you lost it? Does it have a secret life?)
- Write a poem using all of the following words: smooth, soothe, work, dark.
- Write a poem based on your belief about life after death... or about what you WISH you believed.
- Write a poem using all of the following words: snake, honey, thaw.
- Write a poem from the perspective of a character in a fairy tale.
- Write a poem using all of the following words: moth, angle, cloth, tangle.
- Write a poem that tells the story of a specific love affair or marriage.
- Write a poem in the form of a message or letter to your future self.
- Write a poem about the color red or another color. (Some ideas for brainstorming: How does the color make you feel? What things do you associate with that color?)
- Write a poem about a place that frightens you or a place where you feel happy. Try to recreate the feeling of the place.
- Write a poem using all of the following words: exquisite, visit, glisten.
- Write a poem about something or someone you lost.
- Write a poem using all of the following words: dim, hinge, dingy.
- Write a poem in the form of a lullaby.
- Write a poem about yourself in which nothing is true.

Poetry ideas - Write a poem about:

- Night-time
- A particular color
- Being underwater
- A person whose life you're curious about
- Your mother's perfume
- Falling asleep or waking up

- Growing older
- The feeling of getting lost in a book
- How to know if you're in love
- A bad dream
- A ghost
- Your city, town, or neighborhood
- An important life choice you've made
- Spring, summer, fall, or winter
- Something most people see as ugly but which you see as beautiful
- Jealousy
- Becoming a parent
- An event that changed you
- A place you visited -- how you imagined it beforehand, and what it was actually like
- The ocean
- Forgetting
- The speed of light
- A voodoo doll
- Reflections on a window
- A newspaper headline
- Your greatest fear
- Your grandmother's hands
- A particular toy you had as a child
- Being invisible
- A time you felt homesick
- Having an affair, or discovering your partner is having one
- Birthdays
- A favorite food and a specific memory of eating it
- An imaginary city
- Driving with the radio on
- Life in an aquarium
- Dancing
- Walking with your eyes closed
- What a computer might daydream about
- Time travel
- Brothers or sisters
- Your job, or a job you've had
- Weddings
- Leaving home
- Camping
- A zoo
- A historical event from the perspective of someone who saw it firsthand (You will have to do some research for this).

- Holding your breath
- Intimacy and privacy
- A time you were tempted to do something you feel is wrong
- Physical attraction to someone
- A superstition you have
- Someone you admire

Poem starters- the five senses

- Write about the taste of: an egg, an orange, medicine, cinnamon
- Write about the smell of: burning food, melting snow, the ocean, your grandparents' home, the inside of a bus, pavement after the rain
- Write about the sound of: a radio changing channels, a dog howling, a football or baseball game, your parents talking in another room
- Write about the sight of: lit windows in a house when you're standing outside at night, someone you love when he or she doesn't know you're watching, a dying plant, shadows on snow
- Write about the feeling of: grass under bare feet, a really bad kiss, the headrush when you stand up too fast, sore muscles, falling asleep in the back seat of a moving car.

Poem starters- three elements

Write a poem that contains all three of the elements in any of the lists below:

- a dessert, a memory, and someone in your family
- dancing, a pitch-black room, and the smell of lilacs
- a balloon, smoke, and a keyhole
- a secret box, an ice cube tray, and a velvet ribbon
- a betrayal, soap, and a plane ticket

Poetry prompts - Write a poem about:

- Rain, snow, or a storm
- An animal you think is beautiful or strange
- Your parents or children
- How a kiss feels
- The house where you were born
- A smell that brings back memories
- Being a teenager, becoming an adult, middle age, old age
- Feeling lonely
- The moon
- Getting lost

- Marriage or divorce
- An imaginary friend
- Life in the future
- The hottest, coldest, or most exhausted you have ever felt
- Having a fever
- A new version of a fairy-tale
- The shapes you see in clouds

Write a poem in the form of any of the following:

- A letter
- A recipe
- A horoscope
- A fragment from an unusual dictionary
- A prayer
- A shopping list
- A magic spell.

Write a poem from the point of view of:

- One of your parents
- Your child (real or imagined)
- A historical figure (You will have to do research for this one.)
- A very old person
- An athlete who has just lost the big game
- The most popular/unpopular kid from your school
- An inanimate object in your home.

Where to get more ideas for poems:

- Listen to a piece of music and write about the images that it brings into your mind.
- People-watch, eavesdrop, and write about your observations and imaginings.
- Sit in a park and close your eyes. Notice all of the sounds and smells. Write about them afterward.
- Keep a notebook next to your bed and write down your dreams at night to turn them into poems later.
- Make a list of words you think are unusual, then try to use them in poems.
- Watch an animal and write a poem about what it looks like and what it does.
- Smell different spices in your kitchen and write about the memories that they inspire.
- Look through old family photographs and choose some to write poems about.
- Go on a "field trip" -- a museum, the zoo, a greenhouse -- to hunt for poetry ideas.
- Get inspiration from books on an area of science or history that interests you.