The ABC's of Writing a Free Verse Poem

12–15 + GREEN

Age/Grade Level - Middle Sch to High School

A Foundation

When writing free verse, poets pay attention to end words, focusing on language that encourages the reader to turn to the next line to discover more. Poets accomplish this by using descriptive words, focusing not only on meaning but sound and syllables. This way of writing a poem will dictate its form. Remember, **poetry is a form, not a genre**—words written in verse.

The purpose of a poem is to elicit a feeling, convey an image or idea and connect with the reader, causing them to respond with, "Wow, I see that/feel that/think that too." Or, "those words perfectly describe the feel of autumn or the look of a sunset or _____" (fill in the blank).

Intro

The English language has hundreds of words that are spelled the same but have more than one meaning, depending on their usage. **These are called *homonyms*.** *('homo'-same, 'nym'-name)*

Words like:

- *sound*
- *cast*
- *channel*
- *tender*
- *rule*
- *temper*
- *pitch*

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- *scale*
- *foil…*

All words rich with facets of meaning, depending on which way you turn them.

A. To use homonyms as a jumping off place to write your own poem, you will need a dictionary. Then follow these steps:

1. Choose a word from the previous list that could have multiple meanings (or choose one of your own.)
2. Look up the word and its various usages and meanings; see if you can find a minimum of 4-6 ways the word can be used.
3. Jot down the definitions in short phrases and from there, begin crafting sentences.

   Example: When I played with the word **'sound.'** I found five different meanings for the word and wrote this poem:

   Sailing

   We sailed the Sound happily,
   Sounding the depth to be sure of our way.
   Sounds of seagulls and a distant ship
   Kept us company in our sound
   And sturdy sailboat. No need to sound
   A warning, we were safe and sound.

B. As you write your poem, pay attention to three things:

1. Use strong verbs whenever possible. ex. 'break' instead of 'breaking', 'sing' instead of 'singing', 'glance' instead of 'glancing.'
2. Choose words for sound, syllable and meaning; how many ways can you say the word "green"?
3. Be careful of cliches or tired words. Grab a thesaurus or dictionary for your nouns and adjectives.

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Note: there are a few rules in writing free verse—one of them is to not end a sentence with articles like *a, an or the.* You want to keep the reader's eyes moving from the end of one line to the next. Strong adjectives and images help do this.

C. REVISE, REVISE, REVISE

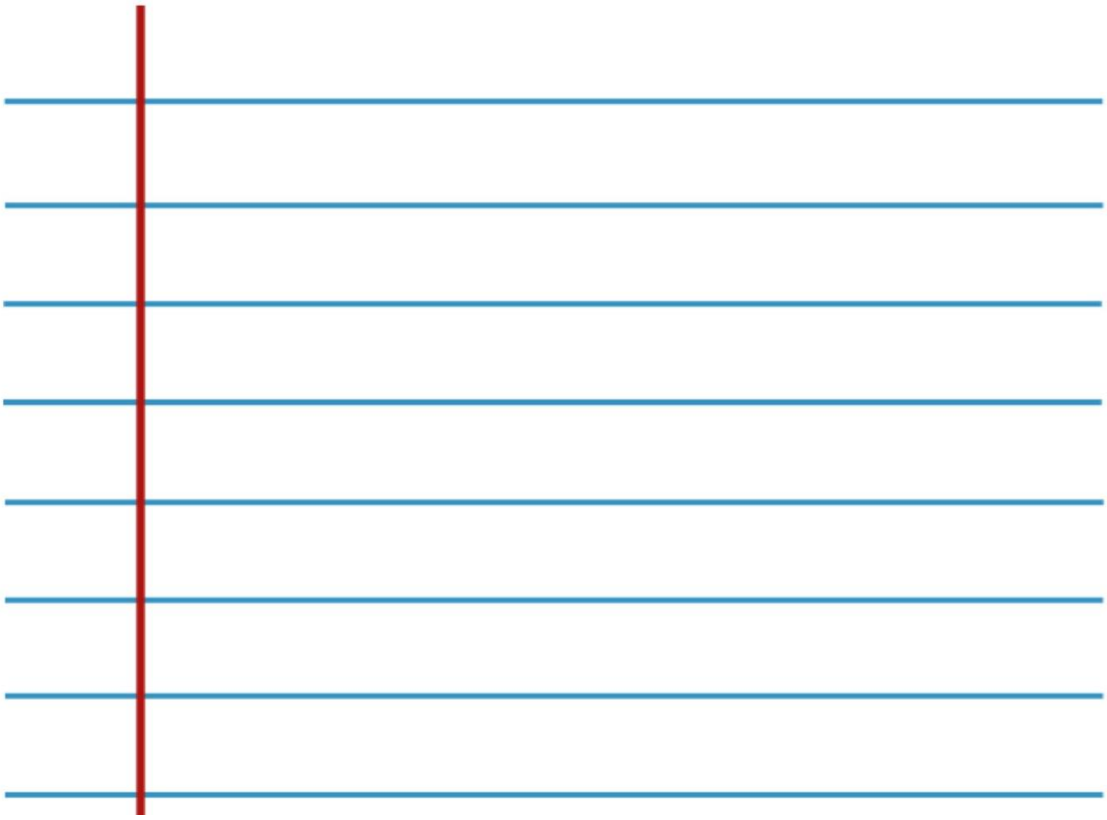
After you've drafted your poem, read it out loud. What do you notice?

1. Erase or cross out words, rearrange sentences.
2. Can you find more descriptive words (adjectives) to use?
3. What about line length? In other words, what does your poem look like on the page?
4. See if you can arrange your phrases to be even-ish; this is more pleasing for the reader.

NOW REWRITE your final draft, re-read, and sit back.

My friend, you've got a poem!

(The space below is a great place to put your poetry brainstorm).



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