

Introduction to this Resource Guide:

The learning objectives for this project are both academic and artistic. These creative writing exercises introduce various genres of poems, provide teachers and students of varying experience level with access to contemporary examples, and provide prompts to help them incorporate these writing strategies into their their own writing practice. There are also specific craft terms and literary devices introduced throughout the exercises as well as in an attached glossary. Students will have opportunities to better recognize examples of these techniques, and then to immediately emulate them. I believe that close reading is one of the most powerful ways to strengthen your own writing, and hope the sample poems collected here offer a wide and useful variety of perspectives.

This online resource is divided into three lessons, each intended to accompany and supplement one of the modules from the *St. Anthony's Lost and Found* poetry journal. Each of these lessons consists of ten writing exercises, made up of one sample poem and a related prompt. The first five exercises have sample poems that could be considered more advanced, and the final five have poems that are accessible to anyone-- even those with limited exposure to poetry. With that being said, there are no rules for how to use this resource. Nearly any of the poems could be used for people of any age group, and there's certainly no obligation to use all of them. One could start by making notes in the journals, and then use those notes to generate responses to the writing exercises, or one could take the opposite approach, and work through some writing exercises before completing a section of the journal. My goal was to create a

selection of exercises both numerous and variable enough to adapt as needed. . You certainly know your student audiences better than I do.

At poetry's core is the metaphor: a tool for making connections. A good metaphor is surprising and unexpected. It doesn't explain meaning; it expands it. In poetry, metaphor creates the opportunity for both poet and reader to leave questions unanswered and to make sense of things in new ways. A poet makes connections, and from this point forward, your students are poets. I hope that this resource can help them to find new connections in their lives, new ways of seeing, and new ways of finding meaning.

The final thing I would like to say to whomever is reading this is "thank you". My primary aim for this project has been to spread a love of poetry among new readers and writers. . The sphere of my influence extends only as far as this online document, and so by reading and teaching the writing exercises found here, you are the most important part of this project; you are doing the work of bringing poetry somewhere new. So, thank you.

-Derek Hudson, 2017 Mellon Foundation Research Fellow, Trinity University

Lesson 1: Naming the World

Advanced Exercises

1. Too Many Names

by Pablo Neruda

Translated by Anthony Kerrigan

Mondays are meshed with Tuesdays
and the week with the whole year.
Time cannot be cut
with your weary scissors,
and all the names of the day
are washed out by the waters of night.

No one can claim the name of Pedro,
nobody is Rosa or Maria,
all of us are dust or sand,
all of us are rain under rain.
They have spoken to me of Venezuelas,
of Chiles and of Paraguays;
I have no idea what they are saying.
I know only the skin of the earth
and I know it is without a name.

When I lived amongst the roots
they pleased me more than flowers did,
and when I spoke to a stone
it rang like a bell.

Who are you? Who are you not? These questions are at the center of this poem by Pablo Neruda. Consider your own name, or the names of loved ones, and write a poem in which you replace these names with images that on some level represent those names. Try finding unexpected or difficult images that at first glance may not seem connected to your names at all!

2. Free Union

by André Breton

Translated by David Antin

My wife whose hair is a brush fire
Whose thoughts are summer lightning
Whose waist is an hourglass
Whose waist is the waist of an otter caught in the teeth of a tiger
Whose mouth is a bright cockade with a fragrance of a star of the first magnitude
Whose teeth leave prints like the tracks of white mice over snow
Whose tongue is made out of amber and polished glass
Whose tongue is a stabbed wafer
The tongue of a doll with eyes that open and shut
Whose tongue is incredible stone
My wife whose eyelashes are strokes in the handwriting of a child
Whose eyebrows are nests of swallow
My wife whose temples are the slate of greenhouse roofs

Try a poem that splits its subject into a multitude of renamed pieces. Your poem doesn't need to be romantic like Breton's, or even about a person. Your subject can be anything, but what is important is the structure of repetitive metaphors. Try out metaphors that are strange, surprising, and even difficult. The best metaphors don't explain their own meaning, they make a novel connection that *expands* and *creates* meaning. Make sure to use detailed, specific imagery in your metaphors.

3. The Human Species

by Raymond Queneau
translated by Teo Savory

The human species has given me
the right to be mortal
the duty to be civilized
a conscience
2 eyes that don't always function very well
a nose in the middle of my face
2 feet 2 hands
speech

Begin your own poem with a line like Queneau's "____ has given me". You can use "the human species", or try something else, like "San Antonio has given me", "Texas has given me", "My mother has given me", etc. Continue your poem by listing the things your opening noun has given you. Note that in the sample poem, there is a careful balance between big, abstract gifts like "the duty to be civilized" and concrete, literal gifts like "2 feet 2 hands". Try to explore contrasts like this in your own work.

4. Sorrow Is Not My Name

Ross Gay

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/92472>

This poem's title is an example of litotes--a negative statement that implies or suggests the opposite. Begin your own poem with a similar title, then describe a series of events or images that have changed your name, literally or metaphorically.

5. Adlestrop

by Edward Thomas

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/53744>

Try a poem that locates your reader in a very specific time/place--in "Adlestrop", the moment is the moment the speaker notices the name of a place. Begin your poem similarly, "Yes. I remember _____--The name, because _____." Make sure to fill your poem with vivid details and images in order to transport your reader.

Beginner Exercises

1. American Names

by Stephen Vincent Benét

I have fallen in love with American names,
 The sharp names that never get fat,
 The snakeskin-titles of mining-claims,
 The plumed war-bonnet of Medicine Hat,
 Tucson and Deadwood and Lost Mule Flat.

Seine and Piave are silver spoons,
 But the spoonbowl-metal is thin and worn,
 There are English counties like hunting-tunes
 Played on the keys of a postboy's horn,
 But I will remember where I was born.

What are some interesting names in San Antonio? Or in your own hometown, country, or current home? List them. If you can't think of any, then this exercise can be a great opportunity to take a walk or a bike ride to collect some names! These names can be interesting because they sound beautiful, because the words mean something beautiful, or for any number of other reasons. Write a list poem that celebrates these names and the sounds that they are made of. For this exercise, try writing lines that don't make sense! Poetry isn't just an art form for silent reading, it is also both an *oral* and *aural* one. Try out combinations of words that are fun or difficult to read aloud, that feel good on the lips, or make music for the ears. In poetry, this kind of writing can be just as accepted as writing that "makes sense".

2. Valentine for Ernest Mann

by Naomi Shihab Nye

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/valentine-ernest-mann>

"Poems hide", Nye writes. Where is your poem hiding? Choose a place, object, image, person, or idea that is uninteresting, ugly, unpleasant, or otherwise distinctly unpoetic and write a poem that transforms and renames it into something worthy of a poem. Keep in mind that it is not necessary to transform your chosen concept into something lovely, beautiful, or pleasant! Simply look at it in a new way. A poem can be about something ugly as easily as something beautiful.

3. Words are Birds

Francisco X. Alarcon

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/91108>

Write a poem that renames “words” using the beginnings of Alarcon’s stanzas.

words
are _____

they
love

some words
are _____

4. Poetry was Like This

Al Mahmud

Translated by Kabir Chowdhury

Poetry was the memory of adolescence
It was my mother’s sad face,
the yellow bird on a *neem* (margosa)tree,
my little brothers and sisters
 sitting at night around a fire
 of dry fallen leaves,
father’s home-coming,
the ringing of a bicycle bell—*Rabeya, Rabeya*—
and the opening of the southern door
at the sound of my mother’s name.

What is poetry to you? This poem collects images and events from the speaker’s life and quite directly and boldly claims that *these things* are poetry. Make a list of images or experiences from your own life, and write a poem that renames these experiences as the stuff of poetry. Try beginning your stanzas like Mahmud (Poetry was _____) or experiment and find your own form.

5. Knoxville, Tennessee

Nikki Giovanni

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/knoxville-tennessee>

Here, Nikki Giovanni combines a list structure with sensory details of taste, sound, and texture to show the reader what she imagines when she thinks of her hometown in a particular season. Try a poem like this about what you love in San Antonio, using Giovanni's opening, "I always like _____ best".

Lesson 2: Count Your Losses

Advanced Exercises

1. Try to Praise the Mutilated World

Adam Zagajewski

Adam Zagajewski's elegiac poem "Try to Praise the Mutilated World", translated by Clare Cavanagh, begins with the lines

Try to praise the mutilated world.
Remember June's long days,
and wild strawberries, drops of rosé wine.

What is something from your world that has been lost or mutilated? What do you want to remember about it? Fill in the lines with your own answers, and use them as a starting point for your own poem

Try to praise _____
Remember _____

Continue this exercise with other lines from the poem.

You must praise the mutilated world.
You watched the stylish yachts and ships;

You must praise _____
You watched blank _____

You should praise the mutilated world.
Remember the moments when we were together
in a white room and the curtain fluttered.

You should praise _____
Remember the moments when _____

2. won't you celebrate with me

Lucille Clifton

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/core-poems/detail/50974>

What have you overcome? What have you taken and shaped into a life? What has tried and failed to kill you? List answers to these questions, and use them to write a poem that begins with the same question as Clifton's: won't you celebrate with me/ what i have shaped into/ a kind of life?

3. Fern Hill

Dylan Thomas

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
 About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
 The night above the dingle starry,
 Time let me hail and climb
 Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
 And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns
 And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
 Trail with daisies and barley
 Down the rivers of the windfall light.

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
 About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,
 In the sun that is young once only,
 Time let me play and be
 Golden in the mercy of his means,
 And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves
 Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,
 And the sabbath rang slowly
 In the pebbles of the holy streams.

This poem about remembered childhood tells a sort of story of feeling through a kaleidoscope of impressionistic images. The colors, scenes, and emotions of the speaker's memory are connected not by logic, chronology, or narrative, but by the speaker's own emotional associations. These surprising connections and turns create an effect of intensely subjective memory. Try your own poem in which you put your own childhood memories through a poetic blender, creating new and surprising connections between images, words, and grammar.

4. Family Portrait

Carlos Drummond de Andrade
Translated by Elizabeth Bishop

Yes, this family portrait
is a little dusty.
The father's face doesn't show
how much money he earned.

The uncle's hands don't reveal
the voyages both of them made.
The grandmother's smoothed and yellowed;
she's forgotten the monarchy.
The children, how they've changed.
Peter's face is tranquil,
that wore the best dreams.
And John's no longer a liar.

Try this exercise with a family photo. Some things--like the voyages of the uncle's hands--are lost in a photo, while others--the tranquility of Peter's face--are preserved. Write a poem that explores what is lost by your photo, and consider what is preserved in the photo and lost in the present.

5. I Remember You as You Were

Pablo Neruda
Translated by W.S. Merwin

I remember you as you were in the last autumn
You were the grey beret and the still heart.
In your eyes the flames of the twilight fought on.
And the leaves fell in the water of your soul.

In some ways, every moment that passes is a moment that is lost. Write a poem that remembers someone as they were in a *specific moment*. Consider what was lost from that moment to the next and what has been lost from that moment to the present. Try using Neruda's opening lines.

I remember you as you were in _____
You were _____

Beginner Exercises

1. Keeping Quiet

By Pablo Neruda

Translated by Alastair Reid

Now we will count to twelve
and we will all keep still.
For once on the face of the earth,
let's not speak in any language;
let's stop for one second,
and not move our arms so much.

The thing that is at risk of being lost in this poem is not something concrete like a species, a building, or a person, but silence. Write a poem about another intangible thing that may become lost, and give instructions for how to preserve it.

2. The Snow Man

Wallace Stevens

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

This is the beginning stanza of "The Snow Man" by Wallace Stevens, in which he celebrates the beauty of winter. Write a poem that celebrates the beauty of something impermanent, and fill in Stevens's lines

One must have a mind of _____
To regard _____

3. All-Purpose Elegy

by Paul Guest

For the sun, which will burn out or run down
or dramatically implode in a future
epoch about as awful as this one. For
the one-antlered deer that expired en-route
to an upstate sanctuary because
why not. For the sequoia tunnel tree
which was uprooted in a storm
the other day. For my boyhood fantasy
of driving through it.

Write a poem that lists all the things that you have lost or will lose in the future. Try using Paul Guest's format of "For _____. For _____. For _____" Your lost things can be as big and universal as the sun, or as small and personal as a lost childhood dream.

4. Peering up from Mud

Margarita Engle

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/141838>

Pick an endangered animal—one that is in danger of being lost, or an extinct animal—one that is already lost. Write a poem from the perspective of this animal and be sure to be very specific. Where does this animal spend its day, what would it feel like to physically be in that environment? What would it feel like to eat a meal as this animal? What would this animal dream about while it was asleep? What would this animal think of you if it saw you? Use questions like these to generate details for your writing.

5. Great Horned Owl

Sallie Wolf

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/91123>

Identify the rhyming pattern of this poem. Then think of a special, unique, or uncommon event you've seen in nature and write a poem about it with the same rhyming pattern as "Great Horned Owl". The first, second, and final lines all rhyme, and the third and fourth lines rhyme with one another.

Lesson Three: A Letter to Anyone

Advanced Exercises

1. Letter to a Lover

Matthew Zapruder

Today I am going to pick you up at the beige airport.
 My heart feels like a field of calves in the sun.
 My heart is wired directly to the power source of mediocre songs.
 I am trying to catch a ray of sunlight in my mouth.

I look forward to showing you my new furniture.
 I look forward to the telephone ringing, it is not you,
 you are in the kitchen trying to figure out the coffee maker,
 you are pouring out the contents of your backpack.

Try writing a poem addressed to someone in your life. Like Zapruder, your poem can be about a lover, or it can be about a friend, a parent, a sibling, a stranger you only saw once, etc. Try beginning your poem by filling in some of Zapruder's lines.

Today I am _____
 My heart feels like _____
 My heart is _____
 I am _____

I look forward to _____
 I look forward to _____
 you are _____
 you are _____

2. Letter Beginning with Two Lines by Czesław Miłosz

Matthew Olzmann

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/letter-beginning-two-lines-czeslaw-milosz>

In a commentary on this poem, Matthew Olzmann said that although it is an elegy, this poem is “less about mourning, and more about anger”. Starting with the same two lines, try writing your own angry poem. Poetry can be a powerful voice for social change, and this exercise is a great way to work on some poetry that addresses social issues. Olzmann's poem is addressed to victims of gun violence, so try addressing your poem to someone victimized by a social issue important to you.

3. This is a Letter

Rebecca Dunham

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/51650>

The first and last lines of this poem make large claims about the poem's recipient—the whole earth—and all the stuff in between is made up of detailed images that clarify and expand the poet's idea of what the earth is. Try writing a poem in the same way. Begin by addressing your big concept, "This is a letter to ___". Your addressee can be physically big like Dunham's, or it can be something conceptually big and abstract, like a letter to love, or to death. The rest of your lines should consist of detailed images that clarify how *you* see your big subject.

4. For Jane

Denis Johnson

At left, with a net, in a light
like whiskey, you skim flotsam
from the water.
I can't tell you how vivid
this undertaking is--
you are as unsettling
and as naked as that yellow
flower admiring you as it rests
along the surface of the pool.
I am just going to listen
to the sound of liquid,
the sound of oleanders.

The speaker's posture in this poem is notably passive. He takes no action as he gazes at Jane, and, in the line "I am just going to listen", makes an intentional point of maintaining this passive mode. Try your own epistle to a loved one in which you describe your sensory experience of a moment you shared with them. Focus all of your poem's attention on the other person, but use images that are reflective of the way *you* remember this person and this moment. This is an exercise in abandoning objectivity entirely, and a chance to reveal a part of your inner world to someone else.

5. Dead Baby Poem

Lucille Clifton

the time i dropped your almost body down
down to meet the waters under the city
and run one with the sewage to the sea
what did i know about the waters rushing back
what did i know about drowning
or being drowned

In this difficult poem, the speaker addresses someone that they are unable to actually communicate with. Try your own poem addresses to someone you are unable to talk to. This can be a dead relative, like in Clifton's poem, or maybe a person who lived before your time, or even someone in the future.

Beginner Exercises

1. Letter to Someone Living Fifty Years from Now

Matthew Olzmann

Most likely, you think we hated the elephant,
the golden toad, the thylacine and all variations
of whale harpooned or hacked into extinction.

It must seem like we sought to leave you nothing
but benzene, mercury, the stomachs
of seagulls rippled with jet fuel and plastic.

You probably doubt that we were capable of joy,
but I assure you we were.

What do you think the world will be like in 50 years? 100? 500? 1000? In what ways will it be better? In what ways will it be worse? What will be different and what will be the same? Write a poem to someone living in your chosen time period that addresses these questions. This poem can be hopeful for the future, pessimistic, or any other tone. Like Olzmann's, your poem can address worldwide themes, but your poem could also concern something as specific as the state of your childhood home or a specific place you've visited.

2. Postcards

E. Ethelbert Miller

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/postcards>

This poem begins with an easy question: when was the last time you mailed a postcard? Write a poem that answers it! When did you send it, why, and to whom? What did it say and what was the photo on the front? The answers to all of these questions can be used to create images and details for your poem. If you've never mailed a postcard, then write a poem about never mailing a postcard, or imagine a postcard that you would send.

3. Mosquitos

Katherine Hawth

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/91103>

Write a poem to something you don't like. This can be an animal, like Hawth's mosquito, an idea, a place, or anything else. Hawth uses some very interesting visual arrangement in this poem's "SLAP!" lines to create a poem that looks like the action it describes. Try using some onomatopoeia and clever line breaks of your own to do something just as active.

4. The Question Mark

Gevorg Emin

Translated by Diana Der Hovanesian

<https://taradiddling.wordpress.com/2012/06/20/the-question-mark/>

Write a poem of your own to a piece of punctuation, a certain letter, or a symbol. Pick one whose shape interests you, or maybe its meaning. Imagine, in your poem, how your chosen symbol came to look the way it does or have the meaning it does. Like Emin, you can explore how your symbol is similar to and different from another, or you can try comparing it to something totally different, like an animal or a type of building.

5. Five Directions to My House

Juan Felipe Herrera

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/five-directions-my-house>

Write a poem that gives five directions to a specific and important place. Like Herrera, try to make your directions non-literal. Write these directions to someone very specific, but avoid naming that person in the poem. Choosing a specific audience for your words will change the way you write and make it even more unique, and this will be apparent and interesting, even if your reader doesn't know to whom you are writing.

Glossary

List Poem - a poem that consists of a list of items, events, images, or ideas. The items on the list are often presented without any transitional phrases.

Elegy - a poem of serious reflection, typically and traditionally lamenting the loss of a dead person. However, the elegy can also be used to reflect on the loss of other things.

Epistle - a poem that *directly addresses* some object, person, idea, or event.

Chant Poem - a poem that incorporates a repeating line or group of lines to form a chant. This type of poetry is often focused on the rhythmic nature of poetic language, and is often meant to be read aloud.

Haiku - a Japanese form of poetry consisting of 3 lines, typically unrhymed. The first line has 5 syllables, the second has 7, and the third has 5. These poems are often about observations of nature and juxtapose contrasting ideas.

Metaphor/Simile - a literary device in which one thing becomes, or is given the qualities of, some other thing. In a simile, the comparison is direct and uses words such as *like* or *as*. This is done in poetry to expand understanding of something beyond its literal definition.

Persona - in a poem in which the speaker is presumed to represent the poet, the persona is the version of the poet represented in the poem.

Anaphora - the repetition of a word or a phrase at the beginnings of successive sentences, lines, or phrases.

Image/Detail - Descriptions that appeal to the senses. It is important to note that although the word *image* suggests an appeal to sight, an image in writing can use language that appeals to any of the senses. Details in an image's description help to enrich and bring it to life.