

13 Ideas About Writing Poems

By Dana Gioia

1. **Trust the reader's intelligence.** Every human being has lived in and thought about the world all his or her life.
2. **Every poem makes connections. Don't over explain them.** Hold back a little so that readers share in the joy of discovery and project some of their own life into the poem.
3. **Try to create a narrative line through every poem you write.** Even in descriptive or lyric poems, the sequence of imagery is as important as the imagery itself.
4. **Every story has more than one way of being told.** Find the right way for your purposes. If the poem seems slack, begin the story at a different point.
5. **Create a believable speaking voice.** Make everything in the poem consistent with that voice. But don't make the voice too simple to be credible.
6. **Never assume that anything that would be boring to say in prose will become more interesting in verse.**
7. **Concentrate on making the surface of the poem interesting.** If your inspiration is genuine, the deeper meaning will take care of itself.
8. **One boring moment, one bad line, can destroy the effect of a short poem.**
9. **Clarity, precision, and brevity are better than the alternatives.**
10. **Never hesitate to cut a good line or image or stanza if it makes the poem better.** The unforgettable word or image is what gives poetry force, not clusters of unmemorable description.
11. **Cutting is usually good Condensing is even better.**
12. **A poem is made out of words not image or ideas.** If the words tug you in a certain direction, follow them and see what happens.
13. **Revision is part of the creative act.** Enter into revision with the same openness to inspiration you had while jotting down the first line.