

## Starting notes...



Poetry is one of our most basic ways of perceiving the world. We, humans, best understand what our senses report by comparing what is new to what we already know. That process of comparison, or matching or grouping things is not only the ordinary way humans process information, but also the way we learn and even create unusual, new kinds of insights. All art does these things whether in visual, musical, movement, other media—or combinations of them. In this way practicing "The Arts" allows us to push the boundaries of the ordinary ways we live, invent new solutions, and generally can keep ourselves interested in our world. While poetry is often regarded as [esoteric](#) or removed from daily life, it is really with us everywhere. It may be most obvious in song lyrics, religious texts and in many memorable sayings, thoughts or observations.



The word "poem" derives from the Greek, *poiēma*, meaning something that is *made*, or a *result of*, or *equivalent* to something else. So comparison and relating one thing to another is at the heart of poetry, and in these ways it is not unlike the sciences—or even the *equations* of mathematics. Visual examples of how science and mathematics do connect us to our surrounding are evident in *fractals* which are objects or quantities displaying the same "type" of structures on all scales from the infinitesimal to the infinite levels of our universe.

The mathematics of [Mandelbrot](#) and [Fibonacci](#) show how virtually everything is related by part and pattern, and poetry is one way to explore these relationships. Becoming aware of [principles of symmetry](#) and [science of aesthetics](#), will help identify the wholeness (or not...) and thereby, a basic quality in the writing.

Poetry, that is, *comparisons of things*, especially including repeated sounds and rhythms has been part of human expression for eons and those patterns are key to memorizing and reciting the many kinds of information that poetics convey. The use of comparison is even basic to human development, which we can see when toddlers may call anything with four legs, a cat or dog, or whatever they learned to recognize as four-legged first.



All this can insure that we start with an understanding that poetry can be anything that is focused on comparing things, directly or subtly. It is the variety of ideas, insights and [finesse](#) of word choice, patterns and, implications that keep writers playing with those elements and readers searching for them. Both writers and readers are motivated by the process of surprise and discovery that successful poetry provides in its unique way.

In a very general sense virtually all poetry can be seen as either [dramatic, narrative or lyric](#) in character—or a mix of those. While all poems might be said to tell or imply a [story](#), there are clear elements of drama and story/narrative that are evident in many [forms](#) and in traditional epic poems—at least in their original versions. *The Iliad*, *Beowulf*, *The Divine Comedy*, and many other extended works present characters, plot, and other elements of *story* and *dramatic form*. *Lyric* poetry is usually shorter in length, personal and very concentrated in its energy and effect. Within these general categories, there are countless patterns, forms and qualities that are reflective of their era and culture. Performance poems, Slams and spoken rap w/music are some current versions that both recall the earliest poetic expressions and test new concepts.

The best way to gain confidence in writing poetry is to practice doing it. Reading and listening to the poems of other writers is important to help us recognize different styles and find our personal preferences. Becoming familiar with the ways poets in various cultures have used words, helps us to know the palette of possibilities we can use or adapt for our own expression. Echoing the work of other poets is educational and complimentary, outright plagiarism is, of course, unethical. We will read, write and discuss poems, so some comfort with this process can be ongoing and rewarding for life. I'd want to study cooking from a person whose food I could sample, so here are some poems of mine to try:

[Stars](#) | [Bareback](#) | [On the Shortest Day](#) | [Chamomile](#) | [Up the Lilliwaup River](#) | [Birth Day](#) | [House Finches](#) | [Roadmap Back Cattle](#) | [In the Care Center](#) |

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