

How to Write Poetry

 [oprah.com/spirit/12-ways-to-write-a-poem](https://www.oprah.com/spirit/12-ways-to-write-a-poem)

Let's say I'm sitting in that room with you now. Take out a pad and pen, your favorite pen—the one that just slides across the paper. Be sure you have an hour or so, so you can take your time with each prompt.

12 Ways to Write a Poem

1. Make a list of five things you did today, in the order you did them.
2. Quickly write down three colors.
3. Write down a dream. If you can't remember one, make it up.
4. Take 15 minutes to write an early childhood memory, using language a child would use.
5. Write a forbidden thought, to someone who would understand.
6. Write a forbidden thought, to someone who would not.
7. Make a list of five of your favorite "transitional objects." Choose one and describe it in detail.
8. Write down three questions you'd ask as if they were the last questions you could ever ask.
9. Write down an aphorism (e.g. "A stitch in time saves nine").
10. Write down three slant rhymes, pairs of words that share one or two consonants rather than vowels (moon/mine and long/thing are slant rhymes).
11. Write three things people have said to you in the past 48 hours. Quote them as closely as you can.
12. Write the last extreme pain you had, emotional or physical. If the pain were an animal, what animal would it be? Describe the animal.

Tips

- Use one of the questions as the first line, each of the colors more than once, the slant rhymes, and the aphorism with a word or two changed.
- Try using any part of, or all of, the material in any way you want—a line from your dream might work well on its own or your description of the animal might better describe your great uncle.
- Let the poem be between 20 and 30 lines; let each line be 10 or more syllables long. Think of the poem as a dream or a psalm you are inventing, and don't force it. Write in your own speech, allowing its music and sense to speak through you.

No human experience is unique, but each of us has a way of putting language together that is ours alone.

Start Writing Now