

# 11 do's and don'ts for writing great poetry

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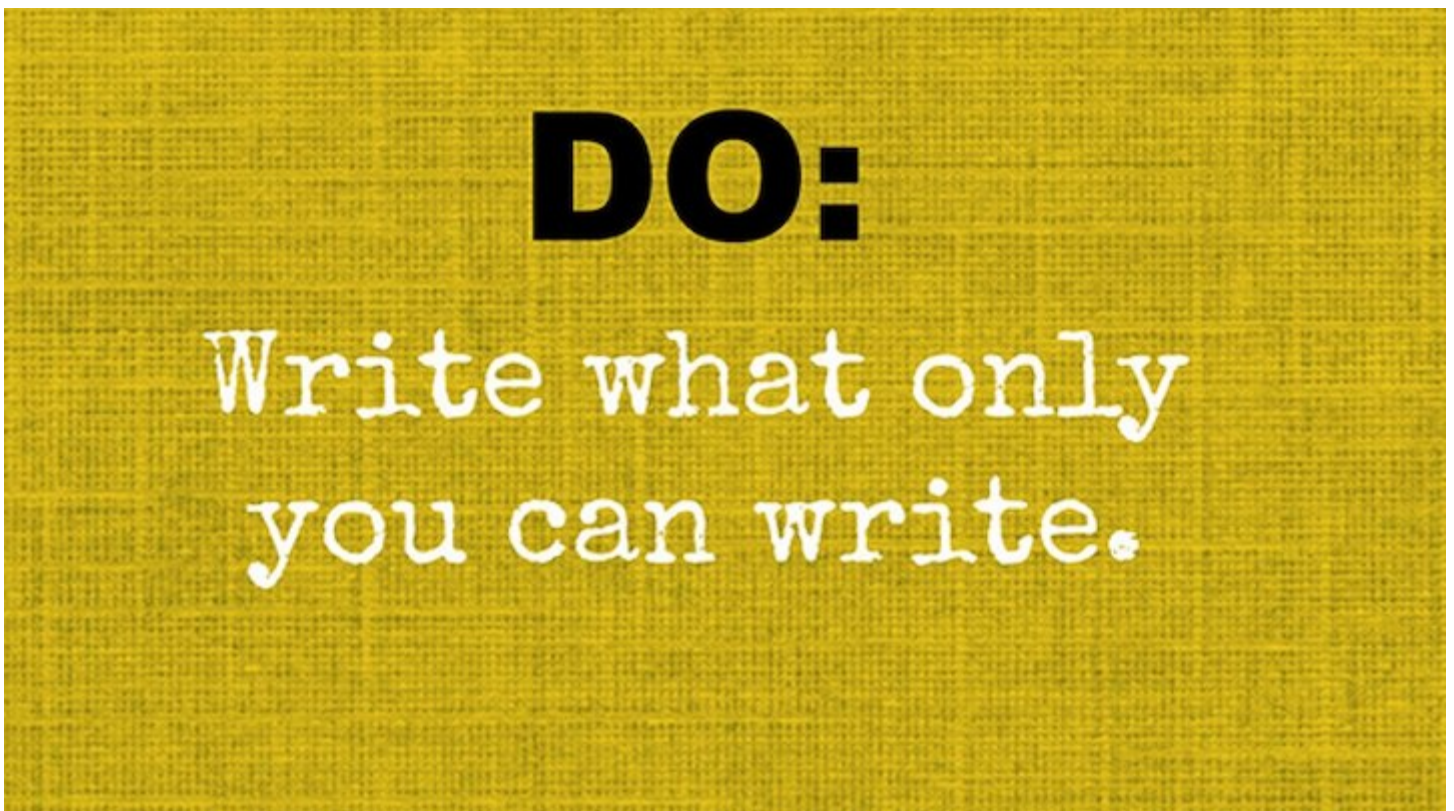
Every year, we ask amazing published poets from across the country to act as readers for the CBC Poetry Prize entries. They read all the entries and build the longlist for the jury. Check out these do's and don'ts that the readers for the 2016 prize offered up.



**Damian Rogers:** If you read deeply and widely, engaging with work from every era and aesthetic corner, then you start to internalize all these mysterious skills that will emerge in new ways in your own writing.



**Greg Santos:** DON'T be afraid to shake your readers awake, to tinker, take chances, experiment, wow, poke, prod, shock, surprise and play. The journey is just as important as the destination. Have fun. Create or croak!



**Jeff Latosik:** When you're sending something in, ask yourself this question: would somebody else have written this? If yes, or sort-of yes, try conceptualizing the poem again. That is, send the stuff to contests that only you could have written; strive to write what only you could have written.





**DON'T:**  
Get fancy  
with your  
fonts.

**Lisa Pasold:** Please submit your poem in either Times New Roman or some similarly legible font, in 12-point type. If you can, resist the urge to add footnotes to your poem.



**DO:**  
Write about  
your own life.

**Nilofar Shidmehr:** Use experiences from your lived life. Express social, political and ecological concerns of our time. Include the stories and the point of view of the marginalized others in your writing.



**DON'T:**  
Try to  
be trendy.

**Talya Rubin:** Being innovative, considered and most of all true to your own voice — that is, originality and authenticity (rather than trying to impress) — are the qualities that truly leap off the page.



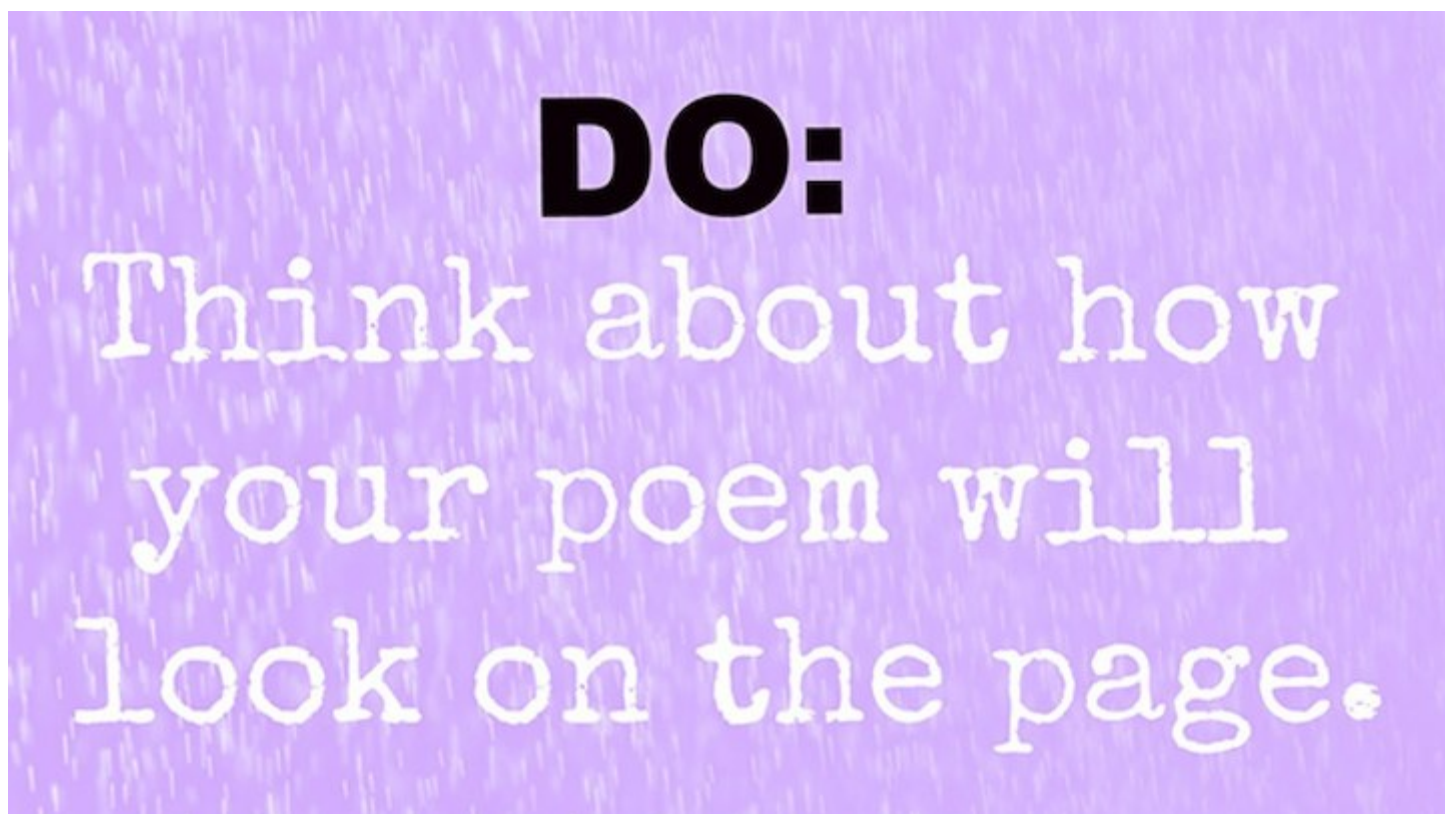
**DO:**  
Experience  
the world.

**Greg Santos:** Read the news, scroll through your Facebook and Twitter feeds, devour books of fiction and nonfiction as well as graphic novels, binge-watch something good on Netflix. Get inspired by the world around you. Good literature doesn't exist in a vacuum.





**Ian Williams:** As a reader, I'm only imaginary in your imagination. Remember there's a real person on the receiving end of your poem. You are not your only audience.



**Talya Rubin:** Strong work is noticed no matter what form it takes, but thinking about the look of your poem on the page, the shape of the line, the way a poem builds into meaning and how that poem (or self-contained series) stands alone really does help.





**DON'T:**  
Explain  
your work.

**Lisa Pasold:** Let it stand on its own feet. Poems come from a strange place in the soul that is not necessarily clever or logical.



**DO:**  
Edit. Edit. Edit.

**Greg Santos:** DO reread and edit your poems before you send. Typos and bad grammar are immediate turn-offs.