

## Poetry Writing Portfolio overview

The midterm for the poetry class will be a portfolio of 5 poems. We have completed 12 poems for the class, so you are choosing fewer than half of your poems.

Here is a list of the assignments we have completed:

Sonnet  
Villanelle/pantoum/ghazal  
Dinggedicht/Ekphrasis  
Translation  
Short lyric (After \_\_\_\_\_)  
Prose poem  
Long lyric

You may change or relax the form of the poem to help it develop; you may write new material to finish your long lyric and count the long lyric as up to three of your poems. (See me if your lyric is very long—if it needs to count for more, you may make that case.)

Each poem should have at least three drafts after the graded final, showing substantial changes. Remember, Elizabeth Bishop wrote 19 drafts of “One Art,” a poem that she said came easily, “like writing a letter.”

You should also include an Artist’s Statement, a single-spaced page in which you express your ideas about your project:

1. Your artistic vision or particular values. For example, your work might center around a theme (e.g., Departures) or around a particular approach (e.g., imagism, New Formalism, the contemporary free-verse lyric). It might also center around a particular maxim (see our collection below).
2. Your process of revision and goals for each poem. Be as specific as you can.
3. The values (again, see below) you particularly wish to emphasize.

The portfolio will be graded on:

the amount of visible work behind the poems  
include drafts at least from the previously graded version forward  
the degree to which you fulfill your goals as set forth in the Artist’s Statement  
the quality of the work, as per the What We Value section of this handout

### What We Value

(This portion of the handout is produced collaboratively, from the class.)

- Very strong images; “Show, Don’t Tell”; “No ideas but in things”—William Carlos Williams  
In keeping with this idea, the poems should as much as possible let the images do the work of conveying the emotion of the poem. Any direct telling should be reserved for the end of the poem, where, presumably, more abstraction has been earned.
- “The natural object is the adequate symbol”—Ezra Pound  
Don’t be afraid of seeing the objects that occur naturally in your poem and allowing them to resonate symbolically. What networks of images do you find? What emotional content do your

images possess? Work with the different elements of your poem to make sure they are doing the work you want them to do.

- “The poet is never the man at the breakfast table; there is always a phantasmagoria”—W.B. Yeats  
Fundamentally, Yeats is thinking about the imagination. That is, we should not look for a 1:1 correspondence between the poet’s biography and the speaker’s identity. The speaker represents a voice the poet has access to rather than the poet herself. The result is freedom of topic.

- “Think of your mother; describe the room”—Marie Howe  
Howe suggests that the poet’s own psychology is loaded with its own preoccupations. Our preoccupations come out everywhere we go, and what we see corresponds with our own sensibilities, obsessions, and concerns.

- Prepare the reader for what follows, be sure all gestures, especially any inferential gestures (telling), are earned.

We also discussed some pro tips for the process of composing and revising:

- Push through ‘bad drafts.’ The good poem goes through a number of phases. Some are ugly. Persist.

- Write by writing. Think by writing.

Forcing yourself to put down your ideas in writing will get words on the page, will force you to cut out some ideas, to articulate concepts as for some sort of audience. This free writing may be largely unusable, but writing this way in the early stages (or when stuck) can elicit new images, turns of phrase, rhythms in a way that thinking in one’s head cannot.

We can add to this list today in class. Include your best notes here.