

Poetry: I Write Because I Must

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Series Description:

Even if Oscar Wilde never did say “I spent the morning putting in a comma, I spent the afternoon taking it out again” few poets will fail to recognize this angst-steeped toil required to make a poem work. In this series we will focus on experimenting with our revisions so that our poems surprise even ourselves. We will start by examining great poems by great poets and revising them to make them fail, in order to better understand how we can revisit our own work to make it better. We will then turn to our poems to discuss them in an open and respectful dialogue, using these discussions and in-class poetry writing and revision exercises to develop your skills and help you complete the poems you want to write, in whatever style you prefer.

Schedule of Topics:

Note: This schedule is only a guide. Discussions and exercises may change according to the preferences of the workshop participants.

1. How did they do it?

Discussion: Examine some great poems to try to understand how they work.

Exercise: Revise a great poem to make it work less well.

2. Making the poem fail

Discussion: Examine one of the instructor’s poems to try to understand how it works, or doesn’t work.

Exercise: Revise the instructor’s poem to make it better or worse.

Discussion: Begin looking at participant poems to try to understand what the poet is trying to do with it.

3. The tools: words and lines

Discussion: Word order, line length, line breaks, moving lines around, moving stanzas

Exercise: Apply the tools discussed to participants’ poems and discuss the effects of the changes.

4. The tools: sounds

Discussion: Sound devices such as rhyme, alliteration, assonance, slant rhymes (Too much of a good thing?)

Exercise: Apply the tools discussed to participants' poems and discuss the effects of the changes.

5. The tools: basic arithmetic

Discussion: Adding words, removing words, adding lines, removing lines, long words and short words.

Exercise: Apply the tools discussed to participants' poems and discuss the effects of the changes.

6. The tools & wrap up: repetition, listening

Discussion: How repetition (refrains, etc.) affect a poem.

Discussion: How listening to a poem helps us write poems and understand poems.

Exercise: Apply the tools discussed to participants' poems and discuss the effects of the changes.

Discussion: What happens next: Getting and giving constructive criticism, forming a poets' group, publishing.