

Found Poem Instructions

Instructions adapted from “Found and Headline Poems” from *Getting the Knack: 20 Poetry Writing Exercises* by Stephen Dunning and William Stafford.

1. Carefully re-read the text and look for 50–100 words that stand out in the prose passage. Highlight or underline details, words, and phrases that you find powerful, moving, or interesting.
2. On another sheet of paper, make a list of the details, words and phrases you underlined, keeping them in the order that you found them. Skip a line between the words so that they are easy to work with.
3. Look back over your list and cut out everything that is dull, or unnecessary, or that just doesn’t seem right for the poem. Try to cut your original list in half, so that you have 25–50 words. As you look over this shortened list, think about the tone that the details and diction convey. The words should all relate to the event. Make sure that the words communicate the emotion of the person in the prose text.
4. Make any minor changes necessary to create your poem. You can change punctuation and make little changes to the words to make them fit together (such as change the tenses, possessives, plurals, and capitalizations). You can repeat phrases that have particular meaning or resonance.
5. When you’re close to an edited-down version, if you absolutely need to add a word or two to make the poem flow more smoothly, to make sense, or to make a point, you may add up to **two words of your own**. That’s two (2) and only two!
6. Read back over your edited draft one more time and make any deletions or minor changes.
7. Check your words, and choose a title—is there a better title than “Found Poem”?
8. Type the words in a word processor or handwrite them in some special way (dare I say *calligraphy*?). Space or arrange the words so that they’re poem-like. Pay attention to line breaks, layout, and other elements that will emphasize important words or significant ideas in the poem.
 - Read aloud as you arrange the words! Test the possible line breaks by pausing slightly. If it sounds good, it’s probably right.
 - Arrange the words so that they make a rhythm you like. You can
space words out so that they are all alone
or allruntogether.
 - You can also put
key
words
on lines by themselves.
 - You can shape the entire poem so that it’s wide or tall or shaped like an object (a guillotine, perhaps).
 - Emphasize words by playing with boldface and italics, different sizes of letters, and so forth.
9. At the bottom of the poem, tell where the words in the poem came from. For example, From “Procession to Eternity” in *English Witnesses of the French Revolution*, memoirs of Henry Edgeworth, 1815.
10. Consider decorating the page in some way to show off your lovely Found Poem!