

WORDS OF ADVICE FROM JUDGE MARILYN FOR ALL CREATIVE WRITERS

Here are some thoughts on what to look for when either creating a poem (free verse) and/or writing a short story or narrative.

Free verse - I call that the lazy man's poem. (This is strictly my opinion!) I am really not a lover of free verse poetry as it does not have rules to go by and can be all over the place and makes judging it difficult. But, I think that there are some guidelines that can be followed.

First of all – punctuation. It helps with the flow of the poem and can give it a continuity and/or “pow”. It creates tone and emotion. **So use question marks or exclamation points, periods and commas etc.**

I knew I was going to make this kill
Though my heart cried: Don't do it!

Next – stanzas or verses. Keeps ideas together. It's a way to give pause to emphasize certain lines or related content. Put in as many as needed. They tell when you're switching time, place, topic, or speakers. They break the page up so it is not just a solid block of writing. Example: excerpt from a free verse poem:

*My eager hands
Turn the pages of an old album
I found in the attic just this morning.*

*Photos, old, faded.
Pages, yellowed, crumbling.*

*Great-Grandma seen in apron
And stockings rolled to the top of sturdy shoes,
Hoe in hand;*

*Great-Grandpa bending over the peas in the midday sun.
The first house built, standing in the background.*

There are no officially sanctioned rules of free verse poetry. However, as with all creative writing, having some degree of structure can only help in getting your idea across where it captures your audience's attention.

On Writing Creative Narrative

Most important: *The first few lines need to catch the readers attention and want them to read more.

“Her hand trembled as she picked up the key” makes you want to hear more of why she was trembling – Was she afraid? Was she cold? What's this about a key?

You can start with a question or with dialogue or an interesting fact or with a bold statement (such as: “ The gold was in plain sight.”)

Sometimes this line has to be left by itself and the rest continuing in the next paragraph. *If you're writing about a garden don't make a list of all the flowers and shrubs. This is a story you are writing, not a grocery list. Mention a few, the colors, how tall, low lying, their scent, how they're “dozing in the cool shade over near the stone fence...” Talk about the overall view of the gardens rather than individuals unless they stand out in some way. “The blue flag irises with their feet in the edge of the pond.”

*Put in as many paragraphs as needed. They tell when you're switching time, place, topic, or speakers. They break the page up so it is not just a solid block of writing.

*Watch your capitalization and punctuation marks, these are important.

*Use interesting verbs. Don't say she "walked over to him. "Rather "she flew to his side.."

Don't say "she dropped the bucket as she turned around." Say " the bucket fell with a thud, spilling it's content, as she whirled around "

*Vary your sentences. Some can be short while others are long. Start sentences with different parts of speech. "Mary had a lot to say. " Change to "There was so much Mary had to say."

This is just a quick guideline. One that I like and have used.

In one category there was only 1 prize awarded because others had not followed the rules. Please be careful. Some are still not including the name of the song it is written to. That is how the judge knows what tune to use. Also, you cannot use too many lines out of the original song. Additionally, some writings ask for double spacing. Please pay attention. One entry would have scored much higher with double spacing.

Thanks to everyone for entering. I look forward to receiving entries from you again next year.