

WE SPEAK Poetry

Resource Guide



edmonds center *for the arts*

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Introduction

Welcome! We're glad you're interested in being a part of WE SPEAK. This resource guide is intended to give you some information and inspiration as you craft or refine your piece for WE SPEAK. The guide covers some of the basics of poetry and spoken word performances, and provides links for further exploration. We hope you find this helpful!



About Poetry

Poetry is an art form that has been fundamental to human expression for centuries. There is no singular definition of poetry, but these resources explore some of the common characteristics of poetry.

[The Elements of a Poem - Khan Academy](#)

[What Makes a Poem... a Poem? - TED-Ed](#)

Check out the variety of definitions of poetry by famous writers:

[Poetry | Academy of American Poets.](#)

Which definitions make sense to you? Can you think of any different definitions?

Spoken Word Poetry and Performance

Spoken word poetry, which is primarily intended to be performed rather than read on the page, has some distinctions from written poetry. Take a look at these resources for more information:

[Spoken word | The Poetry Foundation](#)

[Spoken Word | Performance Playground](#)

In order to write spoken word, it's important to watch successful performances. Check out these videos of poets giving powerful spoken word performances. Note how they use movements, hand gestures, pacing, and inflection to create a dynamic piece.

[Danez Smith: waiting on you to die so i can be myself](#)

[Sarah Kay and Phil Kaye: When Love Arrives](#)

[Andrea Gibson: Orbit](#)



Writing Poetry

It can be overwhelming to sit down and try to write a poem. Remember that it doesn't need to be perfect on the first try. If you're stuck, write down everything you can think of. Even if it's messy, this can lead to really great ideas. Try a variety of strategies and exercises, and figure out what works for you! Just as there's no single or 'correct' definition of poetry, there is also no single or 'correct' way to write a poem.

[How to Write Poetry: 11 Rules for Poetry Writing Beginners - 2025 - MasterClass](#)

[Three Poetry Writing Exercises | Writing Forward](#)

[Writing Activities - Pongo Poetry Project](#)

[Everything You Need to Write a Poem \(and How it Can Save a Life\)](#)



Writing and Performing Spoken Word

Here are some resources focusing on the process of creating a spoken word piece. Since spoken word is all about the verbal presentation of a work, the process can be different from writing a poem that is viewed only in print.

[How to Write Spoken Word with Elizabeth Acevedo](#)

[How to Perform Spoken Word with teaching artist Deborah Magdalena](#)

When you're ready to record your piece, review our WESPEAK [Video Submission Guidelines](#) for tips and reminders on the recording process.

More Resources

If you're interested in taking a deeper dive into poetry, here are some more resources! Some are available for free, and some are paid.

Websites / Online Articles:

[**Poetry for Teens | Academy of American Poets**](#)

[**Teens | The Poetry Foundation**](#)

[**Poetry in America | Poetry in America | PBS LearningMedia**](#)

[**Home - Poetry International**](#)

[**Poetry Out Loud | Poetry Out Loud**](#)

[**Youth Speaks**](#)

Books:

A Poetry Handbook: A Prose Guide to Understanding and Writing Poetry by Mary Oliver

- This handbook explains the basics of poetic construction, including form, meter, and rhyme. Oliver uses examples from well-known poems to explain the craft of poetry.
- Available through Sno-Isle Libraries.

My Trade is Mystery: Seven Meditations from a Life in Writing by Carl Phillips

- In this book, Phillips shares lessons he's learned about writing, offering reflections on what it means to be a writer.
- Available through Sno-Isle Libraries.

The Poet X by Elizabeth Acevedo

- This novel, by the poet Elizabeth Acevedo, follows a teenage girl as she channels the complexity of growing up into her poetry.
- Available through Sno-Isle Libraries.

Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson

- In this memoir, Woodson tells the story of her childhood in verse form, detailing her experience growing up during the Civil Rights movement.
- Available through Sno-Isle Libraries.

Podcasts:

Poetry Unbound | The On Being Project

- On this podcast, Pádraig Ó Tuama reads one poem per episode, and explores its meaning. These episodes are short, and great for getting into the habit of engaging regularly with poetry.
- Available through Apple, Spotify, and other podcast services.

Poem Talk | The Poetry Foundation

- This podcast features longer roundtable discussions of poems, and features rotating guests.
- Available on the Poetry Foundation website, and on podcast services.

The Slowdown | The Slowdown

- This podcast also features brief episodes focusing on one poem.
- Available on The Slowdown website, and on podcast services.

Podcast — Commonplace

- On this podcast, Rachel Zucker interviews poets and artists about their life and their work, combining poetry with everyday discussion.
- Available on the Commonplace website, and on podcast services.

Videos:

Spoken Without Words: Poetry with ASL SLAM

- This video introduces ASL SLAM, an organization that promotes art and performance that uses American Sign Language.

Poetry Out Loud 2023 - National Endowment for the Arts

- This playlist contains recitations and interviews with winners of the annual Poetry Out Loud competition.

Brave New Voices 2023 - Youth Speaks

- This playlist contains some of the poems from the 2023 Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Festival.
- Check out the Youth Speaks YouTube channel for videos from other years of the festival.

Teen Poetry Slam 2023 - Youth Speaks

- Youth Speaks also hosts an annual Teen Poetry Slam. This playlist contains videos from the 2023 contestants.