

Ten Ideas for Writing Poetry

By Erica Goss, poet and author of **Vibrant Words: Ideas and Inspirations for Poets** (2014, PushPen Press).

1. **Prove This Wrong:** The negative can be a lot of fun, especially when revising a poem that seems dead on the page. Try starting a poem with the lines “The food didn’t impress me” or “The gift wasn’t as pretty as the wrapping.” For an example of the negative, read “To Dorothy” by Marvin Bell.
2. **Brothers and Sisters:** Write a poem about your experience being a sibling. If you are an only child, write about not having siblings. Imagine well-known siblings: Cain and Abel, Hansel and Gretel. The 2011 issue of *Caesura*’s theme is Brothers and Sisters. Lots of good examples in there.
3. **Try a Triolet:** The Triolet is a fixed form from the middle ages, with eight lines rhyming ABaAabaAB. The triolet simplifies things for the poet: come up with two really strong lines, and your job is half done.
4. **I Scare Myself:** What is your biggest fear? Be totally honest. Are you afraid of the dark? of losing your looks? of clowns, dogs or old age? As Mark Twain famously said, “I am an old man and I have known many troubles, but most of them never happened.” List your fears, the more irrational the better.
5. **One Word:** Find a word that moves you in some way. Look it up in the dictionary and write down all of its meanings. Look it up in a foreign language dictionary and see how it’s defined. Ponder its associations.
6. **God’s Hobby:** We imagine God as responsible for unforeseen catastrophes – earthquakes, floods and hurricanes are often called “acts of God.” But what if God makes butterflies in God’s spare time? Imagine a hobby for a supreme being. K.S. Hardy’s “Making Butterflies” is a great example.
7. **Parking Lots:** You might not see the possibilities in parking lots, but I find them more inspiring than Yosemite (unless it’s a parking lot at Yosemite!) Find a neglected place and claim it as your own: the back of a store, a dumpster, or an alley. Describe its moods, weather and people. You’ll be surprised at what happens. My poem, “This is a Wild Place,” came from observing a parking lot.
8. **Fifty Words:** write down fifty words as fast as you can. Now try these things: alphabetize the list and write one line starting with each word; reverse alphabetize the list; make a 25-line poem using one word as the first or last word in each line.
9. **Fruitcakes:** write a poem about food. To get you going, describe the least favorite dish from a holiday (I wrote a poem about my grandmother’s rum-soaked fruitcake), or go through a grocery store and make a found poem from food labels. Try this at an upscale grocery and a Walmart.
10. **Way Back:** write down your earliest memories from childhood. Let your mind wander as far back as it will go. Ask your friends and family for their earliest memories. Ask a sibling to remember an event that you both participated in, and compare notes.

These are just a few of the over 50 ideas and prompts for writing in **Vibrant Words!** I hope you enjoyed them and that they open your writing to new possibilities.

"Poems can and should be actively sought, captured, and written down" — Erica Goss's *Vibrant Words* is a little gem of poetry prompts: concise, efficient, whimsical, immediate.... What a delight to read! Each of these prompts offers useful guidance with inspirational suggestions, ideas, and examples for poets and all poetry lovers. This is also a welcome tool for poetry workshops and other related settings.' — Fiona Sze-Lorrain, author of *My Funeral Gondola* (2013) and *Water the Moon* (2010)