



Supplemental Guide to 2020-2021 Open Contests for Poets and Judges **“Musts and Shoulds” for August 2021**

Deadline: August 21, 2021
Sponsor: Marta Lane
Theme: Leap and the Net Will Appear
Form: Organic Form, aka. Free Verse
Line Limit: 40

MUSTS: Five steps to free verse

Like the practice of freedom itself, free verse can be challenging. The key is to correlate the rhythm of your subject with the rhythm of your natural voice. A natural poetic voice is lyrical and metrical, with accents and pauses that are as prevalent as those written into the strictest of classic verse forms. While the cadence, line counts, stanzas, and syllables per line are not mandated by tradition, the actual presentation of the poem is deliberate. Nevertheless, follow your instincts. The best way to write free verse is to start with wild abandon and funnel your choice of words and movement through a tightly-focused editing process.

Try these five steps to unleash your inner poet:

1. Choose your subject and write about it. Get it all out. Stay deep and true to the rhythm of the poetic movement rolling through you, but get everything about the subject down on paper.
2. Check your rough poem to see if anything is missing. If you need to add a line, or even a stanza, do so. If you’re missing a metaphor, simile, or turn of phrase, add it.

3. Read the rough poem aloud. Free verse is a rhythmic dance with voice and words, so check the sequence of lines and make sure that one flows into the other.
4. Move through your poem with an editor's pen and make sure you've selected the words that give proper accent and cadence to the overall poem.
5. Read the poem aloud until it flows like honey and you feel it inside. That's a sure sign of a well-completed piece of free verse.

SHOULDs:

Consider all forms of taking risks, and possible outcomes. What is leaping? What is the net? How does it appear? What happens when it doesn't appear?

EXAMPLES:

["Praise the Rain"](#) By Joy Harjo; ["From Blossoms"](#) By Li-Young Lee; ["Anne Hathaway"](#) By Carol Ann Duffy.