



Criteria for Judging Poetry

“Poetry is a form of writing that formulates a concentrative imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound and rhythm.”

- Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster, Inc. 2013.

“For me, good poems, ones that I like to read over and over, can bring delight in many ways. Wit, word-play, unexpectedness of word and thought, depth of feeling, word-music, vivid images, the shape of the poem on the page, all bring me joy. I think poetry should come from the heart of the writer—whether it is light and funny or deeply-felt. Caring—about the subject, the emotion, the act of making the poem—is, I believe, essential.”

- Patricia Hubbell

These categories and levels provide a consistent measurement scale for evaluating entries. Judges are encouraged to add notes for writers, with suggestions and reactions to the material which will help writers understand their scores and improve.

	Exceeds Standards	Meets Average Standards	Below Standards
Meaning and Ideas Worth 30 points	Compact, intense writing packs powerful ideas into a small space. All aspects of the poem work together to deliver a crystal-clear meaning. Reader comes away enriched with fresh ideas, maybe seeing the world in a new way. (23-30 points)	Poem works as a unified whole to convey a creative, clear idea. (11-22 points)	Poem rambles; the ideas might be confusing or the author might have tried to jam in too many ideas. (0-10 points)
Word Choice and Technique Worth 30 points	Writer uses vivid words and phrases that paint a picture in the reader’s mind. Effectively uses unique details, figurative language and other literary techniques to create tone and meaning. (23-30 points)	Writer uses descriptive language and/or clear sensory images to portray ideas or emotions. The words feel carefully chosen. (11-22 points)	Difficult to visualize images or emotion. Poem reads more like everyday speech because the words do not feel carefully chosen. (0-10 points)
Sound and Rhythm Worth 20 points	The poem sounds like music because of the writer’s artful mastery of techniques to match sound with meaning and emotion: talented use of rhythm, patterns, beat, rhyme, and/or techniques like alliteration, assonance, or onomatopoeia. Even blank verse or free verse poems feature a musical rhythm and words artfully chosen for their sound. (15-20 points)	The poem “sounds right” because it is built with consistent rhythm, rhyme, or pattern. The sounds of the poem help convey the emotion or meaning of the poem. (6-14 points)	The poem, if read aloud, has no rhythm or pattern. If it has a rhyme scheme, the poem might sound sing-songy like a nursery rhyme. (0-5 points)

	Exceeds Standards	Meets Average Standards	Below Standards
Emotion and Voice Worth 10 points	<p>The reader gets the sense that the narrator/speaker of the poem is a complex, real person. The poem might lead the reader through several emotions and provoke a lingering emotional response. Overall, the reader feels that a talented poet has guided them toward an experience they want to savor.</p> <p>(7-10 points)</p>	<p>The writer’s voice and unique perspective is evident. The poem engages the reader’s emotions and interest.</p> <p>(4-6 points)</p>	<p>The poem does not feel like there is a real person behind the words—not much emotion in the poem.</p> <p>(0-3 points)</p>
Discretionary Points Worth 10 points	<p>Reader wants to read the poem several times. The poem vibrates with an energy that can’t be forgotten or ignored. The writer has captured a specific moment in a creative, fresh way.</p> <p>(7-10 points)</p>	<p>Reading the poem is a good experience, but the work shows some unevenness in presentation. Demonstrates overall good word choice, structure, and message, but might sometimes feel confusing. Author may still be developing vocabulary and ability to choose precise words.</p> <p>(4-6 points)</p>	<p>Errors make the poem difficult to understand or distract the reader from the poem’s message. The writer may be still learning about all of the techniques available to poets.</p> <p>(0-3 points)</p>

Judges will provide comments including their reactions to the material, with positive feedback and suggestions for improvement. These comments might include how they responded to the work: emotional or intellectual response while reading; places where they were most interested or least engaged; parts that confused them; or sections or ideas that piqued their curiosity or where they would have liked to have read more.

