

1. Begin strong. A strong image, sense detail or action is best. It must lead the reader on. Make the beginning arresting in some way: musical or sensual or surprising.
2. Look for ways to enhance the emerging patterns of a first draft. Pay attention to vowel sounds, consonant sounds, almost rhyme, rhyme, rhythm, and repetition. The best way to hear this is to read your work aloud. Repeated words to adds emphasis to those words, so make sure you aren't overusing the pronoun "I" or the word "the."
3. Focus. Stay on pitch. If you begin with a metaphor, stay in the metaphor throughout the poem. Similes (which use the words 'like' or 'as) just aren't as vivid as metaphor. Practice staying inside a metaphor by writing persona poems.
4. Make sure to employ the five senses. Good writing is rooted in the body. Write from your heart and write about what is important to you. Longing belongs there, not preaching.
5. Think little and think big. Narrow the focus to a small thing. Consider storytelling conventions, like journey or 'the rule of 3,' or circular forms. Then think big. Is there a way to connect the poem to a wider cultural story by using some word or detail or a certain title?
6. Use action verbs and exact concrete detail. In words, create a vivid picture. Like Mary Oliver says, nouns and verbs are worth 50 cents, adjectives and adverbs are worth far less. Find ways to build tension into the lines (try the use of opposites or by the use of an antagonist; consider what the poem is up against or irresistibly drawn toward). Evoke feeling, but don't name feelings.
7. Stanzas are like paragraphs. Make a pattern in the stanzas and with stanzas. Stanza breaks are "seven-league boots" and offer an opportunity to cross time and space, to free-associate or free-fall, and surprise the reader.
8. Lines: short lines are staccato. Longer lines, more room to breathe. This is about pace. In a poem, a line break slows the rhythm (it's like an invisible punctuation mark). Readers will pause slightly, and this hesitation can add ambiguity which can add meanings. A hesitation can signal the plunge into the next line. End each line on a strong word. Punctuation? Be consistent. Use punctuation to guide the breath.
9. Allow yourself to work intuitively. Sometimes an image lingers or resonates for a writer. Use this and keep it central. Let the poem lead you. Don't be overly controlling. Listen to the work.
10. Often beginning writers can be heavy-handed with a conclusion. Do not summarize what you just said in the poem but do take advantage of the previous images or rhythm or "beat." Don't tell the reader what to feel or think. Think of your last line as a phrase of music.

If you are writing prose, these guidelines are very useful. In any type of writing, a strong voice has "carrying power" and the capacity to stay on pitch.