

HOW TO WRITE A LOVE POEM

Short of a marriage proposal, a love poem is the most personal Valentine's Day gift around, says arts blogger (and incurable romantic) Danna Lorch



It doesn't cost anything but time to compose and will be treasured for years to come. Don't worry, Don Juan, the poem doesn't have to be prize winning. It is a private correspondence between you and your sweetheart – unless you become really famous, in which case it will probably be published in a volume of your letters and displayed in a national library years from now.

Read up

For inspiration, take half an hour to read some of the most famous love poems ever written. The Poetry Foundation (poetryfoundation.org/browse) keeps an archive of 10,000 searchable works including selections on unrequited love, first love, and desire. You might enjoy words by Muriel Rukeyser, Kenneth Koch, Percy Bysshe Shelley, or Mahmoud Darwish.

Write what you know

Love is the most universal human experience around, but this poem will focus on what makes your variety

unique. Rather than crafting a poem that grandly names your love as deeper than all others that came before it, focus on particular details like the way his hands look when they play the piano, the first time you told her you cared for her, or the moment your eyes first met all those years ago. This poem is just another way of telling the story that you have already lived.

Lose your inner editor

Put on some music or grab a cup of coffee and free write for 10 minutes about the subject of your love poem. Don't allow yourself to pause, re-read, or change what you've written until the 10 minutes are up. This is about writing not editing. Now that you're past the scariest part – facing down the blank page – you are halfway there. You just have to pull out the right images and ideas and put them into stanzas.

Consider poetic form

If working in free verse feels too overwhelming, try a classic sonnet for

some structure. Remember *Sonnet 18* by William Shakespeare, which begins by asking, "Shall I compare thee to a Summer's day?" Sonnets have 14 lines and are typically in iambic pentameter meter. The last two lines are a rhyming couplet. Too complicated? Try a non-rhyming 14-line love poem, which has a plot twist in the middle and a dreamy resolution at the end.

Finish with a flourish

While there is a certain glamour to writing a poem on a cocktail napkin or a torn out sheet of notebook paper, this is a Valentine's Day love poem and deserves a pretty dressing to communicate that you put great thought into the gift and it wasn't just a last minute, "Oops! It's February 14 and I forgot to make a plan" kind of thing. Once you've drafted the poem, use your best handwriting and pen to copy it into a gorgeous card, seal the envelope, tie it with a silk bow and slip a single flower through the knot.
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