

Jo Bell's Big Ruthless List for Poetry Composition

- 1 Get rid of cliché. All of it.
- 2 Take out any word that is there solely to fit a rhyme scheme or meter. *We can tell.*
- 3 Is every word earning its keep? If not, bin it, including *and* and *the*.
- 4 Could your lines be broken differently? If so, you haven't finished yet.
- 5 Is there any rhythm, rhyme or structure? If none, you haven't finished yet.
- 6 'Arrive late, leave early.' Look at the beginning and end of the piece. Cut out anything that is unnecessary or over-explanatory.
- 7 Are you assuming your reader is more stupid than you, and over-explaining? Don't.
- 8 Are you assuming your reader is more intelligent than you, and dropping classical/arcane references to impress them? Don't.
- 9 Is your poem boring? Look at approach, pace, point of view and imagery.
- 10 Be honest with yourself – allow uncomfortable emotions to be seen.
- 11 What's the point of your poem – is it just a snapshot? It has to say something to the reader as well as the writer.
- 12 Be true, rather than accurate. Change names, locations etc if necessary but convey what the original episode made you feel.
- 13 Form. If you are using a form, why?
- 14 Form. If you are not using a form, why not?
- 15 Could this poem have been written by anyone, or is it definitely yours?
- 16 'Good enough' isn't good enough. Keep editing until it is as good as it can be, has something to say and says it your way.

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