

# Poetry Project #1

## The Personal Memory Poem

**3 pts.**

Your poem will also contribute subjectively to your Chapbook score. Remember that 3 pts. may not seem like a lot, but we are working with only 100 pts. total.



**Draft and final due dates will be listed on schedule.**

**Even after it has been graded, your poem may still be edited to fit your chapbook as well as possible.**

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*Not ideas about the thing but the thing itself*— Wallace Stevens

*No ideas but in things.* — W.C. Williams

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This first assignment is all about DETAIL. Lots and lots of real, concrete, sensory, specific detail. Stuff you can *touch, see, hear, taste, smell*. Examples. Particulars. Specifics. The nitty gritty of the gritty nits. Bumpy, billowy, scratchy, screechy, dirty, flirty LIFE. Close up.

Avoid generalities, abstraction, and clichés in this project like the plague !!!

**Aprx. length: minimum 40 lines.** I do not count words or pages. Just make a good poem very close to 40 lines long, single-spaced. If you want to shorten it later in the term for your chapbook, you will be able to do that.

The line requirement is important because, in my experience, students just don't know how much is inside

of them, waiting to be written. They stop too soon, but, if nudged just a bit, wind up saying all kinds of fabulous things and making far better poems. 40 lines is enough to push you a bit, but not too crazily.

This is a free verse poem, so you don't need an end-rhyme scheme unless you'd really prefer that. You want the focus of the piece, in any case, to be on expressive, descriptive details and feelings rather than fancy rhyming.

### **Instructions**

Write a free verse poem in the first person ("I") about some significant, puzzling, terrifying, or otherwise intriguing event, person, place, or thing in your past. Rely almost exclusively on intense, sensuous, *concrete* language and images, letting the details speak for themselves. Do not editorialize about your subject or explain it; simply describe or reenact it as accurately and as vividly as you can, *using your senses*. Try to embody the memory; you want to put your reader *right there*.

If necessary, review/look up definitions of "concrete," "specific," "abstract," and "general." These words are used in a specific way when applied to literary writing.

There is no censorship on content except for two things:

1. Avoid anything that is likely to be truly offensive to any group of persons, or that degrades or stereotypes anyone.
2. Take care to avoid sentimentality: writing which evokes predictable, obvious, and pre-digested emotion; writing in which emotion feels unearned, maybe cheesy. Avoid having people in your poem, including you, for example, actually collapse into an avalanche of sobs or whatnot. If someone cries, try to "write it colder"; dial it back a bit because understatement can be more potent than overstatement. What's really fun is to discover NEW feelings in the memory which will surprise your reader and even you. And watch out for subjects which will almost by default be sentimental and predictable: puppies, sunsets, weddings (unless, of course, these are especially interesting puppies, sunsets, or weddings!).

### **Possibilities:**

1. Narrate a brief story from your past. That is, a poem with a plot. What happened first, second, third, and so on?
2. Write about a conversation you had with someone.
3. Write about an object from your past: a favorite sweater, a coffee mug, one of our mother's necklaces, a horse, books, the first time you saw the ocean...etc. Focus sharply on the object and let your description reveal how you feel or felt about it.
4. Write specifically about a place: a room, a house, a special location outdoors.
5. Write a poem based on a photo that is really interesting and cool from your past. Describe what's in the photo.
6. Even though some of our class readings are about traumatic events, your poem doesn't have to take on crisis moments or anything wrenching or life-changing (unless, of course, you want it to).

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Grading scale for all poetry projects:

**Outstanding = A = 3 pts.** Meets all of the stated criteria and instructions exceptionally well. Excels in inventiveness, originality, and energy, relative to work produced generally in 229. Well-edited and proofed.

**Very Good = B = 2 pts.** Meets all of the stated criteria and instructions, or meets several of them

exceptionally well, despite a weak performance with others.. May be especially striking in spots, despite noticeable flaws. Very competent, but may lack originality or inventiveness, relative to work produced generally in 229. Good attention to style and mechanics. Clear attention to assignment.

**Fair = C = 1 pt.** Meets some of the stated criteria, or meets all of them only partially. Uninspired but minimally competent; or very inspired but lacking competence in key areas.. May show some inattention to, or misunderstanding of, instructions. Weak proofreading and editing.

**Poor = D = 1/2 pt.** Meets few of the criteria. May not heed or understand instructions. May be sloppy, unproofed, unedited, and/or very perfunctory and uninspired.. An unsatisfying poem, saved by at least minimal attention to at least one facet of the piece.

**Unacceptable = F = 0** Poem either fails to meet any of the stated criteria, or demonstrates severe oversights or weaknesses in significant areas.