**Slam poetry writing tips –**

**ideas borrowed from**

[**https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/checklist-8-things-keep-mind-when-writing-slam-poetry-digital-poet**](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/checklist-8-things-keep-mind-when-writing-slam-poetry-digital-poet)

**1.  Your slam poem is just that - *YOURS!***

But if you really want to be a top notch slam poet, authenticity is going to be core to your work. Its very easy to take some ideas and 'borrow' some performance techniques from other artists you see - but ask yourself: "Does this really make me a game-changing poet?" Your style should be based on your life, the person you are, and the message you want to carry. So think about who you are. Think about what you want to get out of being a slam poet or spoken word artist. And make sure those core beliefs resonate throughout your work.

**2.  You are writing a poem that will be performed**

You should keep in mind that you're writing to perform and *someone* is going to hear you (and hopefully *listen* to you).  All this means is that after you finish your piece, you should take the time to read it out loud a whole bunch of times. Listen to the flow of your words, listen to the poem's rhythm and understand how each stanza, each line and even each syllable leak into the proceeding components. Poetry should...well, it should sound poetic. It shouldn't sound like an essay; if it does you're going to bore your audience to death.   
  
The point of performing is you want to carry a memorable message and entertain & delight while doing so. A strong performance is persuasive. Being persuasive doesn't mean doing what everyone else does because you might have thought someone's message resonated with you. Being persuasive means finding your own niche and riding it to help connect with your audience. When you walk off stage after performing a slam poem, the audience should feel like they just got punched - with reality. Keep that in mind when you're putting the finishing touches on your piece.

**3.  The best way to project honest emotion is to paint a vivid picture**

When you paint a picture of your experience with words then you don’t have to tell people how you are feeling, they will be able to determine it from your descriptions. Show don’t tell. You should try to help the audience actually feel what it was like to walk in your shoes. You should use the 5 senses and imagery.

**4.  Concrete language is vital for hitting your audience in the gut**

It's that moment you say something so ingenious...well, so ingenious that its *actually poetic.* Don’t be overly abstract or cryptic. Be direct.  
  
**5.  Poetic devices & poetry tools are your friend**

Poetic devices are the crux of what separates a poem from just being an essay. These are some tools that will be useful.

* Rhyming, Repetition, Alliteration, Metaphors & Similes, Hyperbole, Assonance, Onomatopoeia, Personification, Attitude, Imagery, Meter, Rhythm. A lot of these tools help with the emphasis of certain lines and points; they also help an audience feel what you're describing rather than just hear you.

**6.  The content of your slam poem can (and should) outweigh your performance style**

Delivery is a huge part of slam poetry but stage performance doesn’t really mean much unless you're delivering something special. The best performer in the world could probably get on stage and talk about a peanut butter & jelly sandwich, and even if its cool in the moment, its probably not going to affect their lives too much. On the other hand, if a poet delivers words that actually mean something it's going to stick. Its really that simple. When you're writing a spoken word piece, you should be focusing all of your effort into each word - into each syllable even - to ensure you're putting out a quality poem that is representative of who you are. If you're truly doing that, the performance should fall into place more naturally for you.

**7.  Your slam poem should have a point and a purpose beyond just your observations and feelings**

Ever ask yourself why you're even writing and performing slam poetry? You probably write slam poetry for one or more of several reasons: 1) you just love poetry and you always have; 2) its a creative outlet that allows you to be yourself; 3) confiding in a pen is easier than confiding in a friend; 4) you truly desire to touch lives and make a difference; 5) you have a story or message that you want heard. There are definitely other reasons you write, but most are likely along these lines. That's great. That means you're headed in the direction of accomplishing what you're looking for.  
  
What makes slam poetry so good is that you remove the audience from their norm. You add a layer of perspective and the best way to do that is to go really deep on your subject. Use your poem to create a journey and make sure that you have a purpose. Keeping that purpose in mind and not losing sight of it while you're writing will help keep your poem 'tighter'; more focused on conveying your message.  
  
It's wonderful to talk about how you felt or the emotion you might have experienced. But draw on and from those emotions. Make conclusions. Relate those emotions to other aspects of life. Think BIG. You'll write better for it. You'll perform better for it. You'll probably look back and consider yourself a better poet for it.

**8.  You'll need to memorize this - it's called *Spoken Word* for a reason**

Finally, as your scripting your masterpiece, keep in mind that you're writing something to share with people. When you share something meaningful, it’s important to connect with your audience. Eye contact, that real connection, will deepen your poetic verses and further emphasize your words. Memorizing your poem will make it so you can have that connection you need. If you're reading off a sheet of paper, you won't be able to read the room. You'll lose sight of whether or not people are paying attention. If that happens, you're probably not going to be remembered (at least not in the kind of way you want to). So memorize your poem. Please. Then you can see how people react and adjust your body language and mannerism to accommodate that while you're performing.

***How to write Slam Poetry***

***Ideas borrowed from:*** [***http://www.digitalpoet.net/how-to-write-slam-poetry---a-9-step-guide***](http://www.digitalpoet.net/how-to-write-slam-poetry---a-9-step-guide)

***1. Outline your main story, your feelings and your message***  
-Before you start diving into any elements or the framework of your first slam poem, you need to get your story and ideas straight. Just like you would sharpen an ax before chopping down a tree, you want to establish the main story and the feelings or message you wish to convey to your audience *before* you start writing the lines (and chasing rhymes...I've seen a lot of poets *try* to rhyme before they have their story. Wrong approach).  
-What you'll want to do is **think about moments**. This makes things simpler. Think of a moment that touched you, moved you, changed you...something that left an everlasting impression. Once you have that moment, you can write everything that surrounded it - this is the start of your story. Once you have that story, you can start jotting down examples, lines and ideas to support your story. Think about all the emotions that surrounded it. How did you feel?   
-Now reach beyond that for details: Were there particular scents in the air? Did you touch something that you remember (e.g. "As I fell to the floor the carpet was sandpaper..."). Did you taste something, see something, hear something? The more you can incorporate sensory information into your piece, the more your audience will be able to relive it.  
  
  
-See - nothing fancy! By keeping design and style out of the picture at the onset of your piece, you can actually focus on your story and message.

***​​2. Decide on your style, tone & voice***  
-After you've established your storyline, figure out what type of flow you want your slam poem to take on. When you think about the style you’re going to use, keep in mind the story at hand. Is it sad? Is it upbeat? Is it confused? Try to pick a style that aligns with your tone to create a truly unique experience.  
**Your style and flow should be unique to you.** So think about it – do you want to go free-form? Sound like a rapper? A monologue? A written letter? Or just a story with babbling?  
-Whatever you choose as the style for your slam poem, I suggest going back to this step later to try your finished piece in other tones and with different types of delivery. Finally, style should include the poetic devices you want to use. Repetition, Imagery, Analogies, Rhyme, Alliteration, etc. are all tools that can enhance your piece and, more importantly, put some OOMPH! in your delivery!

***3. Write a first draft***  
-Once you know what your story is and you have an idea of the style you want to take on, it’s time to get to writing. For beginners, you might try to write your poem like you're writing a short story. If possible, however, keep the sentences short and choppy. It's not going to be your final draft, but you want to put quality and a high caliber of thought and effort into this step.  
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***4. Edit your draft with details***  
-Once you have a draft that conveys your message and suffices to tell the story you want people to hear, it’s time to add the details. Go back to your work and first decide if it’s all in the right order. Often you will move sentences or entire verses to different portions of the poem to add flow to your story.  
-Now think about the types of poetic devices you can and wish to use. Are there areas you can infuse some of them? i.e. is there a fact in there that you can change to an analogy? Are there words you can swap for synonyms to complete a sentence with alliteration? Are there opportunities to create different kinds of rhymes?

-Think about the slam poetry you've heard and some of the parts of those poems that resonate with you. Were they using repetition or another tool? If it stuck with you, chances are it’s something that could make your poem more powerful.  
  
***​5. Rewrite a (near) final version***  
-Using the notes and ideas you just added to version one, re-pen your poem to a much cleaner, much "slammier" version. It shouldn't take long because your words, your ideas, your story, etc. is all there already.  
-Once you have that version, begin to read it to yourself. As you're reading, think about your style and ask yourself "is this flowing the way I'd want to hear it?" Maybe try reading it with someone else to get suggestions. This is prime-time for quick and dirty edits. You should be making a bunch of small changes, perhaps adding or taking away a couple lines... be sure you note everything!  
-You should read and re-read this back 5 times. Then go away from your poem for at least 24 hours. THIS IS IMPORTANT!  
​-Come back to it the next day when you're in a different mood and mind frame, and re-read this version again. Go through the same exercise, changing words and really fine-tuning the piece.  
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***6. Finalize your piece (i.e. round 1 stage ready)***  
-Take all the notes you now have on your second version and formulate your stage version. Again, this shouldn't take long given you have all the assets.  
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​***7. Practice, Perform & Perfect!***  
-Once you have your final version, it’s time to start reciting it out loud. You usually will read your poems a lot, maybe even a 100 times, before ever performing. This allows you to understand where your emphasis is, and to capture the pauses and line breaks so you have a flawless flow. It might be helpful to record yourself for this part. Listen to yourself and make notes of things you want to change. With each recital of your piece, you should know more and more the perfect form for your delivery.  
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​8. Memorize***  
-Don't get on stage with a piece of paper! You should be connecting with the audience when you deliver your message.  
If you're reading from a sheet, you are probably losing their attention quickly. Memorization isn't easy, but it really adds to the art of "spoken word". You want to have a presence on stage. You're acting. You're living out your feelings. You're going to need your full body to do that - and your two hands. ​So memorize parts at a time - go from verse to verse. Then try connecting verses. It won't happen overnight, but I promise it will happen!

***9. Slam man, SLAM!***  
-Time to actually try it for real. Practice will get you better at overcoming the butterflies and buckled knees known as stage fright. So if you don't think you were great your first time, practice with some of your buddies, continue to record yourself and get better.