

JUDGING CRITERIA

PRESENTED BY
Howard County Library System

1. **The poem has a title.** A descriptive title shows that you have developed an overall theme or focus in a poem.
2. **The poem offers original ideas and words.** All poems should be original work. Poets may look to previously published work for inspiration, but should be careful to avoid plagiarism—taking another author’s words or phrases or themes as your own. Before submission, have other readers, including a teacher or creative writer, review your poems.
3. **The poem makes readers think.** Ask a teacher or other interested reader if the poem makes them think or feel something more or different about your subject. Judges immediately look for the poem’s appeal to the reader’s senses.
4. **The poem uses poetic devices to create a theme or tone.** The judges will consider the poet’s creative use of imagery, figurative language (such as metaphor or personification), sound elements (such as alliteration or rhyme), and the effect of tone (an attitude or mood, such as anger, delight, sadness, or contentment).



SPONSORED BY
Friends of Howard County Library



for
Teachers & Students

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who can enter?

Howard County Library System's poetry contest, [Write! Now](#), is open to students in grades six through twelve who live or attend school in Howard County. Students compete in one of three categories:

1. Grades 6 - 7
2. Grades 8 - 9
3. Grades 10 - 12

What are the prizes?

First, second, and third places in each category are awarded cash prizes. Each winner also receives a printed collection of all winning poems, and winning poems are posted at [hclibrary.org/writenow](#).

What the important dates?

Write! Now begins December 3. Submissions are due March 8.

How many poems may a student enter?

Each student may submit up to three poems. Each poem may contain up to 60 lines. For complete rules, contest information, and winning poems, visit [hclibrary.org/writenow](#).

How do students submit poems?

Visit [hclibrary.org/writenow](#) and look for the submission link. Students will receive confirmation for each poem submitted.

How are the poems judged?

Judges include local poets, educators, HCLS staff, and poetry enthusiasts. All entries are judged according to the criteria available in this booklet and at [hclibrary.org/writenow](#).

Where can I find additional resources?

Poetry 180 ([loc.gov/poetry/180](#))

Former poet laureate Billy Collins selects a poem for each day of the high school calendar.

Poetry Foundation ([poetryfoundation.org](#))

Go to "Learning Lab" for writing ideas, teaching tips, and resources for learning about poetry. The site explains a variety of poetic forms, such as sonnets, sestinas, acrostics, and limericks.

Poets.org

Sponsored by the American Academy of Poets, this site provides a poem a day; search functions for poets, poems, and subjects; links to tips for educators; and "great poems to teach."

Visit [hclibrary.org/writenow](#) for recommended titles from HCLS.

Additional questions may be directed to writenow@hclibrary.org.

IDEAS FOR STUDENTS

Writing Journal

Begin with a blank notebook and decorate it to reflect your personality. Start with the smallest idea and write poetry without editing.

Close to Home

Write a poem about a piece of clothing, toy, or other object important to you. Who gave it to you? Why do you like it? What does it mean to you? Has its meaning to you changed?

Start with a Proverb

Write a ten-line poem. The poem must include a proverb, adage, or familiar phrase that you have changed in some way. The poem must be written in ten minutes. Write quickly and don't edit yourself. (from [fictionwriting.about.com](#); click on "ten-minute creative writing exercise")

Start With an Epigraph

Choose an epigraph — a quote from another poet, a few sentences from a news article, or a memorable phrase spoken by a friend. Study it as you write freely for a few minutes. Next, shape your free writings into a poem, placing the epigraph, with the author acknowledged, between the title and the first line of your poem. (from [poetryexpress.org](#))

Found Poetry

Borrow interesting lines of text from a primary source document such as a letter, diary, or speech. (HCLS's history databases are great places to find primary sources!) Use those lines to create an original poem. (from [loc.gov/teachers/lyrical/ideas](#))

Imagery and Sensory Detail

Visit a local scenic spot. Describe the landscape using all your senses then write a poem that explores your experience.

Metaphor and Simile

Metaphors directly compare ideas: "My car is a palace on wheels." A simile uses "like" or "as" to make the comparison: "Words fly across the paper like blackbirds across the sky." Find a photograph of someone, and write a poem describing the person using metaphors and similes.

Personification

Personification gives human qualities to inanimate objects. For example, a wire fence "flashes an angry grin" at intruders. Choose an inanimate object, such as a clock or a car, and bring that object to life through personification. (from [How to Write Poetry](#) by Paul B. Janeczko)

Line Breaks

Poets choose where to break a line for many reasons: emphasis, suspense, visual effect. Rearrange the line breaks in a favorite poem or song — use the same words in the same order, just change where the line ends. Did it change the meaning or feel of the poem? Did the poem's new structure reflect any particular shape?

Repetition

Some poems use repetition of words, lines, or sound effects to set a tone. Write a short poem repeats a line twice — near the beginning and the end. Does it have a different meaning the second time?