

# Murphy's Style Sheet for Revising Poetry

## 1. Cliché

Eliminate clichés, which are the vermin of imaginative writing. Initially fresh images, clichés have been taken over and made mundane by too frequent usage. They have lost their original authority, power, and beauty. They raise their predictable heads (aaah, a cliché!) in the early drafts of even the most experienced writers. Turning a cliché against itself by intentionally using it in an inverted form can revive it. Puns can give a cliché a renewed life. However, if a poem is merely going to repeat a cliché, cut it.

## 2. Abstract

Identify all abstract or general nouns and replace them with concrete or specific ones. Words like "love," "freedom," "pain," "sadness," "anger," and other emotions and ideas need to be channeled through the physical imagery of the five senses: Sight, Sound, Smell, Touch, Taste (SSSTT). Creating original metaphors is the most difficult part of poetry writing, not just for beginners, but for those who have been working with words for years. This, however, is what makes a poem distinctive and interesting.

## 3. Verbs

Fortify the physical character of the poem by using strong action verbs instead of linking verbs in the passive voice. Because active verbs and concrete nouns are more visceral, dynamic, and persuasive, they reduce the need for modifiers. Avoid overusing the "-ing" form of verbs because it dilutes and reduces their strength. It is like driving a speedboat without raising the anchor.

## 4. Compress

Cut, compress, and condense! Imagine that you must pay your reader a dollar a word to read your prose. Naturally, you will want to use few words to say as much as possible. Then, imagine that you must pay your reader five dollars a word to read your poetry. Compress, especially when the progress of the poem is impeded by imprecise or indecisive language. Try the following experiment. Put a gob of frozen orange juice on your tongue. This pure, concentrated slush, without any liquid to dilute its sweet potency, is so pungent it stings. Make your poem like that. Cut everything that can be cut until what's left penetrates the flesh with its sweet, burning flavor.

## 5. Risk

Be daring in your writing. Experiment and take chances. Risk-taking adds originality and spontaneity to the poem, which leads to imaginative and linguistic breakthroughs. Read a wide variety of contemporary poets so that you will begin to understand the breadth of poetry's language and modern imagination. You will also become more conscious of its many voices. You cannot mature as a poet unless you read widely. If you refuse to read, you refuse to grow.

*Source:*

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([http://www.pbs.org/wnet/foolingwithwords/main\\_revise.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/foolingwithwords/main_revise.html)).