



POETRY

STARTER KIT



A Poetry Resource that explores:

- Event Rules
- Choosing a Structure
- How to Cut a Piece
- Helpful Terminology
- Planning Your Delivery
- Practice Tips



*A resource created by the **National Speech & Debate Association***

POETRY

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WHAT IS POETRY

Poetry is writing that concentrates on the imaginative awareness of an experience through language carefully chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound, and rhythm. While Poetry may tell a story or develop a character, more often Poetry's focus on language and form are designed to elicit critical thought, reflection, or emotion.

At its core, a Poetry performance is a representation of a theme told through poetic devices. You are essentially choosing an author's message or theme that resonates with you on an emotional level and sharing it with your audience. Nothing in Poetry is accidental, and for that reason, nothing in your performance can be accidental either, from the piece you choose right down to the way you turn your pages in the black book that holds your script.

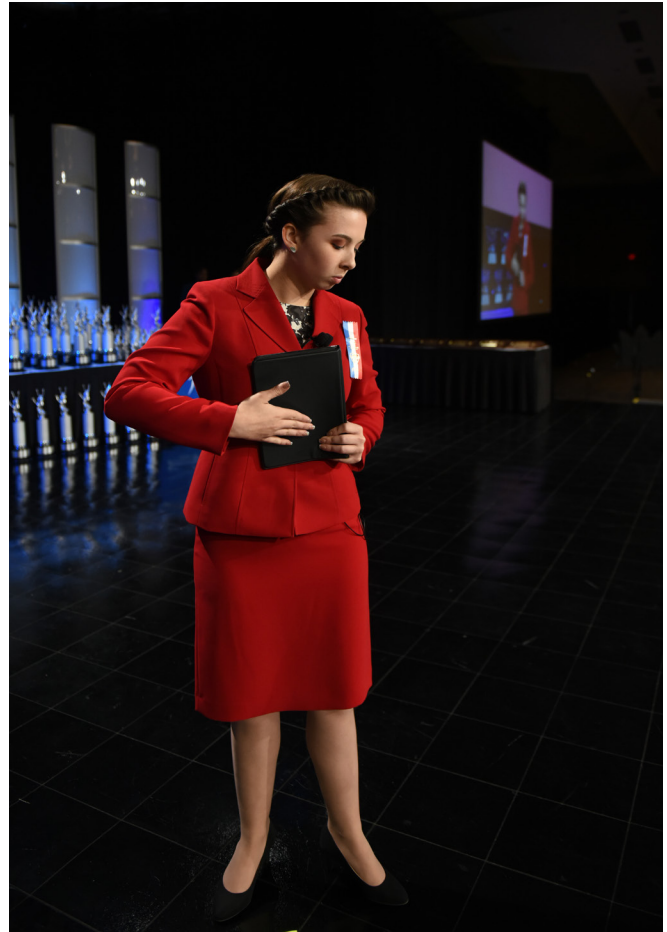
Poetry is a highly unique event, particularly at the middle school level where it is one of the only events with a norm of creating **programs**, or multiple pieces spliced together. Programs often feature two, three, four, or more poems depending on length of each. All the poems can revolve around the same theme or be opposite themes to highlight one another, but they are in some way thematically connected.

Poetry also offers the opportunity to build and develop a broad range of emotional levels in a piece like no other event due to figurative language and creative use of tone. A program can be humorous or dramatic and, like all great performances, a good Poetry program mirrors life in that it has both funny and serious moments.

Poetry requires emotional range and the ability to see thematic links and manipulate

them accordingly. It can be one of the most fun events to not only perform but also put together. This event is definitely for you if you enjoy:

- The use of the black book in Prose but don't like having to tell a story sourced from a book and would rather talk about a theme.
- Exploring a theme in POI but only want to focus on the structural elements and literary devices you can find in Poetry.
- Emotional pieces. Whether they're joyous, dramatic, empowering, mournful, or loving emotions, they're strong and dominate the piece.
- The idea of showcasing multiple pieces of work that are thematically linked instead of just one point of view.





RULES

SOURCES OF MATERIAL

A key part of Poetry is identifying the works you will include. The three overarching rules for those source materials are:

1. Sources used in Poetry must not be written by the competitor.
2. Sources used in Poetry must be accessible to the general public through the duration of the tournament, and the competitor must be able to obtain an official transcript of the source and prove it upon request.
3. Any Poetry material can be used as long as it is accessible to the general public without passcodes or access codes and an official transcript can be obtained of the material. This means you cannot transcribe a poem yourself from a video such as a YouTube video and count it as your transcript.

For complete rules and guidelines on material in Poetry, please reference the [High School Unified Manual](#) and our [Interp FAQs](#).

PERFORMANCE

Poetry has a time limit of seven minutes and 30 seconds. The presentation may not use physical objects or costuming. During the presentation, you must name the author and the work from which the cutting was made.

Adaptations to material may only be used for the purpose of transition. Any word changes (*to eliminate profane language*) and/or additions (*for transition*) must be indicated clearly in ink. Failure to clearly indicate the addition of words will be subject to disqualification. Changes to the script may only be used for the purpose of transition or to eliminate profane language. The voice of a script may not be changed. For

example, changing “She moved to California when she was 13” to “I moved to California when I was 13” is not permitted. Combining small fractions of sentences or singular words to create humorous or dramatic dialogue, scenes, moments, and/or plot lines not intended in the original literature is prohibited. For example, it is not permitted to take one word from page 13 (e.g., *home*), a phrase from page 211 (e.g., *ran away from*), and a name (e.g., *Tyler*) from page 59 to create dialogue between characters or events that do not exist in the script.

Example: Adding “Tyler ran away from home.” when this did not occur and was not said in the script is not permitted. Transitions only may be used to clarify the logical sequence of ideas; they are not to be used for the purpose of embellishing the humorous or dramatic effect of the literature.

Artistic Plagiarism: Videos of previous final round performances and/or other video media are intended to provide educational examples for coaches and students. They are not intended to serve as a model to directly imitate or duplicate in performance.





CHOOSING A STRUCTURE

There are two primary ways to structure your performance based on the way you cut the piece. **Cutting** refers to the way you arrange the work to remove extraneous content and determine the order of the lines to deliver your message while retaining the author's intent.

1. A **single source poem** is a performance cut from a single poem. At first glance, using a single poem may seem easier: you don't have to search for common themes across multiple pieces, but instead can focus all your energy on one work. However, using a single poem has unique challenges. Because the tone is likely to be consistent from start to finish, you may be limited in the number of emotional levels you can build into your performance. You may also struggle to find a poem that is long enough, both in terms of building an emotional connection with an audience and in time. While there is no time minimum in Poetry, you need some time to build the emotions of a piece and connect with your

audience. If you can meet those challenges, a single source poem can be very powerful.

2. A **program** combines multiple works by **splicing** or weaving them together. In this cutting style at the middle school level, you'd typically use three or four poems, depending on their length. You'd use a similar range or possibly a few more at the high school level. You start with a single poem that you like the most. This becomes your **anchor poem**; the rest of the works you select for the program will be built around it. It sets the tone of the program and typically decides the message or lesson you're trying to convey. A program can be challenging in that it requires you to find different viewpoints and emotional levels that all flow together into a cohesive performance. But for many students, finding those connections is the fun of the event! We'll explore the program structure more in depth as we go through how to cut a piece.



HOW TO CUT A PIECE

Cutting a piece can seem very daunting, but like anything else, you have to take it one step at a time.

START THE SEARCH

Before we can cut, we need some material to work with. You may choose traditional Poetry, which often has a formal meter or rhyme scheme, or nontraditional Poetry, which often has a rhythmic flow but lacks formal rhyme or meter (*examples include spoken word or slam poetry*). As you conduct your search, check out the NSDA's list of [suggested source material for interpretation events](#). If you already have an idea for what you want your message to be, you can begin by choosing a theme.

Theme is the lesson or message the poet is trying to convey. The theme will be referenced to and built upon throughout the whole poem.

They're not always explicit, but they are the dominant message of the poem. Examples of themes in stories you've probably read include:

- **Charlotte's Web:** friendship, perception of individuals, loyalty
 - *Theme statement:* Friendship can be found in unexpected places.
- **The Three Little Pigs:** wisdom vs. foolishness, ingenuity, strength of family
 - *Theme statement:* Teamwork and creative thinking can get you out of a jam.

Begin your search by making a list of the top five themes you'd like to explore. Consider the breadth and reach of the theme. It can be as broad as love, siblings, or war or as narrow as the effects of prison on family members, the truth about depression caused by break ups, or

learning how to be happy while being single. If your theme is narrow (e.g., *the effects of PTSD caused by WWII*), you may only find one poem or none at all. If it's too broad (e.g., *PTSD*), your poems may not be related closely enough. Whatever theme you choose, it should be meaningful to you.

If you don't have a theme in mind yet, that's okay! You can let the materials you find lead you to a theme to build around. Whether the material guides the theme or the theme leads you to the material is not important.

Begin by searching for materials and see what matches your theme (*if you have one*) or piques your interest. Tips for your search:

- Utilize poetry books written by a single author to explore a subject or style in depth.
- Find books published by organizations that have tons of poems from multiple authors all in one space. Button Poetry publishes several of their competition winners in books that you can buy on their website.
- Watch as many videos of poetry as possible to give you ideas for themes as well as style and performance choices. It's important to remember when searching for material that you will be performing this poem out loud, not just reading it in your head. So you want to make sure you pick poetry that is meant to be read aloud. Often, poetry best built for this is slam poetry. You can find collections of slam poetry in just about any format. Not all videos of slam poetry have transcripts, but several poets who have won competitions or published several poems have books of their work that

you can cut from or websites with their published work.

- When you begin to search for material, do a simple search for themes. Enter things like “slam poems about love” into the search bar and see what comes up. Then instead of going back and refining your search over and over again, see what's related. If you find a poem, see if there are related poems somewhere on the page and watch/read them, too. If you come up short, then go back and start changing your search to narrow or broaden your theme to find a better selection of material.
- If you find a book of poetry that you like, look at the suggested authors connected to that book. Often you can find several poets who have produced work revolving around similar themes through the suggested authors feature on Amazon or other book sites when you search for a particular book or author.

CHOOSE YOUR ANCHOR AND BUILD AROUND IT

Once you've done some initial searching, the next step is to pick the anchor poem to build your program around. It will set the tone of the program and will most likely be the one with the biggest indicator of the theme. Your anchor will also be the longest of your poems and the one you are least likely to cut anything from. Your anchor poem should be the poem you pick first and the one that resonates with you the most.

You need at least one other poem to build a program—two more is best; three additional poems are difficult to cut because of the time constraints, but it can be done! These additional poems should be thematically linked to your

anchor. This could mean they address the same subject matter and are all trying to prove the same point/make you feel similar emotions, or they could revolve around the same theme but make opposing points. Regardless of the point of view, the goal of your program is for the works to flow together. Gauging flow can be difficult at this stage, but there are some clues that can help you determine if they will work together.

- **Style:** Think about the styles of writing. Is one choppy while another is really smooth? They may not flow together well.
- **Tone:** Is one angry while the other is overly joyful? Those two emotions may be too far apart from each other to work well.
- **Length:** Is one extremely short while the other is really long? You may not have enough of one and too much of the other to splice them together evenly, leaving you with an uneven piece and leftovers of one poem.
- **Contrast:** You have to find the poems that are symbiotic enough that they just flow from one to another, but you don't want them to be so similar that they all feel like the same poem.

ORGANIZE THE MATERIAL

These next few steps are optional but will keep things more organized.

1. Put each poem transcript into a different document so you can focus on one at a time.
2. Find a way to differentiate the poems from each other, like text color (*i.e., red for the first, blue for the second, and green for*

the last) or font style (*i.e., bold, italics, and underline*).

3. Once you're organized, start with one poem and read through it, out loud, and gauge where the poem naturally pauses or changes subject/tone. When you find these spots, add several line breaks between the section before and the section you just created. These are your starter **page turns**. Keep going until you've sectioned the entire poem. Repeat this process with the other poems until each poem is broken into different sections for page turns. Each section should be spaced well apart from the other sections.
4. Print each document and prepare to splice the program.

CUT AND SPLICE THE PIECE

Once you've printed the poems, you can start splicing them together. Start with the beginning of each poem. Which one has the strongest lead in and grabs your attention the most? That's a great first page. Which one has the strongest tie to the theme? Is it different from the one with the strongest lead in? If so, this is the section that leads into your intro. Now, try to fit a section in between them. Does it flow easily? These sections open the program and create what's called the **teaser**. If it doesn't flow well, rather than using sections of all your poems in the teaser, consider using just one or two to draw in your audience and lead into your intro. Next, start thinking about whether you want to go in a pattern where you repeat the poems in the same order no matter what, or if the natural flow requires them to shuffle around a little. This decision depends on the flow and perspective of the poems you've chosen.



Try to avoid putting two sections of the same poem back to back because it can disrupt the flow and confuse the tone. Other than that, the order is entirely your choice. Splicing can seem daunting, and there is no formula for how to do it. You have to read your poems and make a decision about what you believe sounds the best. If you don't know, invite someone else to read what you've spliced and ask if they would reorder anything. Remember, you don't have to keep the poems in order. As long as the author's intent never changes, the pieces of each poem can be moved around however you'd like.

RETYPE THE MATERIAL

Once you're happy with the order, retype the poems into one document. Don't copy/paste—type out each word. This will help you with memorization! Don't forget to color code the poems or use different font styles to differentiate between them.

TIME AND CUT

When each section is in the new document, read it out loud with as much inflection as you can on your first run through and time yourself doing so. The more inflection you have, the more accurate your time will be. Also, when you read things in your head, you're often much faster than when you say them out loud. If it's over seven minutes and 30 seconds (*which it will be*), start to trim the program down. Start by cutting out entire sections you don't need, but keep in mind by doing this you may have to reorder the poems a little. You can keep a document with all the things you cut in case you decide to swap them back in later.

TIME AND CUT AGAIN

After the initial cut, time it out loud again. Your goal is to be at about six minutes and 10 seconds to give yourself enough time for an introduction and any extra inflection that might get added after you've become familiar with it. If it is still too long, start cutting individual lines. Your goal here is to cut things out that may embellish the poem but are not necessary when it comes to building the meaning of the poem. This could be one line or three lines back to back. Time again. At this point if you're over time, you're cutting lines but also individual words and phrases. As you cut, remember you can add 150 words for transition, clarity, and continuity purposes, so you can replace some phrases with individual words as long as you stay within the rules outlined in the *Unified Manual* and maintain the author's intent.

WRITE THE INTRO

Write the introduction after you've spent some time with the piece. You want to connect with your audience during this time by explaining

why this piece is important or they should pay attention to you. Introduce the poems without giving away too much information about the poems themselves. Don't forget to include the names of the poems and the authors who wrote them. You also want to give your program a title since you can't call it the name of just one of the poems. Your program title should tell your audience something about your program but not necessarily be just the theme.

Here's an example from [Katie Eckerman](#), 2019 Middle School Poetry champion:

“According to a 2015 study conducted by the anti-harassment group Hollaback! and Cornell University, a majority of women are first catcalled between the ages of 11 through 17, many of which before they even begin puberty. This is because some men think the girls are too young to understand the innuendos or possess the linguistic means to fight them. To men, easy targets. But as Sophie Priceman so eloquently explains by using poetry, a linguistic tool all of its own, women can understand and verbalize the impacts of the sexualization and fight back against the men whose words attempt to sexualize them. So, by using the poetry For Teenage Girls by Clementine von Radics, Girl Code by Blythe Baird, How Teenage Girls are Like Poetry by Sophie Priceman, and Piñata by Pages Matam—a program: because we are tired of being scared on the streets.”

In this common format, the introduction begins with historical background, introduces the works by name and author, and finally offers a personal connection and the theme statement of the piece.



Print and Insert

Once you have your piece under time, print it and put it in your black book. When you print, each section should be on its own page. The page margins should be Left 1”, Right 3.0”, Top 1”, and Bottom 3.75” to make sure it fits in the book on the pages. Remember, each page section should be its own page with a page turn in between. Do not stick multiple sections on one page.

Now you have your piece! The next step is to practice and plan your delivery.

ANNOTATED PIECE

Explore cutting a piece from start to finish in the annotated guide on the following pages. The Poetry and cutting are included for educational purposes only and cannot be used for performance.

Hammerlock (Imagination Series): 9781880834459: Seibles, Tim: Books

ORIGINAL POEMS

Commercial Break: Road-Runner, Uneasy

If I didn't know better I'd say
the sun never moved ever,
that somebody just pasted it there
and left it,
but that's impossible.
After awhile you have to give up those conspiracy theories.
I get the big picture.
I mean, how big can the picture be?
I actually think it's kind of funny —
that coyote always scheming,
always licking his skinny chops
and me, well I am pure speed, I don't mean to toot my own horn but
Meep, meep
and I am the object of all his hunger,
the *everything* he needs —
talk about impossible,
talk about *the grass is always greener...*
I am the other side of the fence.
You've got to wonder, at least a little,
if this could be a set-up:
with all the running I do —
the desert, the canyons, the hillsides, the desert —
all this open road has got to lead somewhere else.
I mean, that's what freedom's all about, right?
Ending up where you want to be.
I used to think it was funny —
Roadrunner
the coyote's after you

The first thing I did was read as much poetry as possible. That's where I found this book by Tim Seibles. In it are the two poems below.

In this case, instead of picking a theme first, I did a search for material. I didn't have any ideas so I needed inspiration and I found this poem about the Road-Runner. I liked its message so I decided I wanted to use it somehow. But I still don't have a theme or any other poems.

Since I know I'm using this poem I'm going to go ahead and assign it the color yellow.

Roadrunner...

Now I'm mainly tired.

Not that you'd ever know.

I mean I can still make the horizon in two shakes of a snake's tongue,

but it never gets easier out here,

alone with Mr. Big Teeth and his ACME supplies:

leg muscle vitamins, tiger traps, instant tornado seeds.

C'mon! I'm no tiger.

And who's making all this stuff?

I can't help being a little uneasy.

I do one of my tricks,

a rock-scorching, razor turn at 600 miles an hour,

and he falls off the cliff,

the coyote —

he really falls:

I see the small explosion,

his body slamming into dry dirt

so far down in the canyon the river looks like a crayon doodle.

That has to hurt, right?

Five seconds later, he's just up the highway

hoisting a huge anvil

above a little, yellow dish of bird feed —

like I don't see what's goin' on. C'mon!

You know how sometimes, even though you're

very serious about the things you do,

it seems like, secretly, there's a

big joke being played,

and you're part of what

someone else is laughing at —

only you can't prove it,

so you keep sweating and believing in your *career*,

as if that makes the difference,

as if somehow playing along isn't really playing along
as long as you're not sure what sort of fool you're being turned into,
especially if you're giving it *one-hundred percent*.
So, when I see dynamite tucked under the ACME road-runner cupcakes,
as long as I don't wonder why my safety isn't coming first in this situation,
as long as I don't think me and the coyote are actually working for the same people,
as long as I eat and get away
I'm not really stupid, right?
I'm just fast.

MIDNIGHT, THE COYOTE, DOWN IN THE MOUTH

I used to sleep so well
my mother could carry me
by the neck scruff
without waking me up.
Even the dark tasted good
with the quiet noise of family around me-
and sunrise simply meant
I could catch grasshoppers drunk on dew.
Of course,
I didn't know the road-runner then,
and whatever I wanted seemed
nearby and easy.
Now I close my eyes and he's there
in slow-motion technicolor,
all a'trot, his heart like a little tom-tom,
loud enough to be visible inside that boney chest.
Come morning it'll be the same,
but hotter-
a buzz of shins,
the road sizzling like a fuse.
Meep. Meep.

After reading more of the book I find this poem which is the companion to the other. This has the same theme but offers a completely different perspective. I know now that I definitely want to use these two poems. Because these two poems are a little long and they're companion pieces I don't want to pull in a third poem so I'm going to stop at two.

Now that I have my second poem I will assign it a color (blue) so that I can keep them organized.

I used to believe what I did
mattered in some spectacular way,
as if a big audience sat somewhere
really watching,
really wondering
how well I would do out here.
At first,
I thought it was only a matter of time.
I'd put on a bib,
pick up some silverware,
duck behind a cactus-
just to ham it up a little.
He was mine:
I figured a few near-misses
for sus- pense then
chomp!
The good life.
Of course.
I've been after the road-runner for so long-
I can't tell if it's hunger, love,
or just plain stupidity.
Maybe that's what's so funny:
my life whittled down to a riot of
wild pursuits and
slim chances
to grab something I don't even understand.
I mean, if I had his speed
I'd get out of here.
I'd be so gone even color couldn't catch me.
It's crazy I've died lots of times.
Lots. Blown-up.
Bowled over by boulders.

Run over by trucks.
Some days,
when I'm a 1000 feet below the ledge and
1000 more from impact,
I stop
and look up
at that pebble-headed feather-duster and
touch my chin.
Who keeps bringing me back?
How can I keep hitting the ground
and keep getting up with nothing
but another scheme?
It's got to end somewhere,
doesn't it? There's got to be some way to
I don't even wanna be a coyote anymore,
canniverist-sharpist-toothist.
It's not me-
it's like my appetite doesn't belong
in my belly,
like I'm hungry because
someone else wants to eat,
like I'm stuck in this story and
no matter how bad I want to get out-
and me trying to get out of the story IS the story.
Nevermind.
Of course,
I think my life means something.
And, of course,
it does.
Otherwise, I'd be running around
all the time and there'd be no-
it would seem like my life had been,

I mean, who hasn't wondered, right?
 But if this is not my life,
 then what am I doing?
 And who should I ask?
 Honestly,
 if you can just stand still for a minute
 you start to see the whole show.
 I mean- it's all perspective;
 if you can step out of the action
 long enough to catch your breath
 you become your own audience.
 And, of course,
 there you are,
 a scrawny animal
 starving in the middle of a desert,
 squeezing your knife and fork.

SECTIONING

Commercial Break: Road-Runner, Uneasy

If I didn't know better I'd say
 the sun never moved ever,
 that somebody just pasted it there
 and left it,
 but that's impossible.
 After awhile you have to give up those conspiracy theories.
 I get the big picture.
 I mean, how big can the picture be?

I actually think it's kind of funny —
 that coyote always scheming,
 always licking his skinny chops
 and me, well I am pure speed, I don't mean to toot my own horn but

Now that I have my two poems I'm going to start doing page turns and sectioning the poems. I'm going to start with the Road-Runner's perspective. I'm going to read through it once and then the second time I'm going to start sectioning.

This is my first section. Notice how I sectioned where there was a question? This is because the question is either going to be answered later and I want that in a different section so the audience is drawn in by the desire to know the answer. Or the question is rhetorical and the focus is about the shift.

This is my next section. This section ended by introducing our characters but not enough. So our audience's curiosity will be piqued.

Meep, meep

and I am the the object of all his hunger,
the *everything* he needs —
talk about impossible,
talk about the *grass is always greener...*
I am the other side of the fence.

I am going to cut the 'AND' out because it messes with the flow of the piece. Remember, you can cut words, but you have limitations on what you can add in.

This is my third section. This section now introduces the main character. We are starting to get a glimpse of who our poem is about even if we don't know what it's about yet.

You've got to wonder, at least a little,
if this could be a set-up:
with all the running I do —
the desert, the canyons, the hillsides, the desert —
all this open road has got to lead somewhere else.
I mean, that's what freedom's all about, right?
Ending up where you want to be.

At this point I know what the theme is and this section solidifies it. One thing to remember is theme is subjective. The theme I see or take away from this is the question "what's the point in doing the same thing every single day of your life?" or another way to read is "is there a purpose in life?"

This is the theme I see due to my personal experiences, you may see something different or word the theme differently and that's OK! You don't have to explicitly state your theme just be able to recognize one.

I used to think it was funny —

Roadrunner

the coyote's after you

Roadrunner...

Now I'm mainly tired.

Not that you'd ever know.

I mean I can still make the horizon in two shakes of a snake's tongue,

but it never gets easier out here,

alone with Mr. Big Teeth and his ACME supplies:

leg muscle vitamins, tiger traps, instant tornado seeds.

C'mon! I'm no tiger.

And who's making all this stuff?

This is my fourth section. This section starts to explore the theme. We start toe see the questioning of the meaning of life or do our lives have purpose. This question is where we find our theme and is what this poem revolves around.

This is my next section. This section starts to introduce why we have this problem or these questions. I'm separating it here because the last line is a question and the focus changes after it.

I can't help being a little uneasy.

I do one of my tricks,

a rock-scorching, razor turn at 600 miles an hour,

and he falls off the cliff,
the coyote —
he really falls:
I see the small explosion,
his body slamming into dry dirt
so far down in the canyon the river looks like a crayon doodle.
That has to hurt, right?
Five seconds later, he's just up the highway
hoisting a huge anvil
above a little, yellow dish of bird feed —
like I don't see what's goin' on. C'mon!

This is another section. In this section we start to shift from the focus on the Road-Runner to focus on the coyote. I break the section here because the next line is another shift in focus.

You know how sometimes, even though you're
very serious about the things you do,
it seems like, secretly, there's a
big joke being played,
and you're part of what
someone else is laughing at —
only you can't prove it,

This is the next section because we're being asked more questions that relate to our theme about the purpose of life. I did the break in sections here because the next section will address those questions even if we don't necessarily get answers.

so you keep sweating and believing in your career,
as if that makes the difference,
as if somehow playing along isn't really playing along
as long as you're not sure what sort of fool you're being turned into,
especially if you're giving it *one-hundred percent*.
So, when I see dynamite tucked under the ACME road-runner cupcakes,
as long as I don't wonder why my safety isn't coming first in this situation,
as long as I don't think me and the coyote are actually working for the same people,
as long as I eat and get away
I'm not really stupid, right?
I'm just fast.

This is my final section for this poem, because it addresses all the questions faced throughout the poem and wraps the theme up in a way where we're left thinking about what is the purpose of what we're doing.

MIDNIGHT, THE COYOTE, DOWN IN THE MOUTH

I used to sleep so well
my mother could carry me
by the neck scruff
without waking me up.
Even the dark tasted good
with the quiet noise of family around me-
and sunrise simply meant
I could catch grasshoppers drunk on dew.
Of course,
I didn't know the road-runner then,
and whatever I wanted seemed
nearby and easy.

This is my first section. It ends by introducing what might be the topic of our poem.

Now I close my eyes and he's there
in slow-motion technicolor,
all a'trot, his heart like a little tom-tom,
loud enough to be visible inside that boney chest.
Come morning it'll be the same,
but hotter-
a buzz of shins,
the road sizzling like a fuse.
Meep. Meep.

This is my second section because it introduces subject more, but not our speaker. I broke the section here because the next line shifts the focus.

I used to believe what I did
mattered in some spectacular way,
as if a big audience sat somewhere
really watching,
really wondering
how well I would do out here.

This is where I start to see the theme emerge. That same question of "what's the purpose of life" appears, but the theme is solidified in a later section.

At first,
I thought it was only a matter of time.

I'd put on a bib,
pick up some silverware,
duck behind a cactus-
just to ham it up a little.
He was mine:
I figured a few near-misses
for sus- pense then
chomp!
The good life.

This is my third section. It starts to introduce the speaker. I broke the section here because the next line starts to introduce the issues our speaker is having.

Of course.
I've been after the road-runner for so long-
I can't tell if it's hunger, love,
or just plain stupidity.
Maybe that's what's so funny:
my life whittled down to a riot of
wild pursuits and
slim chances
to grab something I don't even understand.
I mean, if I had his speed
I'd get out of here.
I'd be so gone even color couldn't catch me.

This is my next section. It explores the existential crisis the coyote is grappling with. I chose this place to break because the next section shifts focus a little.

It's crazy I've died lots of times.
Lots. Blown-up.
Bowled over by boulders.
Run over by trucks.
Some days,
when I'm a 1000 feet below the ledge and
1000 more from impact,
I stop
and look up

This is my fifth section. In this section we start to see the theme appear. We see the similar issue of what is the purpose of what I'm doing every single day. I chose this as my page break because there is a rhetorical question that I want my audience to think about before we move on with the poem.

at that pebble-headed feather-duster and
touch my chin.
Who keeps bringing me back?
How can I keep hitting the ground
and keep getting up with nothing
but another scheme?
It's got to end somewhere, doesn't it?

There's got to be some way to
I don't even wanna be a coyote anymore,
canniverist-sharpist-toothist.
It's not me-
it's like my appetite doesn't belong
in my belly,
like I'm hungry because
someone else wants to eat,
like I'm stuck in this story and
no matter how bad I want to get out-
and me trying to get out of the story IS the story.
Nevermind.

Of course,
I think my life means something.
And, of course,
it does.
Otherwise, I'd be running around
all the time and there'd be no-
it would seem like my life had been,
I mean, who hasn't wondered, right?
But if this is not my life,
then what am I doing?
And who should I ask?

This is my next section. This section really drives home the crisis the Coyote has been having and sets up the next section. I chose the section break here because the Coyote literally tries to dismiss the idea and move on.

This is where the theme is solidified. Every section in between adds to the theme and makes you think about that question of "what is the purpose of life" but this section makes you realize that the Coyote also doesn't know what their purpose is and doesn't know how to cope with it. It is also the section that makes the audience wonder about themselves.

This is my next section. It is the section that drives home the theme. It establishes all the questions the Coyote has been asking himself and the crisis he has been having. I chose the page break here because these are the last of the questions. The next section will wrap everything up.

Honestly,
if you can just stand still for a minute
you start to see the whole show.
I mean- it's all perspective;
if you can step out of the action
long enough to catch your breath
you become your own audience.
And, of course,
there you are,
a scrawny animal
starving in the middle of a desert,
squeezing your knife and fork.

This is my last section. This section doesn't necessarily answer the questions. But it does address the theme by leaving you thinking and asking yourself what is the purpose of what you do every single day.

SPLICING

If I didn't know better I'd say
the sun never moved ever,
that somebody just pasted it there
and left it,
but that's impossible.
After a while you have to give up those conspiracy theories.
I get the big picture.
I mean, how big can the picture be?

Typically I would print the poems out and do this part physically. Instead what I've done is copied/pasted sections from the sectioned poems.

I chose this as my first page because it has the best lead in. It hooks your audience because it doesn't give any indication of what the piece is about.

I used to sleep so well
my mother could carry me
by the neck scruff
without waking me up.
Even the dark tasted good
with the quiet noise of family around me-
and sunrise simply meant
I could catch grasshoppers drunk on dew.
Of course,

This is my second page because it introduces who the program is about. It hooks the audience by introducing our characters and giving a glimpse of the program topic.

I didn't know the road-runner then,
and whatever I wanted seemed
nearby and easy

I actually think it's kind of funny —
that coyote always scheming,
always licking his skinny chops
and me, well I am pure speed, I don't mean to toot my own horn but
Meep, meep

From here on I'm choosing
to alternate between the
two perspectives.

Now I close my eyes and he's there
in slow-motion technicolor,
all a'trot, his heart like a little tom-tom,
loud enough to be visible inside that boney chest.
Come morning it'll be the same,
but hotter-
a buzz of shins,
the road sizzling like a fuse.
Meep. Meep.

and I am the the object of all his hunger,
the *everything* he needs —
talk about impossible,
talk about *the grass is always greener...*
I am the other side of the fence.

I used to believe what I did
mattered in some spectacular way,
as if a big audience sat somewhere
really watching,
really wondering
how well I would do out here.

At first,
I thought it was only a matter of time.
I'd put on a bib,
pick up some silverware,
duck behind a cactus-
just to ham it up a little.
He was mine:
I figured a few near-misses
for sus- pense then
chomp!
The good life.

You've got to wonder, at least a little,
if this could be a set-up:
with all the running I do —
the desert, the canyons, the hillsides, the desert —
all this open road has got to lead somewhere else.
I mean, that's what freedom's all about, right?
Ending up where you want to be.

Of course.
I've been after the road-runner for so long-
I can't tell if it's hunger, love,
or just plain stupidity.
Maybe that's what's so funny:
my life whittled down to a riot of
wild pursuits and
slim chances
to grab something I don't even understand.
I mean, if I had his speed
I'd get out of here.
I'd be so gone even color couldn't catch me.

I used to think it was funny —

Roadrunner

the coyote's after you

Now I'm mainly tired.

Not that you'd ever know.

I mean I can still make the horizon in two shakes of a snake's tongue,

but it never gets easier out here,

alone with Mr. Big Teeth and his ACME supplies:

leg muscle vitamins, tiger traps, instant tornado seeds.

C'mon! I'm no tiger.

And who's making all this stuff?

It's crazy I've died lots of times.

Lots. Blown-up.

Bowled over by boulders.

Run over by trucks.

Some days,

when I'm a 1000 feet below the ledge and

1000 more from impact,

I stop

and look up

at that pebble-headed feather-duster and

touch my chin.

Who keeps bringing me back?

How can I keep hitting the ground

and keep getting up with nothing

but another scheme?

It's got to end somewhere, doesn't it?

I can't help being a little uneasy.

I do one of my tricks,

a rock-scorching, razor turn at 600 miles an hour,
and he falls off the cliff,
the coyote —
he really falls:
I see the small explosion,
his body slamming into dry dirt
so far down in the canyon the river looks like a crayon doodle.
That has to hurt, right?
Five seconds later, he's just up the highway
hoisting a huge anvil
above a little, yellow dish of bird feed —
like I don't see what's goin' on. C'mon!

There's got to be some way to
I don't even wanna be a coyote anymore,
canniverist-sharpist-toothist.
It's not me-
it's like my appetite doesn't belong
in my belly,
like I'm hungry because
someone else wants to eat,
like I'm stuck in this story and
no matter how bad I want to get out-
and me trying to get out of the story IS the story.
Nevermind.

You know how sometimes, even though you're
very serious about the things you do,
it seems like, secretly, there's a
big joke being played,
and you're part of what
someone else is laughing at —

only you can't prove it,

Of course,

I think my life means something.

And, of course,

it does.

Otherwise, I'd be running around

all the time and there'd be no-

it would seem like my life had been,

I mean, who hasn't wondered, right?

But if this is not my life,

then what am I doing?

And who should I ask?

so you keep sweating and believing in your *career*,

as if that makes the difference,

as if somehow playing along isn't really playing along

as long as you're not sure what sort of fool you're being turned into,

especially if you're giving it *one-hundred percent*.

So, when I see dynamite tucked under the ACME road-runner cupcakes,

as long as I don't wonder why my safety isn't coming first in this situation,

as long as I don't think me and the coyote are actually working for the same people,

as long as I eat and get away

I'm not really stupid, right?

I'm just fast.

Honestly,

if you can just stand still for a minute

you start to see the whole show.

I mean- it's all perspective;

if you can step out of the action

long enough to catch your breath

you become your own audience.

And, of course,

there you are,

a scrawny animal

starving in the middle of a desert,

squeezing your knife and fork.

CUTTING TO TIME

If I didn't know better I'd say

the sun never moved ever,

that somebody just pasted it there

and left it,

but that's impossible.

After a while you have to give up those conspiracy theories.

I get the big picture.

I mean, how big can the picture be?

I used to sleep so well

my mother could carry me

by the neck scruff

without waking me up.

Even the dark tasted good

with the quiet noise of family around me-

and sunrise simply meant

I could catch grasshoppers drunk on dew.

Of course,

I didn't know the road-runner then,

and whatever I wanted seemed

nearby and easy

I actually think it's kind of funny —

that coyote always scheming,

I now have my spliced program, so I read it out loud with my different voices and inflections and time it to determine how long it is. I notice that this piece is about eight minutes long so I need to cut about a minute and a half out to be in time and be able to write an intro. So I am going to go through once and cut out sections that I do not need.

After reading through the whole program I realize there are no sections I can just get rid of, so I will have to go line by line and cut out what I can live without.

I got rid of this line because it's just extra after the not knowing the Road-Runner part.

always licking his skinny chops

and me, well I am pure speed, I don't mean to toot my own horn but

Meep, meep

Now I close my eyes and he's there

in slow-motion technicolor,

~~all a'trot, his heart like a little tom-tom,~~

~~loud enough to be visible inside that boney chest.~~

Come morning it'll be the same,

but hotter-

a buzz of shins,

the road sizzling like a fuse.

Meep. Meep.

I'm cutting this line because it's not necessary to the poem. The lines around it are essential for the story trying to be told but that line is just embellishment and I need the time.

and I am the the object of all his hunger,

the *everything* he needs —

talk about impossible,

talk about the *grass is always greener...*

I am the other side of the fence.

I used to believe what I did

mattered in some spectacular way,

as if a big audience sat somewhere

really watching,

really wondering

how well I would do out here.

At first,

I thought it was only a matter of time.

~~I'd put on a bib,~~

~~pick up some silverware,~~

~~duck behind a cactus—~~

~~just to ham it up a little.~~

I'm getting rid of these lines because while they add to the visualization of the Poetry they are not essential for theme or story building.

He was mine:
I figured a few near-misses
for sus- pense then
chomp!
The good life.

You've got to wonder, at least a little,
if this could be a set-up:
with all the running I do —
the desert, the canyons, the hillsides, the desert —
all this open road has got to lead somewhere else.
I mean, that's what freedom's all about, right?
Ending up where you want to be.

Of course.
I've been after the road-runner for so long-
I can't tell if it's hunger, love,
or just plain stupidity.
Maybe that's what's so funny:
my life whittled down to a riot of
wild pursuits and
slim chances
to grab something I don't even understand.
I mean, if I had his speed
I'd get out of here.
I'd be so gone even color couldn't catch me.

I used to think it was funny —
Roadrunner
the coyote's after you
Roadrunner...
Now I'm mainly tired.

Not that you'd ever know.

I mean I can still make the horizon in two shakes of a snake's tongue,

but it never gets easier out here,

alone with Mr. Big Teeth and his ACME supplies:

leg muscle vitamins, tiger traps, instant tornado seeds.

C'mon! I'm no tiger.

And who's making all this stuff?

It's crazy I've died lots of times.

Lots.

Blown-up.

Bowled over by boulders.

Run over by trucks.

Some days,

when I'm a 1000 feet below the ledge and

1000 more from impact,

I stop

and look up

at that pebble-headed feather-duster and

touch my chin.

Who keeps bringing me back?

How can I keep hitting the ground

and keep getting up with nothing

but another scheme?

It's got to end somewhere, doesn't it?

I can't help being a little uneasy.

I do one of my tricks,

a rock-scorching, razor turn at 600 miles an hour,

and he falls off the cliff,

the coyote —

he really falls:

I see the small explosion,
~~his body slamming into dry dirt~~
~~so far down in the canyon the river looks like a crayon doodle.~~
~~That has to hurt, right?~~

These build visuals, but can be cut without losing the message.

Five seconds later, he's just up the highway
hoisting a huge anvil
above a little, yellow dish of bird feed —
like I don't see what's goin' on. C'mon!

~~There's got to be some way to~~
I don't even wanna be a coyote anymore,
canniverist-sharpist-toothist.
It's not me-
it's like my appetite doesn't belong
in my belly,
like I'm hungry because
someone else wants to eat,
like I'm stuck in this story and
no matter how bad I want to get out-
and me trying to get out of the story IS the story.
Nevermind.

I'm cutting this line because it's just inner monologue and not necessary.

You know how sometimes, even though you're
very serious about the things you do,
it seems like, secretly, there's a
big joke being played,
and you're part of what
someone else is laughing at —
only you can't prove it,

Of course,
I think my life means something.

And, of course,
it does.
Otherwise, I'd be running around
all the time and there'd be no-
it would seem like my life had been,
I mean, who hasn't wondered, right?
But if this is not my life,
then what am I doing?
And who should I ask?

so you keep sweating and believing in your *career*,
as if that makes the difference,
as if somehow playing along isn't really playing along
as long as you're not sure what sort of fool you're being turned into,
especially if you're giving it *one-hundred percent*.
So, when I see dynamite tucked under the ACME road-runner cupcakes,
as long as I don't wonder why my safety isn't coming first in this situation,
as long as I don't think me and the coyote are actually working for the same people,
as long as I eat and get away
I'm not really stupid, right?
I'm just fast.

Honestly,
if you can just stand still for a minute
you start to see the whole show.
I mean- it's all perspective;
if you can step out of the action
long enough to catch your breath
you become your own audience.
And, of course,
there you are,
a scrawny animal

starving in the middle of a desert,
squeezing your knife and fork.

I've been through the whole piece and cut out lines that are unnecessary. So now I have to time again. This time the time came out at about six minutes. So it's perfect.

Now that it is within time, this is the final cutting of the program. All that's left to do with the actual cutting is write the intro and decide if there's anything that lends itself to technical book work.

FINAL CUTTING

If I didn't know better I'd say
the sun never moved ever,
that somebody just pasted it there
and left it,
but that's impossible.

As you know from the larger resource, book work should come naturally and flow with the piece. But you can go through and see if there are lines that lend themselves to book work. I will make those annotations in this section Final Cutting, but by no means are these the only ones, the best ones, or the most natural ones for you. On top of that, these notes are not the most detailed blocking notes. They're just quick brainstorms and you may not be able to visualize all of them if they don't fit your style.

After a while you have to give up those conspiracy theories.
I get the big picture.
I mean, how big can the picture be?

BOOK WORK: lift book up to sky as if it was the sun. Might hold by the rings with one hand so that it's open. Bring down on the word impossible.

I used to sleep so well
my mother could carry me
by the neck scruff
without waking me up.
Even the dark tasted good
with the quiet noise of family around me-
and sunrise simply meant
I could catch grasshoppers drunk on dew.
Of course,
I didn't know the road-runner then,

BOOK WORK: I might hold up the book to my side and look at it and then move it back farther so I create the illusion it's getting bigger. Or if it flows enough I might tuck the book under my arm and make a fake camera with my fingers and then pull them apart to show it getting bigger.

This is where I want to put my intro because I've had a chance to introduce both my poems but not given away too much of the subject material.

BOOK WORK: At this point when I go into my Intro I will close my book by bringing front cover sitting on my thumb to meet the back cover sitting

on my fingers. Place my index finger in the top corner between the page I just turned and the page I'll start after my intro. Hold my book flat facing my chest about 4-5 inches from it. I can hold the book straight up and down or turned at an angle.

I'll say my intro from memory.

When I've finished my intro I'll straighten my book if I have it angled. Flatten it so it's parallel with the floor and then use my index finger to open the book but running it down the inside of the page and opening the book from the bottom corner with my thumb and index finger in a pinch like hold.

Growing up my Saturday mornings were filled with cartoons like Spongebob and Rugrats, both of which had questionable storylines as far as believability is concerned. They were cartoons afterall. But when confronted with the storylines of The Roadrunner and The Coyote you really have to stop and wonder, what's the point? In these two companion poems we are faced with answering some of life's oldest questions and in this case the answer isn't a simple 42. Our characters, nor myself for that matter, are certain there is an answer at all.

In *Commercial Break: Road-Runner, Uneasy* and *MIDNIGHT, THE COYOTE, DOWN IN THE MOUTH* by Tim Seibles we are forced to face a question that causes universal fear: Does anything we do actually matter? *What's the point as wondered by the Road-Runner and the Coyote* a Program.

This is my lead in for the Intro because it gives me a connection between myself and the content.

This section of the Intro is the part that introduces the content of our poems.

I included this line because I needed some humor in my Intro.

This line tells the audience, even if they don't know it yet, that all the questions will not be answered. Instead it will cause them to think and leave them thinking even after it's over.

This is where I introduce the names of the poems and the author.

This is the part of the Intro that addresses the theme of the poem.

Here I named the program because I can't use just one of the poem's names because there's more than one poem.

I actually think it's kind of funny —
that coyote always scheming,
always licking his skinny chops
and me, well I am pure speed, I don't mean to toot my own horn but
Meep, meep

BOOK WORK: I might close my book here and act like it's a horn that I'm beeping.

Now I close my eyes and he's there
in slow-motion technicolor,
Come morning it'll be the same,
but hotter-
a buzz of shins,
the road sizzling like a fuse.
Meep. Meep.

and I am the the object of all his hunger,
the *everything* he needs —
talk about impossible,
talk about the *grass is always greener...*
I am the other side of the fence.

BOOK WORK: I might hold my book up straight up and down and sideways so that the audience are looking down both sides of the binder. Then I might move the book so I'm to one side of it.

I used to believe what I did
mattered in some spectacular way,
as if a big audience sat somewhere
really watching,
really wondering
how well I would do out here.
At first,
I thought it was only a matter of time.
He was mine:
I figured a few near-misses
for sus- pense then
chomp!
The good life.

BOOK WORK: I might snap my book closed here for sound effect.

You've got to wonder, at least a little,
if this could be a set-up:
with all the running I do —
the desert, the canyons, the hillsides, the desert —
all this open road has got to lead somewhere else.
I mean, that's what freedom's all about, right?
Ending up where you want to be.

BOOK WORK: I might put these all on their own pages and make each one a fast page turn with a flick of my wrist.

Of course.
.....
I've been after the road-runner for so long-
.....
I can't tell if it's hunger, love,
.....
or just plain stupidity.
.....
Maybe that's what's so funny:
.....
my life whittled down to a riot of
.....
wild pursuits and
.....
slim chances
.....
to grab something I don't even understand.
.....
I mean, if I had his speed
.....
I'd get out of here.
.....
I'd be so gone even color couldn't catch me.
.....

I used to think it was funny —
Roadrunner
the coyote's after you
Roadrunner...
Now I'm mainly tired.
Not that you'd ever know.
I mean I can still make the horizon in two shakes of a snake's tongue,
but it never gets easier out here,
alone with Mr. Big Teeth and his ACME supplies:
leg muscle vitamins, tiger traps, instant tornado seeds.

C'mon! I'm no tiger.

And who's making all this stuff?

It's crazy I've died lots of times.

Lots.

Blown-up.

Bowled over by boulders.

Run over by trucks.

Some days,

when I'm a 1000 feet below the ledge and

1000 more from impact,

I stop

and look up

at that pebble-headed feather-duster and

touch my chin.

Who keeps bringing me back?

How can I keep hitting the ground

and keep getting up with nothing

but another scheme?

It's got to end somewhere, doesn't it?

BOOK WORK: I might flatten my book and peek over it as if I'm looking over a cliff.

BOOK WORK: I **might** drop my book flat on the ground. Then pick it up inspect it and then run my thumb over the pages when I say "nothing but another scheme."

**Note: dropping anything on the ground is a huge risk and is very hard to master. This would not be my first choice in blocking if I've never done any blocking before.*

I can't help being a little uneasy.

I do one of my tricks,

a rock-scorching, razor turn at 600 miles an hour,

and he falls off the cliff,

the coyote —

he really falls:

I see the small explosion,

Five seconds later, he's just up the highway

hoisting a huge anvil

above a little, yellow dish of bird feed —

like I don't see what's goin' on. C'mon!

BOOK WORK: I might lift my book as if it was the anvil.

I don't even wanna be a coyote anymore,
canniverist-sharpist-toothist.
It's not me-
it's like my appetite doesn't belong
in my belly,
like I'm hungry because
someone else wants to eat,
like I'm stuck in this story and
no matter how bad I want to get out-
and me trying to get out of the story IS the story.
Nevermind

You know how sometimes, even though you're
very serious about the things you do,
it seems like, secretly, there's a
big joke being played,
and you're part of what
someone else is laughing at —
only you can't prove it,

Of course,
I think my life means something.
And, of course,
it does.
Otherwise, I'd be running around
all the time and there'd be no-
it would seem like my life had been,
I mean, who hasn't wondered, right?
But if this is not my life,
then what am I doing?
And who should I ask?

BOOK WORK: I might go to
turn the page here and then
hesitate and put the page
back, say the next line, go
to turn the page again, and
put it back and then move
on to the "I mean" line.

so you keep sweating and believing in your *career*,
as if that makes the difference,
as if somehow playing along isn't really playing along
as long as you're not sure what sort of fool you're being turned into,
especially if you're giving it *one-hundred percent*.

So, when I see dynamite tucked under the ACME road-runner cupcakes,
as long as I don't wonder why my safety isn't coming first in this situation,
as long as I don't think me and the coyote are actually working for the same people,
as long as I eat and get away
I'm not really stupid, right?
I'm just fast.

BOOK WORK: I might hold my book like it's a tray that's holding cupcakes. I might pick up one of the cupcakes when I say "I see dynamite tucked under" and then put it back down when I say the wonder line. Then I might pick up another cupcake when I say, "as long as I eat and get away."

Honestly,
if you can just stand still for a minute
you start to see the whole show.
I mean- it's all perspective;
if you can step out of the action
long enough to catch your breath
you become your own audience.

And, of course,
there you are,
a scrawny animal
starving in the middle of a desert,
squeezing your knife and fork.

BOOK WORK: Here I might turn the book around, take a step back, and hold the book from the top with one hand with the pages facing the audience instead of me.

BOOK WORK: I might gesture to myself down my body, hold up my fist like I'm holding a knife or fork in one hand, and then close my book backward by grabbing the spine and slowly closing the two sides.

HELPFUL TERMINOLOGY

Tone: The mood of the poem. This is created through vocabulary, figurative language, rhyme, and the way the poet constructs the poem sentences (*syntax*). Think of tone as the lens through which the poet views the theme.

Voice: The perspective of the person behind the poem. Tone and voice often overlap. The voice is an important part of poetry because this is where the meaning comes through. Voice is the interpretation of the poem from the speaker, when you're reading it that speaker is the author. When you're performing, that speaker is both you and the author. Voice expresses how you see the poem and why it matters.

Pace: The speed at which a poet speaks. Pace should vary throughout the program (*and likely each poem*) and can go a long way in creating imagery. For example, if you're speaking about a boat rocking on the ocean, your words may rush and slow like waves bobbing the boat along. The pace of the poem is essential in creating tone and voice.

Cadence: The natural rise and fall of sound that contributes to the way you speak. In poetry, cadence is much more natural because the words are so carefully chosen that you can't help but say them a certain way. Returning to our ocean example, your volume may increase as waves pound against the shore and quiet as they ebb away. Cadence is heavily influenced by inflection and how the writer ends lines.

Demeanor: The way you behave. It encapsulates the way you deliver lines, but also the way you hold yourself and move your body, like your posture and facial expressions.

Theme: The lesson or message the poet is trying to convey. They may be subtle or explicit.

Blocking: The way you move and bring the piece, including the way you maneuver your black book.

Anchor Poem: The central poem that establishes the theme of the program. This poem's theme is often the inspiration for the theme of the program.

Splicing: The weaving together of sections of poems until they create one program rather than three different poems.

Intent: The author's reason for writing and what they want you to take away from the poem. That could be to persuade you that something is a problem, to make you smile, etc.

Teaser: Section of a program or performance that introduces the piece without giving away too much information before the introduction. The teaser is typically about 60 to 90 seconds long.



PLANNING YOUR DELIVERY

CREATE COHESION

Your Poetry performance should tell a story, at least thematically. That doesn't mean it should be narrative, though it can be, but the poem(s) should be told in a way that the audience understands the big picture. Overall, the program should flow as one cohesive body of work. In other words, while the judge should be able to differentiate the poems, it shouldn't feel like three poems thrown into a book together. This is accomplished through tone, pacing, cadence, demeanor, and blocking.

PRACTICE PACING AND INTONATION

Pacing and tone are skills that have to be practiced over and over again to make them natural. You should say your piece out loud over and over again to make sure it sounds right. What emotions are you trying to convey? At what speed should you speak? Should you be soft

and heartfelt or loud and furious? Should you be speeding through to express the franticness of the words, or should you be taking the words slowly and pausing in abundance? These things take time to master. You'll only know what feels right once you start practicing the program.

BLOCKING

Consider how you will act out situations that happen in the piece. In Storytelling, someone may hop like a bunny after saying a line about a bunny hopping down the street. In Humorous Interp, someone may switch (*pop*) between characters really fast or use wild hand gestures to play up their characters. In Dramatic Interp, someone might move about the stage room miming fiddling with objects anxiously to demonstrate their character's nervousness. In Poetry, however, you rarely have a description written out that tells you what a speaker is doing,

and there is generally less character work built in. Instead, you have implied movements and actions that you have to bring to life using your body and your book.

Blocking is essential to Poetry performances because it brings the actions that would normally be left to the imagination to the forefront of the audience's mind. They can actually visualize what the poet is talking about because you're acting it out, not just saying it. Like with any performance, you want to show, not just tell.

USE THE BOOK

Poetry requires you to use a manuscript in your performance. As a community, we call these binders a black book, even though there are no requirements about the color or size of the binder. You can buy a black binder and sleeve inserts made specifically for Interp events at the NSDA online store.

Blocking with the Binder

The black book allows for a more dynamic piece because you can manipulate it like an object to add another level of dimension. Your book should be an extension of your body and can be used to emphasize the performance by highlighting key moments of movement that sometimes get lost in the words. This includes page turns and any book movement. Your book is a chance for you to get creative.

When it comes to moving the book, or rather moving **with** the book, there is no limitation to what you can do. Anything you would normally act out with your body or a prop you can replicate with a book. If you're taking shelter, huddle with the book over your head. If you're preparing to fire an arrow, use the book as the bow. The only thing that can get

in your way is your imagination. Your book is essentially anything you can turn it into to help enhance your performance. Consider not only movement, but sound. Closing the book at a dramatic moment can emphasize your words.

Holding the Binder

The most important thing is to hold the binder however is possible and comfortable for you. Here we break down the most common ways to work with a binder, but by no means are these movements required. Consider these tips suggestions as you find what works best for you!

Most performers hold the binder with one hand except for the beginning of the performance and the end. (*Exceptions are made for dramatic effect or as part of the blocking.*) Before you begin, the binder is held at an angle in front of you with the opening face at an angle down. One hand is placed on the corner of the top of the binder near the opening. Your index finger should be placed on the top of the opening while your thumb is in the back and the two to three middle fingers are on the front (*the third finger is optional and can be tucked or provide balance*). Your other hand should be at the most diagonal corner on the bottom with the pinky at the bottom of the opening, with the thumb in the back and the three middle fingers splayed on the front of the angle of the binder.

When you're holding the binder and not using it as a prop, it should be an extension of your body and held naturally in your hand. Holding the binder completely open creates an obstruction to the audience. Instead, try using your pinky to hold the bottom of the binder, your thumb to hold one side, and have your middle three fingers surround the spine to support and hold it.



The black book is typically held in your left hand and pages are turned with your right hand. This convention allows for your body to remain open because you're only using one hand to hold the book leaving the rest of your body open and your other hand free to gesture. This also helps when you turn your pages because you aren't reaching all the way across your body to grab a page and turn.

Opening the Binder

When opening the binder at the beginning of a performance, you'll first turn it straight up, then turn it flat. Your index finger slides down the middle to open the binder into holding position.

Watch Examples

- *Middle School Student – Miles Sabeeh (35:56)*
<https://bit.ly/3mItfUx>

Here are a few things Miles does with the book to enhance their performance and communicate emotion to the audience.

- Notice the way Miles holds their book before they even start. It's flat against their chest, then they flatten it, slide their finger down the inside cover, and open the book by taking the front cover out.
- Miles then holds their book in front of their body rather than in front and to the side. This creates the feeling that they are closed off. If their book was to the side just a little more, their body language would be more open and more inviting. Miles' grip of the book is very relaxed. The book is resting in their hand as if the book is a natural extension of their arm and hand. This allows Miles to flow naturally into their bookwork, like using the book as a towel or a disco ball over their head.
- When Miles goes into their intro, they hold their book back in that starting position again. Try that positioning out for yourself!
- Later, Miles uses the book as an object that holds some weight they're carrying, and then again as a weapon, and lastly as an instrument. These movements add emphasis to the piece.

- **High School Student – Joshua Timmons**

<https://bit.ly/3jLZJH5>

- Joshua’s book work starts in the same manner. They hold their book flat to their chest and angled, but rather than flattening the book, they bring it straight out and straighten it. Then they open it while it’s vertical.
- Joshua begins performing before they open their book, and the opening is a seamless turn of the cover while they’re speaking. Joshua closes their book and holds it at an angle again for their intro. This whole flow is smooth and seamless. This opening makes the book work feel more like an extension of the performer rather than an additional element of blocking that has been robotically mapped out.
- You’ll notice that Joshua also holds their book close to their body, but in Joshua’s case, it makes the times they open their body up even more powerful.
- Joshua uses their book first as a super soaker, then they close their book and hide behind it, and use their body movements to emphasize what they’re saying. All of this is considered book work because the book influences how these movements happen. Joshua then uses the book as a weapon several times. But mostly, Joshua uses the book as an extension of their body. When they raise their hands and when they cross their hands on the handcuff lines, the book is an extension of their hand. It isn’t closed, so they can use their hands; rather, it creates the illusion that the action is happening as normal.

What’s important to notice in both performances is the movements are fluid and natural. The book work all flows from one movement to another. The hand gestures and book work flow together, not against each other, to create the visual performance. The book work in both performances is limited but enhances the performances because it finds moments where the performance can be visualized and brings those moments to life. The fact that there aren’t many of them makes them more special because they stand out and your audience remembers them more. If you overload your performance with book work, it will become overwhelming and disorganized to the point your audience won’t be able to focus or decipher what’s happening.

MEMORIZE

While you are required to use a manuscript, your performance can be enhanced tenfold if you deliver the material rather than just reading it. Poetry is about feeling, and the more you’re reading, the less emotion and connection with the audience you’re able to incorporate into the performance. Rather than trying to memorize the whole piece in one go, break it down into small chunks.

MAINTAIN EYE CONTACT

One of the most important things about performing your Poetry is to maintain eye contact with the audience, whether they are in person or through a camera. When you break eye contact, you also break the emotional connection. Hold eye contact for an entire thought, and then you can move on. You don’t have to lock eyes with someone and stare at them; the goal is to be as natural as possible. Avoid scanning the room trying to make eye



contact with everyone. Make meaningful eye contact by selecting a few people and hold those moments with them to really convey the emotion and meaning.

PROJECT

When you're performing Poetry, words sometimes get drowned out in a room. The tone and emotion can affect volume and, as a result, it is incredibly important to project your voice. This does not mean you have to be loud or yell. It means you speak from your diaphragm and make every word hold weight in your voice. When you speak from your diaphragm, you should feel your stomach expand, and your abdominal muscles should support every breath you take. Make sure you're standing up straight unless blocking dictates otherwise. Concentrate on breathing. Every breath should come from your stomach, and it should contract and expand as you breathe and speak.

ENUNCIATE

Saying every word in your cutting is important because you've carefully selected them to enhance the flow and sound and meaning of the poem. This is especially important if your pacing is fast to express the emotion. In order to convey the meaning, not just the emotion, you need to hear every word.

UTILIZE EXPRESSION AND GESTURES

Expressions are not just limited to voice. Your face and body should represent the tone and meaning behind your words. Facial expressions are especially important. The use of your eyes and eyebrows can tell an entire story without even uttering a word, so utilize those assets to enhance the emotions you're conveying.

Make your body as open as possible. Don't be afraid to be big and bold. Let your gestures emphasize your emotions. Don't over gesture; let movement flow naturally from your body. Your body is an accessory to the poem(s). Gestures should complement the other aspects of your piece. As your body expresses emotion, your voice should, too—and, in turn, the emotion in your voice should match what your body is doing. If your tone is timid, your movements should be small and shy. If you're being loud and overtly expressive, your movements should be sweeping and firm.



PRACTICE TIPS

Poetry is one of the most rewarding events, especially when it comes to expression. No other event allows you the emotional range of expression that Poetry does or the ability to speak your truth without ever having to tell a complete story arc. Instead, you can master the ability to control your emotions and use them to tell a story with the most limited writing devices. You likely won't narrate or use dialogue. You use emotions to tell your audience how they should be feeling so that they may feel the emotional story rather than hear you tell one. No one starts at the top, it takes time and dedication. Practice and delivery are key parts of that time and dedication.

1. Type your piece yourself. This physical act can help immensely with memorization. Each time you do a cut, especially if you're using physical copies of poems, retype the whole program.
2. Determine the tone of each poem. Each poem is unique, so they shouldn't all be performed the same. Decide what the tone of the speaker is and then incorporate that into the performance. You do have some wiggle room because you're cutting a program, so the tone of the program may influence how you perform a certain poem. But remember, you have to stay true to the author's intent—and in Poetry, tone, emotion, and demeanor are all closely related to intent.
3. Pick your voice, cadence, pace, etc., before you start practicing and then practice with those selections each time. If you practice once and it doesn't fit, try it again. If after a couple of times something feels off, go ahead and make changes. Nothing is set in stone, but you want to have an idea of what your poems should sound like before

you really start practicing so you form good habits.

4. Practice in front of a mirror. Yes, it feels awkward, but it's the best way to see the blocking you're doing and whether it looks natural on your body. If it looks natural to you, then it should look natural to an audience.
5. Use drills to increase your delivery skills such as enunciation, projection, and maintaining eye contact. For enunciation, you can run pen drills with your piece so that you know you can enunciate each word. For projection, stand in a large room with a camera that can record. Put yourself on one end of the room and the recording device on the opposite end of the room. Practice your piece to find out if you can clearly hear

yourself projecting on camera. This will also give you an opportunity to hear yourself and correct anything that might sound off. Keep in mind you need to be in a large room for this to work. For eye contact, practicing in the mirror is your best option. If you can maintain eye contact with yourself, despite how uncomfortable and awkward it is, you can maintain eye contact with anyone.

6. The most important thing you can do to practice is say your piece, in competition position (*standing, not sitting or pacing*), with your book and page turns, over and over and over again, as often as possible, whether you have an audience or not. That's how you master timing, emotional level building, fluency, etc. You can't get better at performing if you never perform.



ADVICE FROM THE FINAL ROUND STAGE

When you practice, record yourself. Nobody likes hearing their voice, but we're our own worst critics, and it helps us improve timing and expressions. At least perform in front of a mirror to see yourself. Go through your piece and try to say each line in different ways—scream it, whisper it, show no emotion, then over perform it, see what works. Perform outside of your comfort zone, and maybe it'll be better than you think.

— Nicholas Olwell, 2021 high school Prose finalist



ADVICE FROM THE FINAL ROUND STAGE

The process I followed to create my piece was fairly simple. I discovered my topics from watching poetry slams. I found poetry that speaks to me, and then I developed a stronger topic through the best material I'd find. The practice ideas that I utilize are deeply rooted in the type of emotions and characters I have to portray in my Poetry performance. When I am performing, I like to physically embody my words, so when practicing, I take it one section at a time.

For example, each one of my poems in my Poetry convey their own messages. Therefore, I give them their own character. In order to strengthen each character, I practice their section in the Poetry for about a week and move onto another character and section of my Poetry the next week. I do it weeks at a time so I do not burn myself out, which is how I fell deeply in love with my piece.

My delivery is solely based on my connection with my piece. In the beginning of the season, my piece was extremely weak and I could not figure out why I could not connect with it. I then learned that my heart was not connected to any of the words I was saying. So I reconnected with my piece through finding my “Why” behind doing speech and my “Why” behind doing Poetry and my topic. This not only improved my delivery of it, but it helped me realize that my goal was greater than making it onto the national stage or even placing well at tournaments. Rather, it was about touching the hearts and souls of my people along with learning more about myself and history through the research and knowledge I had attained in the making of it.

Expression intertwined with each of the aspects it took to strengthen the piece. When conveying a specific emotion through your face, you must know exactly which emotion you want to show. Otherwise, you'll confuse yourself along with your judges. If you want to show sadness, be all in with your eyes, mouth, cheeks, and whole body. Whichever character you are, make sure you look into how your character would portray a certain emotion. How would you show your sadness or anger? Would you show it at all? You decide that through YOUR body and facial expressions.

— Danielle Williams, 2021 high school Poetry finalist



ROUND/TOURNAMENT

When you go to a tournament, you'll be provided with a code of some kind, either your name or a number. This code will help you determine where you go to speak and what order you speak. Students will report to their rooms a little before round time and provide their speaker code to check in (*you may also be asked to provide the title and authors of your program*). In Poetry, all students in the round are allowed to watch because your program is unique to you.

In a Poetry round, students will enter the room when the judge arrives and allows competitors in. Students will be called up one at a time to perform their programs for the judge and any students or observers in the room (*although some tournaments have rules against observing if you aren't in the room to compete, so be careful with this*). Once you've finished performing, you should return to your seat and

respectfully watch the other competitors. If you are at a tournament that allows you to be entered in multiple events, you should let the judge know at the beginning of the round that you are entered in multiple events. Once you have finished performing, ask to be excused to your next event. If you are in multiple events and you arrive late to a round, let the judge know you were entered in multiple events and that's why you were late. Your judge will be understanding, so there is no need to stress about anything extra on top of your events. Be calm and focused on your performances, being a little late to a round is expected when you're entered in multiple events. Just be sure to be as respectful of everyone's time as you can. Don't dawdle between events, but there is no need to run from one to the next.



*This guide includes content from **Start Here: Teaching Middle School Interp** and **Intro to Coaching Program Oral Interp**.*

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The National Speech & Debate Association was created in 1925 to provide recognition and support for students participating in speech and debate activities. While our organization has evolved over the decades, our mission is more relevant today than ever before. We connect, support, and inspire a diverse community committed to empowering students through competitive speech and debate.

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