

# Found Poem Instructions

1. Carefully re-read the text you have chosen, and look for 50–100 words that stand out in the prose passage. Highlight or underline details, words, and phrases that you find powerful, moving, or interesting.
2. On another sheet of paper, make a list of the details, words and phrases you underlined, keeping them in the order that you found them. Skip a line between the words so that they are easy to work with.
3. Look back over your list and cut out everything that is dull, or unnecessary, or that just doesn't seem right for the poem. Try to cut your original list in half, so that you have 25–50 words.
4. Make any minor changes necessary to create your poem. You can change punctuation and make little changes to the words to make them fit together (such as change the tenses, possessives, plurals, and capitalizations).
5. When you're close to an edited-down version, if you absolutely need to add a word or two to make the poem flow more smoothly, to make sense, or to make a point, *you may add up to two words of your own*. That's two (2) and only two!
6. Read back over your edited draft one more time and make any deletions or minor changes.
7. Check your words, and choose a title—is there a better title than “Found Poem”?
8. Copy the words and phrases into your journal or type them in a word processor. Space or arrange the words so that they're poem-like. Pay attention to line breaks, layout, and other elements that will emphasize important words or significant ideas in the poem.
  - Read aloud as you arrange the words! Test the possible line breaks by pausing slightly. If it sounds good, it's probably right.
  - Arrange the words so that they make a rhythm you like. You can space words out so that they are all alone or allruntogether.
  - You can also put  
key  
words  
on lines by themselves.
  - You can shape the entire poem so that it's wide or tall or shaped like an object.
  - Emphasize words by playing with boldface and italics, different sizes of letters, and so forth.
9. At the bottom of the poem, tell where the words in the poem came from. For example, “From *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* by Judy Blume.”

Instructions adapted from “Found and Headline Poems” from *Getting the Knack: 20 Poetry Writing Exercises* by Stephen Dunning and William Stafford.