

ON WORKSHOPPING A POEM

IMAGERY: Clear or confusing? Does it add to the poem or is it merely scenery? Is the writer making good use of both literal and figurative (simile/metaphor) imagery—are there places he or she could create an image to further the poem? Is the image precise enough, deep enough, to enable us to experience the world of the poem?

RHYTHM: Flowing or awkward? Is the poet working with a meter? Is the rhythm / meter effective?

LINE: A line is a unit of rhythm and a unit of meaning. How are the line breaks working to control the flow of information and rhythm of the poem?

DICTION: Word choice. The difference between lightning and the lightning bug, as Twain said. Is the diction appropriate to the speaker, the subject matter? Is there more than one level of diction, and is it working for or against the poem?

TONE: Solemn, playful, ironic, contemplative—what's the effect on the reader, and is it the effect the writer intends?

CLARITY: Surprisingly difficult to achieve.

SYNTAX and **GRAMMAR:** Are the sentences similar in structure, or varied? Are there errors in grammar, punctuation, etc.—if nonstandard syntax is used, does the writer convince us that it's part of the design of the poem, or not?

DETAIL: Is there enough vivid, sensual detail? How much does the concrete world enter the poem?

LANGUAGE: Is the language alive, surprising, interesting? Where does it succeed, where does it fall into stale formulations, vague generalities?

SOUND: The music, achieved through the line, syntax, assonance, alliteration, etc.

GAPS: Look at the poem holistically. In terms of the poem's ambitions, what seems to be missing? Does the poem aim high enough? How could the poet expand or deepen the poem? Do we need more detail, or a larger version?