

## Questions I Might Ask of My Poems and the Poems of Others

1. Is there in some pocket of the poem a clarity and a location: of place, or person, or speaking voice, or situation, or of feeling, or tone, or intelligence? Is this immediately discernible?
2. Do the words invite, either by their aptness, or by their originality? Does the poem use a more or less full range of the ear-sensuality available in the language: repetition of sound, and at intervals that seem right for the poem?
3. Is there a heartbeat that brings me along and guides me and won't let me stop reading the poem?
4. Location, language and rhythm: are they established right away, in the opening line or lines? And, what the heck does every line, or sentence, have something to offer, in content or form? Does the sense of the line reflect and reinforce the tone and the tension? Is the poem pushed forward in every line? Does it need to be?
5. Is the poem more difficult to read than what it provides me with? That is, is the poem worth the effort? Would I rather go dancing than read this poem? Would I rather be taking out the trash?
6. Do I begin to recognize myself—and others—in it, or does it seem to come from a completely alien land? Is it about something other than itself? Something other than the writer? Is it about something at all?
7. Is something being confronted, explored, discovered, transformed? Does it begin to scare me with its truths?
8. Is it various and surprising? Or is it polite? Does the level of disclosure feel dangerous?
9. Does it use language or form or strategy in a new way, or in the old way but with the stamp of individual character? Does it feel like another human is speaking with me, me personally?
10. Does it feel like a poem written alone in a room to be read by others sitting alone in a room? Or is it public like a cocktail party or a speech? What difference does this make?
11. Does it lie? That is, does it seem like a pose invented for the occasion of poetry? Would I like to meet the person of the poem and have a conversation about lilies and anger? Do I want to live in this poem, at least for an hour of my life? Does the person of the poem seem to be possessed by a spasm of self-hatred and therefore should be quarantined for a short while?

12. Does the poem develop, in whatever way seems necessary: through its feelings, its gestures, its intelligence, its plot? Or does it stand still and repeat the dance?
13. Is the poem mysterious, the way life is and we forget? Does it make me feel sufficiently uncomfortable with my current way of living, feeling, and thinking? Or does it make me want to join the country club and give up the struggle?
14. Is there some level of urgency, necessity, sincerity? Did this poem have to be written? Does it feel inevitable? Or do I feel bored and lied to and want to run off and go dancing? What would I rather be doing than reading this poem?
15. Does the ending stop the poem or invite me to re-read it, endlessly, and enter my brain cells, and therefore become memorable, part of my daydreaming self-conversation?
16. Are all the uncomfortable questions raised by the poem dealt with, or do I feel cheated? That is, does the poem meet its apparent ambition? Is it too short or too long or just right? Maybe, could it have cut a few lines, or added a few?
17. Does it seem that the poem feels differently about poetry every day, and this poem reflects that endless shifting of perspective about what is important, what is the subject of poetry?
18. That when the poet comes before the Muse of Poetry on Judgment Day, can the Muse be told an attempt was made to do honest work with this poem? Or do we hide it in our pockets?
19. Does it feel perfect? If it does, it's a lie in a long line of lies. Flaws are part of the human condition and should have a voice in our poetry. Poetry is the hardest form of language to write in, but it oughtn't to read that way.
20. Have I been as open to weirdness as I could have been while reading or writing this poem? Does this poem make me want to drop all my standards and sit in its new chair?