**Tips for Writing Spoken Word Poetry**

1. **Context matters.** Know your audience. A good poet uses this knowledge to hit as hard as he or she can in a particular scenario.

2. **Substance over style.** Spoken-word is more than pretty art—it’s an opportunity to say something to an audience. The best spoken-word is powerful and ultimately transformative because of what it says, not how it says it. Pretty words with no meaningful foundation ring hollow. Spoken word often, though certainly not always, utilizes complex and interesting rhymes.

3. **Challenge the audience.** The best art doesn’t tell people what they want to hear—it pushes them out of their comfort zones.

4. **Being original and memorable is more important than being “good.”** What new perspective do you have? How are you going to make your work stand out? Your challenge is not to “write well;” it is to slap your audience in the face with something meaningful, powerful and memorable. Spoken Word Poetry commonly relies on first-person narratives, or stories told about the poet’s personal experiences. Poems that focus on general observations about people and events are also common.

5. **Be specific.** For example, don’t write about “love,” tell a detailed story about a specific moment in your life when you felt loved.

6. **Study the art of poetry.** Don’t just get up on stage and rant and rave. Understand dynamics, structure, metaphor, imagery, assonance & consonance, rhythm, concrete vs. abstract language and all of the little things that go into making what is traditionally considered good poetry. Even if you want to break rules, you should be able to do so intentionally.

7. **Poetry—especially spoken-word—is about communication.** At the end of the day, you’re not up on stage to celebrate how brilliant you are; you’re up there to open up lanes of communication, to say something that might get someone else to think or feel something, to build community—artistically, intellectually and physically.

8. **Study other performers.** YouTube is a great resource for this. As you watch, pay attention to what other performers are doing: What kinds of choices are they making with their voices and gestures? Who are your favorite performers, and what about their performance or poetry do you find compelling?

9. **Try memorizing your poetry.** Memorizing your poetry is a great way to stretch and grow as an artist. Also, in my opinion, it’s absolutely the best way to achieve a full and fulfilling performance experience. There’s nothing quite like the feeling of performing spoken word without the encumbrance of having to hold a piece of paper or a book.

10. **Rehearse.** Speaking of performing again and again, rehearsal is fundamental to consistent and successful performances. Find a rehearsal space where you can be uninterrupted and can feel free to experiment with your voice and gestures. Definitely, work on developing your poems—make choices, commit to them, learn them, and do them consistently. When I first started performing, I would rehearse like mad, and that rehearsal paid off when I was in front of audiences. The performance of my poems was second nature to me, and I could focus on enjoying the experience, rather than worrying about my next line or next gesture. But, there’s a balance between knowing your poems and running them into the ground. So, rehearse, but don’t be so compulsive about it that your poem no longer sounds fresh.

**Some Literary Techniques to consider in writing Spoken Word:**

- **Alliteration-** the repetition of the same or similar sounds at the beginning of words, such as *Parson Peters picked a peck of pickled peppers.*

- **Assonance-** the repetition of vowel sounds within a phrase, such as in *crave and rave.*

- **Internal Rhyme-** rhyme within a line or verse, as in *boisterous and noisterous.*

- **Metaphor-** A comparison between two dissimilar things that have something in common, for example, "my home is a dungeon when I am grounded”.

- **Onomatopoeia-** words that sound very similar to the sound they name, such as the buzz of bees, the howl of the coyote, or the snap of twigs.

- **Simile-** A simile is similar to a metaphor because it compares two unlike things that have something in common, but the words "like" or "as" are used, rather than writing, "my home is a dungeon when I am grounded", a simile would look like, "my home is like a dungeon when I am grounded".
Tips for Memorizing your Spoken Word Poem

1. **Find a space in which you can be alone and uninterrupted.** This first step may seem obvious, but it helps to alleviate anxiety if you’re able to read and recite your poem aloud without worrying about being overheard. Finding a private place where you can yell, sing, and experiment with your voice can help to ease any fears, worries, or embarrassment you might feel as you learn. Also, it’s important to remove distractions and not to be interrupted.

2. **Slowly read your poem aloud several times and learn to love it.** As you’re reading, think about the poem. Note each word, each image, each line break, and try to remember what you were thinking when you wrote it. Feel your poem again. Feel the emotions and the passion of it. And answers these questions: Why did you write your poem? What is your poem about? What were you trying to say at the time? What do you think of it now? How do you feel about it now? Try to develop a new relationship with your poem by deepening your investment in its meanings and its message. Don’t criticize the poem. Just let it be what it is—an expression of your creativity. In other words, love your poem.

3. **Break the poem into sections of about 3-5 lines each.** The sections can be longer or shorter, depending on your poem and its logic, but be sure to make the sections “bite-sized” so that they’re easier to learn. Think about each individual section and discern how it connects to the section before it and after it. What is the “logic” of the poem? How do the words, images, and phrases connect to one another?

4. **Create mental cues for each section.** One way is to create a mental cue is to note the key words or rhymes in the section. Another way is to note how the words look on the paper. For instance, when reciting my poetry, I often remember how the words and lines are laid out on the page. Also, you can create a mental cue by noting the feeling the words evoke in you. A final way to create a mental cue is to listen to the way the words sound and to the rhythm of the piece. But there are many ways to create mental cues. So, use whatever method works for you.

5. **Start reciting.** Begin by reciting the first section aloud without reading the paper. Say this section several times by memory. As you do so, remember the mental cues and other associations you’ve developed for that section. Repeat the section by memory until you feel that you’ve mastered those lines. Now, recite the second section and do the same thing until you’ve mastered it. Finally, recite both sections together until you can do so easily several times. Keep learning each subsequent section and reciting it with the parts you’ve already learned.

6. **Try to recite the poem three times without faltering.** Once you’ve learned the poem, it’s helpful to repeat it several times. If you can’t recite the poem three times in a row, go back and find the places where you forget and quickly create a mental cue for those lines. Try again to recite the poem three times until you can do so without fail.

7. **Practice. Practice. Practice.** The best way to learn your poem is to continually practice it in all kinds of situations...in the shower, in the car while you’re traveling, or while you’re cooking dinner. Also, try reciting it for a trusted person—say, your mother, your best friend, or your sibling—so you can get positive feedback. Recite it whenever you can, and pretty soon, it’ll become second nature, something you just know, like your name or the days of the week or the alphabet.