

A month of poetry prompts by [Jo Bell](#)

Day 1 Write to yourself as a sixteen year old. What warnings, what advice would you give? If you have time – write back.

Day 2 ‘January freesia, hot coffee’. Read Elaine Feinstein’s [Getting Older](#). What small, physical things delight you? Write about them. Stick to the physical. See where it goes.

Day 3 Thirteen Ways. Everybody knows [this poem](#) by Wallace Stevens. Not everyone knows [this response](#) by RS Thomas. Choose some physical thing to write about. Write about it, in thirteen ways.

Day 4 Trains, Planes and Automobiles. Write a poem that takes place entirely inside one of these – or a boat, of course.

Day 5 Read Alden Nowlan’s poem [Great Things Have Happened](#). Write about a great historic moment and how it affected – or didn’t affect – your life. Diana’s death in Paris – 9/11 – the assassination of a political leader. Resist the urge for great philosophical pronouncements. Just tell it like it was.

Day 6 Write about a friend, or friends. It needn’t be cute or even kind – see [this](#) disturbing poem as an example – but on the other hand, it could be a wonderful celebration. Keep it focused on events you have shared.

Day 7 Mechanical disaster. That time your car/ washing machine/ plumbing broke down. What happened? Who fixed it? Was it all bad?

Day 8 Read Roddy Lumsden, [The Young](#). Now think of a group of people you want to address – the old? Hippies? (It will help if you don’t like them). Write a poem addressing them, as Lumsden does.

Day 9 Read Mervyn Morris, [A Chant Against Death](#). Write a chant against something dark – death, grief, loneliness – by summoning up the things that defeat it best. It doesn’t have to take this form, but make it strong and affirmative.

Day 10 A litany is a poem or prayer in which a single word or phrase is repeated at the beginning of each line. Here’s a classic example, the [Litany of Loretto](#) – and three modern examples from [Billy Collins](#), [Allen Ginsberg](#) and [Richard Siken](#). If stuck, use one of these as your repeated word: Unless, Or, Whatever, If, Finally.

Day 11 List twenty intensely physical experiences you have had. Write about one of them. It doesn’t have to be a good one!

Day 12 Read [this poem by Anne Bradstreet](#). Now read these poems about Anne Bradstreet by [Eavan Boland](#) and [John Berryman](#). Now write a poem addressed to a favourite (or unfavourite) poet of yours. Think of where, how and in what style s/he wrote. Talk to them. Tell them things.

Day 13 A valediction is a poem of goodbye – to a lover, a deceased relative, a situation. Read examples here from [Ann Ridler](#), from [Billy Collins](#), and from [John Lyons](#): now write your own.

Day 14 A laudation is a poem of self-praise. Read [this one from Tomaz Salamun](#) and write your own. British persons in particular will complain that this is too hard. It's *meant* to be hard, you slackers. Pull all the stops out, show your wit and celebrate yourself unapologetically!

Day 15 Read this poem from Liz Lochhead, [A Favourite Place](#). Think of a favourite place of your own and make notes on it. Write a poem about it. Include one personal name, and one piece of reported speech (something someone said, quoted directly). Focus on one event or occasion. If it takes you somewhere else, like Liz's poem – so much the better.

Day 16 Write about work. It can be yours, someone else's, the job you hated most or what 'work' means. Look at Alan Dugan's [Monologue of a Commercial Fisherman](#): Cornelius Eady's [The Cab Driver Who Ripped Me Off](#), and Gavin Ewart's [Office Friendships](#).

Day 17 Blessings. Here's [one by me](#) (blushes) and one by Galway Kinnell, the justifiably famous [Saint Francis and the Sow](#). Now – write a blessing.... but hang on, that's too easy and trite. I want you (on this day of Margaret Thatcher's funeral) to write a blessing for someone you dislike. Make it sincere, not snide or sarcastic. Dig deep and find the best of yourself.

Day 18 Read two poems called Shame – one by [Joshua Weiner](#), the other by [CK Williams](#). Now – write about something you are personally ashamed of, whether small or large.

Day 19 Read [Bodkin](#) by Vona Groarke, which is clearly about a favourite word. Think of a favourite word of your own – either you like its meaning, or simply its sound – and write about it. See where it takes you.

Day 20 A springy prompt, with video accompaniments. Watch this [best ever poetry video](#) and observe that the poem is not just about daffodils. Watch [this](#) and observe that the Edward Thomas poem is not just about Tall Nettles. Watch [this](#) and remember that Housman's poem is not just about cherry trees. Now get outside and walk, or sit, for half an hour. Write about something green, something growing. Your poem may (indeed should) turn out to be about something else.

Day 21 Got your Sunday paper? Well then, you can do [one of these](#). Your blackout poem may not be a work of genius but it might spark off a train of thought that leads to another poem.

Day 22 To Do Lists. Make a list of the life ambitions you haven't yet achieved – climb Everest, learn to make the perfect omelette – and write about one of them. Inhabit it as fully as possible. What would it smell, sound like? How would it feel to actually achieve it?

Day 23 Read Sharon Olds' [First Sex](#). Now write about the first time you did something – anything!

Day 24 A Museum Visit. Read these three poems – [Waka 99](#) (a waka is a war canoe), [In the Museum at Teheran](#) and [Beginnings](#). Now visit a museum. Haven't got time? Then look at [the British Museum](#), [The Wellcome Collection](#) or an oddity like [Leila's Hair Museum](#). Pick an object and write about it. Try, as ever, to make it about something more than the obvious subject.

Day 25 An argument poem. Get mad at someone. Hit the ground running. Open with a strong statement and let rip!

Day 26 Write about your parents in a rough sonnet. Six lines on your mum, six on your dad and two on yourself to conclude. If you want to make it a Shakespearean sonnet, it should rhyme ABAB CDCD EFEF GG.

Day 27 Read (and more importantly, listen to) Michael Donaghy's [A Repertoire](#). Now make time to listen to your favourite piece of music, or to one with strong associations. Remember where you first heard it, what it means to you, who you were with when you heard it at a concert etc. Write about that – don't worry if the poem takes you a long way from the music.

Day 28 Read [Fear](#) by Ciaran Carson, [Fear of Happiness](#) by AE Stallings and [Things](#) by Fleur Adcock. What are you afraid of – really? Write about it. Be honest. Do not be afraid.

Day 29 Proverbs. Read [this](#) by Eliza Griswold, and [this](#) by Geoff Page, and my own duet with Max Wallis based on an Arabic proverb, [here](#). Now – make a list of sayings or proverbs (or cheat by looking [here](#)). Write a poem starting from one of these.

Day 30 Write about love. Write it true and deep and plain, and as you are feeling it now – whether fresh, or weathered, or lost, or unspeakably painful. Speak it. Write the best poem you ever wrote. No pressure. But tell your truth. Here are some examples of poems about different kinds or stages of love – Sharon Olds' [True Love](#), Vikram Seth's [Protocols](#) and Raymond Carver's [Late Fragment](#).