

In 2021, David Stavanger and Pascale Burton – with the help of Australia Council of the Arts funding and in-kind partnership from Red Room Poetry – commenced a collaborative writing project. They invited 50 practising artists across diverse mediums (poets, authors, artists and musicians) to select a prompt from this Menu of Constraints and co-write a poem or creative response. Now, you are invited to use the menu, too.

MENU OF CONSTRAINTS

Please note that these instructions should be read flexibly, and matters regarding line limits are recommendations only. Poets are encouraged to allow the thread to unravel as necessary.

FOUND TEXTS

1. Find a range of texts that have either significance or insignificance.
2. Share these texts with your partner.
3. Create a poem (up to 20 lines or can be a visual poem) selecting language from each other's found texts.
4. Remember to cite texts.

SPINES OR CUT-UPS¹

1. Each poet gives their partner a title for a poem.
2. Poets write 20 lines each based on their allocated title.
3. Cut up the lines up so that each becomes, alternately, the first and second half of the new lines.

BETWEEN-THE-ACTION

1. Over a prearranged period (e.g., 24 hours, a month etc), share moments where 'nothing' happens.
2. Create a joint poem based on the descriptions (up to 40 lines or can be a visual poem).

FILL-IN-THE-BLANKS

1. The guest poet writes a poem (up to 40 lines).
2. They blank out selected words and their partner substitutes those for their own words.
3. This is the new poem.



DEFLATED COUPLETS²

1. Poet A emails a line to Poet B.
2. Poet B counters/deflates the line and sends it to Poet A.
3. Poet A counters/inflates the line and so on until there are 20 couplets (or however many agreed upon).
4. You may decide on other constraints, e.g., specific rhyme or rhythm.
5. Argue over a title for the poem.

LISTENING OR VIEWING PARTY

1. Decide on a film, album or artwork.
2. Watch the film, listen to the album or view the artwork at or around the same time, either together or apart.
3. Make notes during the listening or viewing 'party'.
4. Share notes and use both sets to create a joint poem (up to 40 lines or can be a visual poem).

INTERNET PERFORMANCE

1. The guest poet selects a poem by another poet (20 lines or under).
2. For each line, poets free associate what it makes them think of, then search the internet, click on a link and write a new line of poetry from the text on that page.
3. There will be two new versions of the original poem.
4. Remember to cite the webpages and the original poem.

BOUTS-RIMÉS³ WITH ANY FORM

1. Decide upon a form to write (e.g., sestina, ghazal or prose poem) or the number of lines (up to 20 lines).
2. Come up with the end words for each line first. Depending on form, this may impact rhyme or repetition.
3. Using the end words, each poet 'fills in' the poem to create two different poems with the same end words.
4. Give each poem a title with the same end word.



HOLDING PATTERNS⁴

1. At an agreed time, turn on the TV and transcribe what you see.
2. Create a joint poem based on the transcriptions (up to 40 lines or can be a visual poem).

THEME COMBINATIONS

1. Each poet suggests a theme (e.g., a topic, artist, text, body part etc.)
2. Each poet creates a poem (up to 20 lines or can be a visual poem) based on how these themes interact.

TIMED DIALOGUE⁵

1. Over email or text messages, record a dialogue for a prearranged period of time (e.g., 48 hours, a week etc).
2. Create a joint poem based on the dialogue (up to 40 lines or can be a visual poem).

EUPHEMISMS OR APHORISMS LIST⁶

1. Decide on a topic.
2. Write alternating lines (up to 40 lines) that are euphemisms or aphorisms for that topic.



DREAMS OR MEMORIES

1. Each poet describes a dream they have had or a significant memory, such as an earliest memory.
2. Poets each write a poem about their partner's dream or memory separately or about the combined descriptions together.

RED TAPE

1. Each poet shares a piece of legislation or bureaucratic form that has impacted their life in some way.
2. With care, poets use their partner's text to create a poem (up to 20 lines or can be a visual poem).

WORD ASSOCIATION⁷

1. Arrange a phone call or meeting.
2. Record the conversation with each poet saying one word at a time.
3. This is the poem. You may format it any way you wish.
4. You may incorporate further constraints, such as using words beginning with selected letter/s etc.

DOUBLE-ACT

1. Decide on an activity (cook a meal, sit facing north etc) and a time limit.
2. Perform the agreed activity at or around the same time.
3. Share experiences, including trains of thought, things heard and seen or emotional responses, and create a joint piece about the happening.



START TO FINISH

1. Poet A sends Poet B a line of poetry.
2. Poet B responds with a line.
3. Poet A responds with a third line and Poet B responds with a fourth.
4. Poet A will use these four lines as the start of their poem and complete it (up to 20 lines).
5. Poet B will use the lines in order 4, 3, 2, 1 and use them as the final four lines of their poem (up to 20 lines).

TWITTER POEM

1. Write a line of poetry and @ the other poet on Twitter.
2. They reply with a line of poetry.
3. Include any other interactions from others, noting likes and retweets.
4. Once you have 20 lines (including comments), the first poem is done.
5. Now the other poet @'s and another 20-line poem is created.
6. Remember to cite any other Twitter users in the poem.

THE EMPTINESS

1. Poets share something they no longer have.
2. Each poet writes an elegy to the other poet's loss (up to 20 lines may take a particular form, such as somanka, or can be a visual poem).



DIETARY RESTRICTIONS

1. Poets decide on compulsory vocabulary or grammatical requirements for each line.
2. For example, John Ashbery and Kenneth Koch wrote the sestina *Crone Rhapsody*, where every line contained the name of a flower, a tree, a fruit, a game, and a famous elderly lady, as well as the word *bath tub*; and all the end-words were pieces of office furniture.

¹ inspired in part by Tom Breidenbach and Nathan Kernan, p. 354, *Saints of Hysteria: a half-century of collaborative American poetry*, edited by Denise Duhamel, Maureen Seaton and David Trinidad (2007, Soft Skull Press), and of course, William S. Burroughs.

² inspired in part by *A Lover's Complaint* by Samuel Ace and Kevin Killian, p. 126, *Saints of Hysteria*.

³ said to have been invented by the French poet Dulot in the early 17th century.

⁴ inspired in part by Dodie Bellamy's *TV Sutras* (2018, Ugly Duckling Presse).

⁵ inspired by *The Instead: A Conversation Between Emily Abendroth and Miranda Mellis* (2016, Carville Annex Press).

⁶ inspired in part by *The literary community* by Stacey Harwood and David Lehman, p.171, *Saints of Hysteria*.

⁷ inspired in part by Joshua Beckman and Matthew Rohrer, p. 311, *Saints of Hysteria*.

