

HOW TO LEARN VERSE

Traditionally, poetry has been an oratorical art. Since the invention of the printing press, poetry has been read silently more often than heard. However, poetry is popular as a performance art, especially with bush poets, who participate in competitions across the country, thanks to a tradition of Australian bush poetry.

There may be a time when you are called upon to recite a poem, either by reading it or reciting it from memory. It may be for a school function, or for a family or friend's party. You may simply want to learn a poem because it means something special to you. It looks more professional if you can recite the poem from memory.

Steps

1. Print off a copy of your poem.
2. Let's assume you are familiar with your selected poem. Read the poem to yourself and then read it aloud to get a feel for the rhythm and to ensure you pronounce all words correctly. The poem must make sense to you.
3. Break the poem up into sections. Most people prefer to start with just a couple of lines. On your printed copy mark off sections, either couplets or complete stanzas—whatever amount you are comfortable with memorising.
4. Slowly read the first section a few times and then cover the page and try to recite the first line, then the second, and so on. You may need to go back to your page and re-read the section again. After you've learned one section, move on to the next.
5. Practise reciting the first and second sections together, move on to the third section, and so on.
6. When you have learned the whole poem, take a long break. You may forget parts of your poem, but you'll remember more of it in the long term. Let the poem sink into your long-term memory.
7. A day later, you should find that you can recite most of the poem without peeking.



A practical suggestion

Give your printed page to a friend and try to recite the entire poem, letting the friend prompt you if you stumble. Reciting poetry this way gives you practice reciting in front of others.

You are on your way to becoming a performance poet!