

## 12 Tasks

Keep in mind, this is an exercise to help you generate a draft of a poem. Maybe when you're finished, the result will be a poem you're happy with *as is*. But maybe not, in which case you'll next want to add to it, or subtract from it, or ignore instructions (I modified #5 and #6, for instance, preferring to stick with my cat rather than switch to the "I" pronoun, and to *express* desire instead of *stating* it—"purring"—but as part of #7). What I'm saying is revise. Revision is most often where the best stuff happens. Anyway, whether it's a final draft or a first draft, what it won't be is you still looking at an empty page and thinking you've got nothing to say.

Another thing: If seeing examples is useful, go ahead and look. However, if you think seeing examples will make your own ideas foggy and the writing harder to do, then black them out, ignore them with wild enthusiasm, etc.

Lastly, I like to write sonnets, and the examples given below each task come from one of those, a poem in my book *Weather Report* (Somondoco Press 2006) that I generated by using this very exercise. I'm employing slant rhymes as often true rhymes, and I'm following my own rhyme scheme—A-B-C A-B-C D-D E-E C-B E-B—rather than either of the two most common kinds, but it's a sonnet. You absolutely don't have to aim at a sonnet, though. Any idea, any kind of poem, is totally cool.

### 1rst stanza:

**1. Start with something doing something impossible . . .**

My cat has swallowed the year's last moon.

**2. Continue that picture for us . . .**

It stares out gold through his eyes. All night,  
he carries it inside him like a dream.

**3-4. In the next lines, use two of your senses to describe how, what, when, or where this is happening. And mix it up, mix the senses (synaesthesia) . . .**

And he's eaten three constellations,  
so he's warm now as whiskey with their light.  
He's a cat. He takes whatever pleases him.

**5. Describe yourself in a weird way . . .**

He gulps the very heart of the Earth—its own  
red center—then finishes with a yawn. . . .

**6. Make the "I" say something he or she desired . . .**

**2nd stanza:**

**7. Make an assertion that sounds true but couldn't be . . .**

At last, the Earth's heart settled down, purring.

**8. Now make a truer assertion . . .**

Outside, it's winter and a cold wind stirring.  
Above that, beyond, more cold to come,  
no question. But not for me, not tonight.

**9. Write a line describing another part of your setting . . .**

Inside, if he stirs at all, my cat stirs

**10. Repeat the initial image in line 1, but change it in a noticeable way . . .**

like a furnace. Here. On the bed, between my feet.

**11. Now write a line that seems to continue the story or mood,**

~~Now that's what I'm talkin' about.~~

**12. but cross it out and make it the title of your poem instead.**

NOW THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKIN' ABOUT

—for Gruden

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