



# Next Word, Better Word: The Craft of Writing Poetry

By Stephen Dobyns

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This accessible writer's guide provides a helpful framework for creating poetry and navigates contemporary concerns and practices. Stephen Dobyns, author of the classic book on the beauty of poetry, *Best Words, Best Order*, moves into new terrain in this remarkable book. Bringing years of experience to bear on issues such as subject matter, the mechanics of poetry, and the revision process, Dobyns explores the complex relationship between writers and their work. From Philip Larkin to Pablo Neruda to William Butler Yeats, every chapter reveals useful lessons in these renowned poets' work. Both enlightening and encouraging, *Next Word, Better Word* demystifies a subtle art form and shows writers how to overcome obstacles in the creative process.

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## Next Word, Better Word: The Craft of Writing Poetry By Stephen Dobyns Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #494586 in Books
- Published on: 2011-04-26
- Released on: 2011-04-26
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 232.66" h x .78" w x 6.12" l, .70 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 288 pages



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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“No one but Stephen Dobyns has tackled this impossible genre with such smart, sensible, and charming results. Place this new one next to his *Best Words, Best Order*, and the poetry-instruction shelf of your library will be complete. All bitten by the poetry bug must read this.” *Billy Collins, Poet Laureate of the United States, 2001-2003 and author of Ballistics*

“*Next Word, Better Order* is a gift from a great teacher returning us to the enduring mysteries of the art.” *Ellen Bryant Voigt, former Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and author of Messenger: New and Selected Poems 1976-2006*

“Stephen Dobyns, a great American poet, gives a lucid explanation of his craft. This book is valuable for poets, film-makers, novelists, playwrights, and anyone interested in the clear expression of original thought.” *Fred Wiseman, film-maker*

“Stephen Dobyns' new book on poetic craft defines, with an impressive breadth of reference, what is required for poets to give their subjects significant form, a nuanced aesthetic embodiment that is true to the poet's deepest concerns and open to a process of discovery, resistant to any idea that might limit a full exploration of the chosen materials. This book should be of genuine interest not only to apprentice poets but to anyone who wants to understand the choices involved in making a poem substantial and persuasive.” *Carl Dennis, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry and author of Poetry as Persuasion*

“Robert Frost said that a poem ‘must begin in delight and end in wisdom.’ Here is the rare book about the process of poetry that does both, and brilliantly. Luminous erudition coupled with a palpable love for subject, *Next Word, Better Word* is sure to be an education and an inspiration for student poets, seasoned poets, and--dare I say--there's plenty here for prose writers, too. Dobyns not only takes us deeply into the matter of the poet's craft, but into the poet himself: how the knowledge necessary to write a good poem intersects with the enlightenment born of experience.” *Binnie Kirshenbaum, Writing Chair, School of the Arts Writing Program, Columbia University and author of The Scenic Route*

“Serious but playful; stylish and true; honest yet magical--this is a comprehensive and beautifully written book about the thorny, joyous art of making poems. It is the best contemporary guide to poetry I have read.” *David Morley, National Teaching Fellow, University of Warwick and author of Enchantment*

“Stephen Dobyns states in his introduction that ‘writing a poem is one of the ways to love the world,’ and the rest of the book demonstrates, in exquisite, careful detail, exactly how. Full of invaluable insights and basic information for aspiring poets, Dobyns' collection also has much to say to his peers--and he peoples his essays with some of the art's most engaging practitioners, from the well-known, such as Baudelaire and Rilke, to those who will be new to many, such as the Russian Acmeists, and most valuably, he gives us their poetry as well their thoughts and lives. It's a book to study, to return to, to annotate with marginalia, but it's also a book to curl up with and simply enjoy.” *Cole Swensen, Professor, Iowa Writers' Workshop and author of Goest*

“Stephen Dobyns unpacks the essential kit of the trade, all the taken-for-granted tools which poets think with and work with to find out what their poems want to say: line breaks, how syllables behave, the hide-and-seek

of metaphor, how a poem hangs on the page like a bird in flight. He enters into dialogue with a galaxy of poets, to help us listen better to poems, to read better, and also maybe write better this most central of arts.”  
*?Ruth Padel, author of Darwin: A Life in Poems and The Poem and the Journey*

#### About the Author

**Stephen Dobyns** is the author of over 30 novels and poetry collections, including *The Church of the Dead Girls*, *Cold Dog Soup*, and *Cemetery Nights*. Among his many honors and awards are a Melville Cane Award, Pushcart Prizes, National Poetry Series prize, and three National Endowment for the Arts fellowships. His novels have been translated into 20 languages, and his poetry has appeared in the *Best American Poems* anthology. Dobyns teaches creative writing at Warren Wilson College and has taught at the University of Iowa, Sarah Lawrence College.

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