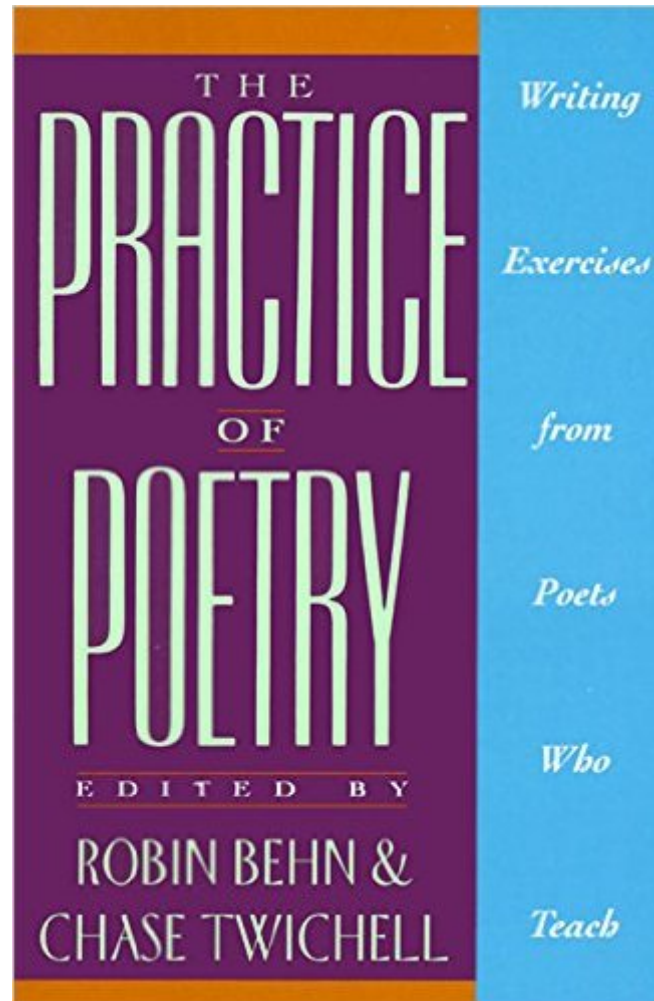


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# The Practice Of Poetry: Writing Exercises From Poets Who Teach



## Synopsis

A distinctive collection of more than 90 effective poetry-writing exercises combined with corresponding essays to inspire writers of all levels.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When I bought this book, I envisioned it being like Kowitz's "In the Palm of Your Hand" or Addonizio and Laux's "Poet's Companion". It isn't. Instead of the comfortable, conversational and pretty easy-going tone and pace of the other two books, this is a densely packed collection of exercises from a great many different poets. Each exercise is set out, and then expanded on in a very useful essay/note/commentary from the poet who contributed the exercise. In some ways, it is this latter feature that is the most useful. Quite often you will come across a poetry (or any other) exercise, where it is quite clear what you are meant to do, but with no clue about what it is that you are trying to achieve. Here, each exercise has an accompanying explanation. Problem solved. Because the exercises are contributed by so many different poets, it is unavoidable that there will be some exercises which seem pointless or stupid or irrelevant. This is where the explanation part comes in handy once again. Don't like the way the exercise is structured? Read on, find out what it is that you are supposed to be doing, and redraft the exercise to suit your own personal needs/tastes. Overall, this is a very useful little book. My copy is only one year old, but is seriously dog-eared and full of strips of paper serving as bookmarks. With the number of different poets/attitudes/approaches included, there are bound to be sections that you read with a sense of either boredom or incredulity.

Never mind - there are plenty more sections that will have you scrabbling for pen and paper. Maybe the best way of using the book is to think of it like a well-stocked pantry cupboard - browse, take what you need today, leave the rest for dinner tomorrow, or boil leftovers down for soup ...

As a teacher of poetry writing, I am always looking for books that include exercises and inspiring starters that will help the young and or inexperienced writer. I bought this book for that purpose, but what I found myself doing was bringing the book home week after week so that I could experience the activities personally. Writing is an incredibly personal activity that isolates one from others. This book brings writers together collectively to that lone writer and helps her to know she is not alone, and it helps that writer to try some new ways of tapping that well of creativity...even when the supply is running low. There are a lot of books out there on writing poetry, but few are as inspiring and helpful as Ms. Behn's. It is a must have for every poet, teacher, and lover of poetry.

This book is a must-read for any poet, regardless of skill. It has exercises ranging from terribly technical to wildly free formed. They are fun, sometimes even silly, and lead the reader into mental places they might never have thought to go. The results of the exercises always surprise the reader, and I would say that if a poem doesn't surprise it's writer, nothing has been learned. I recommended this book to a freshman poetry class and they all did many, many exercises on their own time. (Not a small feat for time-pressed college students!) Overall, I rank this book right up there with other indispensable books for poets such as *Writing Down The Bones* by Natalie Goldberg and *Letters to a Young Poet* from Rilke. Read this book, but don't just read it--live in it, sip from it, allow it to lead you where you may not know you need to go. You will be better for it, both in your writing and in your spirit.

I discovered this book during my MA program a few years back. At the time, I'd not seen anything quite like it, aside from Lew Turco's *Book of Forms*, a book that I enjoyed. But since I'm not a primarily formalist poet, I found Turco's book somewhat wanting. Robin Behn and Chase Twichell's *\*The Practice of Poetry\** provided a needed alternative. It's filled with great generative poetry writing exercises, each accompanied by a short discussion written by the poet/professor who contributed the piece. These introductions are at least as valuable as the assignments themselves: reading them, one sees a poet's mind in action, something very hard to describe or capture. The most useful of these assignments gets you writing very quickly. David St. John's contribution, a dramatic monologue, for example, urges writers to find a famous person from history or literature and write

from that person's perspective. I'll never forget a shy young student writing a monologue in Sherlock Holmes' voice in my workshop. Other assignments do come off as flaky, and yet the contributors admit as such. One exercise leads poets through a chanting exercise that seems so odd that I'd fear for my job if I tried it in class. Even in a less formal workshop, I'd be reticent about chanting. Of course, if chanting is something you enjoy . . . The book concludes with two or three essays about revision that every poet needs to read. Beginning poets especially can benefit the wisdom herein. Perhaps the greatest strength of this book is its variety. The book includes assignments from all ends of the aesthetic spectrum--from Jackson Mac Low to Dana Gioia. So, whether you're a New Formalist, a Neo-Surrealist, or a L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E disciple, this book will prove indispensable to your library.

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