



# Games for Creative Writing

## The Ear Game

The human imagination is not just passive in perceiving the world: it is active; it engages with and shapes its experiences as well as being shaped by them. Language is a central element in the shaping imagination; with sounds, we speak and express, we label and state, we question and argue.

Because language is so central to us (the French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty says that language is "the double of being"), we seize sounds with our imaginations and search them for significance, we shape them to patterns of meaning. For writers—prose writers as well as poets—the sounds are an essential part of the meaning. The purpose of this game is to focus your imagination on sounds and their harmonies and contrasts, and to let the sounds themselves lead you toward the meanings they suggest to your imaginations.

### Instructions

The game has two parts; approach them in a spirit of play. And use your throat as well as your ear - sound the sounds as well as listening to them.

1. Write a two to four line poem, using words with the same sounds as the vowels in one of the following lists as key words. *Be sure to go bai saund n nawt buy speallin.*
  - a. **ea**d, **be**d, m**o**de, **vi**ne
  - b. **ir**d (the /r/ is part of the vowel), **bi**d, **bo**on, **co**w
  - c. **mai**d, m**o**d, m**o**ck, **boi**
  - d. **la**nd, **bu**ll, **fr**ee, **bu**d
2. Write a two to four line poem, using words with one of the following sets of consonants in key, stressed positions, repeating the consonants (or words) as necessary. Again, bee shure to go by sound, not spelling.
  - a. bl, p, k, sl
  - b. x, sk, v, f, z
  - c. m, n, ng (as in **si**ng), br, th (as in **th**in)
  - d. d, t, n, sw, z (as in plea**S**ure), j
  - e. ch (as in **ch**icken), kr, g (as in **g**o), l, th (as in **th**em)

## Egzamplz / Examples / Eksampls

1. the old sheet tore  
when we fled the fire's heat  
that fine, cold night  
(Set 1.a)
2. a nervous breeze, mingling  
with thick, barren mimosa branches,  
rubbed noisily through the night  
(Set 2.c)

## And There'z Rhythm, Too

Rhythm in English is mostly a matter of stress—the relative loudness with which a syllable is pronounced. (Changes in pitch and pauses are other factors in rhythm). Spoken American English has four significant levels of stress, whereas the conventional system of metrics for poetry recognizes only two levels of stress.

The following stanza, which begins a well-known poem of e.e. cummings', illustrates a common metrical patten, alternating weak and strong syllables (with a variation in the third line). I've marked the stressed syllables in each line.

my fáther móved through dóoms of lóve  
through sámes of ám through háves of gíve,  
sínking each mórning óut of each níght  
my fáther móved through dépths of héight

Listen to these lines read aloud and see if you can hear more than two levels of stress; also listen for the changes in pitch and pauses. For instance, in the third line, which has more stress, the two *each's* or the last syllable of *singing* and *of*?

Now read your poems for the first part of the game aloud and mark the syllables for stress. What kind of rhythm do you find?