

Poetry & Wellbeing Workbook

1. How to use this workbook 🤔

Welcome to this Poetry & Wellbeing slow seminar! It was created by [Rebecca Hurst](#), a writer and Creative Manchester researcher. If you have questions or comments please email Rebecca at: rhurst70@gmail.com.

This self-directed workbook is divided into three 20 minute blocks:

- A. Reading a Poem 🌸 ([Ada Limón's 'Instructions on Not Giving Up'](#))
- B. A short introduction to free-writing 🕒
- C. Writing your own 'Instructions for...' poem 🐝

You can complete the workbook in a single 1-hour session, or divide it into two or three shorter sessions. Try to find a time and place where you won't be interrupted. **You will need a pen and paper, and a timer.** (It might take you longer than 20 minutes to complete a session, and that's fine!)

2. Why creative writing for wellbeing? 🌱

Expressing yourself and crafting an object are both ways to relieve stress and emotional turbulence. Research has shown that the physical act of writing creates 'a pathway to memories, feelings and thoughts', and that creativity enables us to 'explore, clarify and make connections with the present.' For more information on the health benefits—both physiological and psychological—of creative writing you can visit my [Substack, the Slow Train](#), where I publish short essays about my practice-based research in this field.

3. What to do after completing the workbook? 🎈

This workbook offers you an opportunity to **pause, reflect, and reconnect** with yourself. It also offers creative tools for future wellbeing. On The Slow Train you will find some [additional resources](#) for developing a creative writing practice as a method of reflection and self-development, and as a tool that can help support mental and physical wellbeing. A book I recommend if you would like to learn more is: [Writing Alone and With Others](#) by Pat Schneider.

A. 🌸 **Reading a Poem** 🌸 (20 minutes)

We will begin by reading a poem. Please have your pen and paper ready.

1. Read the poem below and ask yourself **what leaps off the page?** Let your response be quick and instinctual; maybe it's just a single word or image. Write it down. ✍️

Instructions on Not Giving Up

by [Ada Limón](#)

More than the fuchsia funnels breaking out
of the crabapple tree, more than the neighbor's
almost obscene display of cherry limbs shoving
their cotton candy-colored blossoms to the slate
sky of Spring rains, it's the greening of the trees
that really gets to me. When all the shock of white
and taffy, the world's baubles and trinkets, leave
the pavement strewn with the confetti of aftermath,
the leaves come. Patient, plodding, a green skin
growing over whatever winter did to us, a return
to the strange idea of continuous living despite
the mess of us, the hurt, the empty. Fine then,
I'll take it, the tree seems to say, a new slick leaf
unfurling like a fist to an open palm, I'll take it all.

2. Read the poem again **outloud**. How does the poem change when you are *hearing* it as well as looking at it on the page? Make a note of your thoughts, again without too much reflection. ✍️
3. In the third and final reading, **pay close attention** to the shape of the poem, the images and sounds Limón creates; the way she works with and through language; the feelings she evokes. Does the poem asks a question of you, the reader? What is the question? Write it down. ✍️

Congratulations! 🌟 You've finished the first part of this workbook!

B. 🕒 **A short introduction to free-writing** 🕒 (20 minutes)

You will need a pen and paper, and a timer; a kitchen timer is ideal. You can also use your phone, but turn it to Do Not Disturb before you begin.

Free-writing is a tool that is helpful for reflective, expressive and creative writing. You can use it to start your own regular writing or journaling practice. When free-writing try to...

- ➔ Write without self-editing or critiquing your words.
- ➔ Try not to cross things out, just keep going.
- ➔ Tangents are good!
- ➔ Don't worry about grammar or spelling.
- ➔ Or writing in complete sentences.
- ➔ See where the words take you.
- ➔ Keep your hand moving across the page.
- ➔ What you write doesn't have to be true.
- ➔ Trust yourself.
- ➔ Relax and enjoy the process!

Now write the words *I REMEMBER* at the top of a clean sheet of paper.

Set your timer for 10 minutes and start writing. 🕒 Use *I remember ...* as a starting place or prompt. 🖋️

In her book [*Writing Down the Bones*](#) Natalie Goldberg suggests:

"Write lots of small memories. If you fall into one large memory, write that. Just keep going. Don't be concerned if the memory happened five seconds ago or five years ago..."

When the timer goes off, **stop writing.** 🕒

Congratulations! ✨ You've finished the second part of this workbook and completed your first piece of creative writing for wellbeing!

C. 🐝 **Writing your own 'Instructions on...' poem** 🐝 (20 minutes)

You will need a pen and paper, and a timer.

👉 **Write the title of your 'Instructions on...' poem at the top of a clean sheet of paper.** What would you like to write some instructions on? (I'm sure you will have ideas of your own, but here are some examples: *Instructions on...being brave; packing your lunch; making the perfect chocolate cake; not giving in to despair; being a good friend...*)

🕒 **Set a timer for 10 minutes and begin writing.** Use the freewriting technique you've just learned to create a first draft. Write quickly. Try not to edit as you write. Keep your hand moving and let the ideas flow. **Have fun!**

🐝 When the timer goes off stand up, have a stretch. Maybe make yourself a hot drink. We're almost done!

🌱 **Sit down again and set a timer for 10 minutes.** Now it's time to redraft and edit your poem. You might do this by typing it up on a computer. Editing can mean changing a word or two, clarifying an image, and adding or adjusting the line breaks¹. Try reading the poem out loud. Again, have fun! 🏃 Think of this as playtime for your brain.

When the timer goes off, stop writing. 😊

🌟 Congratulations! You've written a poem and finished the workbook! 🌟

If you would like to help with my research, please complete this short survey about how you used the workbook.
You can [link to the survey here](#). Thank you!

¹ A line break in poetry refers to where the line of text ends on the righthand margin. In a poem where this break occurs is usually decided by the writer, rather than dictated by the width of the page. Look again at the opening lines of 'Instructions on Not Giving Up': *More than the fuchsia funnels breaking out / of the crabapple tree, more than the neighbor's / almost obscene display of cherry limbs shoving / their cotton candy-colored blossoms to the slate / sky of Spring rains, it's the greening of the trees / that really gets to me...* I have replaced the line breaks with a forward slash (/) to help show how Ada Limón's poem works. Now look back at the original to see how line breaks have helped shape the poem on the page. You can also think how these breaks affected your reading the poem out loud. Finally, you can [read more about the poetic line here](#).