

## NOTES FOR POETS ON PROOF READING

These will make you neurotic, of course. But it's in a good cause.



1. Obviously check for accuracy to the text of your poems: errors can creep in at any stage of development. If you know you're capable of making mistakes with apostrophes, ask a reliable friend to check them for you.
2. Be aware of British/American spelling and be consistent about which you prefer. Do not rely on spellcheck software: it doesn't know the difference between 'bear' and 'bare', and your 'soul' could end up under your feet.
3. Ensure that the size and type of font you have chosen to use is easy on the eye and comfortable for reading. If it is too small it will cause strain. If it is too big, it will feel like a child's primer. Check it out with a friend or compare it with a good quality poetry publication that you know works well for readers.
4. Watch out for space errors. Sometimes two spaces can slip in front of a word, instead of one. There is only *one* space after a full stop or a colon.
5. Most poems end with a full stop (there are exceptions). Do yours? It is all too easy for a full stop to wander off and never return.
6. Check ALL quote marks and apostrophes. Look out for *dumb quotes* (which are straight). They should be *smart* (i.e. curly). So **Priscilla's hat** should be **Priscilla's hat**, not **Priscilla's hat**. If Priscilla says 'Get me a glass of brandy!', she should say '**Get me a glass of brandy!**', and NOT '**Get me a glass of brandy!**' The dumb error can arrive easily when a correction is typed in.
7. Check numerals. They should be consistently formatted, not a mixture of old style (54321) and modern: 54321.
8. Check the dates on the acknowledgements page to ensure you have been published in the year and century we are actually in.
9. Check the ISB number on the acks page (if you have one) for consistency with the number on the back cover and the bar code.
10. Contents page: are the page numbers correct? (especially if you switch the running order midway through the process).
11. Contents page: are the titles in the contents page *precisely* the same as the titles on the pages? (especially if a title is, at some point, changed).
12. Acknowledgements page: proof read this scrupulously. If poems have previously appeared in magazines or anthologies, or have won competitions, you should acknowledge these. Titles normally appear in alphabetical order and they should be *correct*, not just your approximate memory. Is it '*Dark Horse*' or '*The Dark Horse*', for example.
13. Acknowledgements page: if you want to list previous publications, decide whether date order will be chronological or the reverse (most recent first).



14. Keep an eye on margins (the technical term is 'gutter'). Each left hand page should have the same margin — unless you deliberately change this. Each right hand page should have the same margin or gutter, though this will probably be wider than the left to take account of ease of reading when you open the book. If your first word almost disappears into the centre fold, your poem will suffer.
15. Check the space between the title of the poem and the first line. It will normally be the same on each page but it gets complicated when you preface your poem with a quotation, or with '*After Gerry Cambridge*' (for example). In this case, make sure all poems that do this (because there is probably more than one) follow the same spacing and formatting.
16. Check the dashes. You need to choose between *m* (—) dashes and *n* dashes (–). *M* dashes *can* be closed (no spaces before and after) or open (space before and after). You can see at a glance that *ms* are longer than *ns*. You may prefer *n* dashes. These *always* have a space before and after. If you omit the space, what you've got is a hyphen. Most important of all: be consistent.
17. The font type and size for every poem should be the same, unless you have varied it for some excellent reason (this does not include squeezing a poem into a page that's too small for it, which is like Cinderella's ugly sisters trying on the glass slipper — *disastrous*).
18. Check the headers and footers if you have any. Is your name right? Is the title of the publication the RIGHT title?
19. Consider the placing of poems that take up more than one page. If you *can* start on the left and finish on the right, do so. That way the reader knows at a glance that the poem doesn't finish at the bottom of the first page.
20. Check the position of titles. Like margins, each title should appear in precisely the same position.
21. If you have prose poems, be careful about hyphenation. Changes in format or font can split a word in a painful place. If your poem is fully justified, you need to be consistent about margins to the right as well as the left. Think about the poem in design terms: does the block of text look a) pleasing and b) legible?
22. Most publications have tiny errors in them somewhere. It's not the end of the world. If your proofing is rigorous, the error that squeezes through is likely to be one only you will notice. . . .

