

# Composing List Poems is Anything But Listless!

List poems, an ancient form with easily available examples from the Bible to Walt Whitman, are extremely useful in your poetry repertoire. They are one of the most versatile and useful formats you'll ever find. You may be serious or humorous or philosophical. Your poem may be as simple or as sophisticated as you make it. In writing list poetry, however, be sure to tend to diction, rhythm, sound devices, balance, build up (suspense)...so your list poem is more poem and less mere list. I don't want to feel as if I'm reading a grocery or "to do" list instead of a clever poem with a message tucked in. We will look at some examples on this handout to get your mind working. Have fun.

## Inventory by Dorothy Parker

Four be the things I am wiser to know:  
Idleness, sorrow, a friend, and a foe.  
Four be the things I'd been better without:  
Love, curiosity, freckles, and doubt.  
Three be the things I shall never attain:  
Envy, content, and sufficient champagne.  
Three be the things I shall have till I die:  
Laughter and hope and a sock in the eye.

The pause of the wave  
That curves downward to spray  
The ember that crumbles  
The opening flower  
And the ox that moves on  
In the quiet of power.

### which inspired this student's poem:

There are some things that get on my nerves:  
Nouns, pronouns, adjectives and adverbs.  
There are three things I really hate:  
Fighting, clumsiness, and hooking bait.

## A Likable List by John Cadwallader, student poet

I like the feel of my favorite music  
and the smell of my favorite food.  
I like the sight of a 3-point shot  
and the taste of a cold winter day  
I like the sound of pride and happiness  
the feel of praise  
the smell of victory  
the sight of trying  
I like the taste of fear  
And the sound of friendship.

## Swift Things Are Beautiful by Elizabeth Coatsworth

Swift things are beautiful  
Swallow and deer  
And lightening that falls  
Bright veined and clear  
Rivers and meteors  
Wind in the wheat  
The strong withered horse  
The runner's sure feet

And slow things are beautiful:  
The closing of day

## A Halloween Grocery List

by Kevin Blum-Schumacher, student poet

Monkey tails, frail whales  
Dirty socks, shiny rocks  
Old broom, a lizard's tomb  
Dog's hair, a rotten pear  
A clown nose, old toes  
A black cat, a weird-looking hat  
Frog tongues, smoker's lungs  
A cup of gall  
And  
A charge card to pay for it all!

## The Mall by Tara Bagan, student poet

Clothes galore  
Your favorite store  
People staying  
Movies playing  
Bags in hand  
A jewelry stand  
Hats and shades  
Video arcades  
Spending money  
Dressing funny  
Shoes and socks  
Watches and clocks  
School supplies  
Girls and guys  
Buy some CDs,  
drinks, and cookies  
Lotions and gooks  
Even books  
Let's all shop  
Until we drop.

## Love or Hate?

By Elizabeth Coons (student poet)

What I love about the wind is its constant  
    howling  
What I hate about my dog is his shrill bark.  
What I love about fire is its subtle crackling  
What I hate about television is its powerful  
    impact  
What I love about mom is her keen sensibility  
What I hate about politics is its diverse opinions  
What I love about sunsets is their vivid array  
    of colors  
What I hate about dark skies is their sinister  
    glares.  
What I love about winners is their wandering  
    ambition  
What I hate about losers is their surging envy.  
What I love about grandma is her magnanimous  
    soul.  
What I hate about snow is its piercing hands.  
What I love about the rain is its cool impulses  
What I hate about happiness is that it will soon  
    become sorrow.  
What I love about sorrow is that it will soon  
    change.

## Tuned In

By Sara Swartzendruber (student poet)

I'm a gum-chewing  
Flower-sniffing  
Record-playing  
Bead-wearing  
Song-singing  
Boy-loving  
Movie-going  
Pizza-eating  
Coke-drinking  
Fast-moving  
Day-dreaming  
Peace-loving  
Easy-going  
Ring-wearing  
School-yawning  
Party-going  
War-hating  
Level-headed  
Darn good  
Teenager

## Monotone

By Carl Sandburg (who was not my student)

The monotone of the rain is beautiful  
And the sudden rise and slow relapse  
Of the long multitudinous rain.

The sun on the hills is beautiful  
Or a captured sunset sea-flung  
Bannered with fire and gold.

A face I know is beautiful—  
With fire and gold of sky and sea  
And the peace of long warm rain.

from Walt Whitman's famous

## I Hear America Singing

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear  
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it  
    should be blithe and strong,  
The carpenter singing his as he measures his  
    plank or beam,  
The mason singing his as he makes ready for  
    work, or leaves off work.  
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his  
    boat,  
The deckhand singing on the steamboat deck  
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench,  
    the hatter singing as he stands,  
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his  
    way in the morning,  
    or at noon intermission or at sundown.  
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the  
    young wife at work, or of the girl  
    sewing or washing,  
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to  
    none else,  
The day what belongs to the day—at night the  
    party of young fellows, robust, friendly,  
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious  
    Songs

## **A Reluctant Poet**

By Daniel Shryock (student poet)

What I like about poetry is reading it  
What I hate about poetry is writing it  
What I like about water is its wetness  
What I hate about water is having to dry off  
What I like about outdoors is nature  
What I hate about outdoors is its destruction  
What I like about clocks in their time  
What I hate about clocks is their tick  
What I like about grass is green  
What I hate about grass is its growth.  
What I like about lawnmowers is using them  
What I hate about lawnmowers is their noise  
What I like about food is eating it  
What I hate about food is cooking it  
What I like about TV is watching it  
What I hate about TV is losing time watching it  
What I like about writing is wonderful pens  
What I hate about writing is the effort  
What I like about this poem is that I'm done.

### **I like...**

White tie and tails—long, dark nails  
Salt air and sand—a good jazz band  
Autumn haze—cool fall days  
Fast cars—open bars  
Talking—walking  
Attentive listening—raindrops glistening  
Sparkling rings—classy things  
Concentrating—celebrating  
A day of rest—the best

### **I hate...**

Math, calculus, geometry—algebra & symmetry.  
People who say what they mean, but don't mean  
    what they say—a very typical boring day  
Full-grown cats—fat roaches, rats  
Bad grades on hard tests—disappointments,  
    depressions, unhappiness  
Loud noises—hard choices  
Long, boring books—dirty looks  
People who don't care—not going anywhere  
Homework, housework—and hate.

By Sarah Holyfield (student poet)

## **I Hate Water**

By Destiny Gillum-Butler (student poet)

I hate water  
    cause the water on the floor made me slip  
I hate to slip  
    cause when I slipped I dropped the ring  
        you gave me  
I hate dropping things  
    cause I dropped the only thing I have to  
        help me remember you  
I hate remembering you  
    cause every time I do I cry  
I hate crying  
    cause crying makes me look like a fool  
I hate looking like a fool  
    cause when I do people laugh at me  
I hate laughing  
    cause ever since you left me, I haven't  
        been able to laugh  
        I'm too sad  
I hate being sad all the time and  
I hate laughing and  
I hate crying and  
I hate looking like a fool and  
I hate remembering things and  
I hate dropping things and  
I hate slipping and  
I hate water  
But most of all I hate you  
Cause you left me here in this cruel world  
Couldn't you have taken me with you?

### ***Counting Out Rhyme by Edna St. Vincent Millay***

***Silver bark of beech, and willow***

***Bark of yellow birch and yellow***

***Twig of willow.***

***Stripe of green in moosewood maple***

***Colour seen in leaf of apple***

***Bark of popple***

***Wood of popple pale as moonbeam***

***Wood of oak for yoke and barn-beam***

***Wood of hornbeam.***

***Silver bark of beech and hollow***

***Stem of elder, tall and yellow***

***Twig of willow.***

***(note the sound and other sensory images —what fun this famous poet must have had here)***

