

WORKING IN POETRY

This free guide comes from the Society of Authors' Poetry and Spoken Word Group (PSWG). It is designed to signpost useful resources for poets and spoken word artists and help you to navigate ways of working and earning through poetry. For information about national and local opportunities for poets and spoken word artists, see also our [Opportunities for Poets](#), available to download along with other resources from the [PSWG webpage](#). Resources which are available only to SoA members are denoted '(M)'.

Magazines and Anthologies

Publishers will look for a track record of being published when considering your work, so publishing your individual poems in magazines and journals (whether print or digital) is a good way to get started. Some magazines pay, and all should give you a free copy of the issue. For UK magazine listings, see:

- The Writers' & Artists' Yearbook (includes non-poetry-specific magazines)
- [Poetry Magazine Publishers](#) | [National Poetry Library](#) | [Southbank Centre](#) (includes print and online magazines)
- Robin Houghton's [UK and Irish Magazines Spreadsheet](#) is a database of magazine deadlines (sign up available via [website](#))

Pamphlets

A lot of poets will publish at least one pamphlet before putting out a full collection, allowing you to experiment with curating a smaller body of work and (hopefully) gaining attention for it. Some useful resources include:

- [Poetry Publishers](#) | [National Poetry Library](#) | [Southbank Centre](#)

If you are considering self-publishing and are an SoA member, you can [contact the advisory team](#) for resources on self-publishing.

TOP TIP: PROTECT YOUR RIGHTS

Whenever you agree to publish, ensure you know exactly what you're agreeing to. Copyright should usually remain with you. You should receive a contract from any prospective publisher whether a pamphlet or full collection. It's essential that you read this properly. SoA members are entitled to unlimited, bespoke advice on their contracts. Seek advice before you sign! [Find out more.](#)

Payment for Poems

Most magazines will have information on their website about whether they pay contributors. Anthologies from larger publishers should offer a fee for inclusion of your work, while smaller ones may offer copies of the book instead. See the [SoA guidance on rates and fees](#) for more information.

Reading/Performance Fees & Expenses

Often you will be expected to read for free at smaller local events and magazine or anthology launches. It is up to you whether or not to take these opportunities, but do consider how much money you are having to spend in travel and accommodation as set against the opportunity to market your work and meet people. If you're asked to read by bigger events or festivals where there is a charge for tickets, think about your right to be paid for your work and time. See the [SoA guidance on rates and fees](#) for more information. Bespoke advice is also available for SoA members.

Building an audience

Building an audience as a poet often means putting yourself out there in multiple ways:

- Attending live events and open mics is a great way to share your work, connect with other poets, and start building a supportive community.
- Social media can also play a huge role. Regularly posting your poems, updates, or short videos of you reading your work aloud not only helps audiences engage but also makes it easier for event organisers to see your style and consider booking you for gigs.
- Beyond social media platforms, having a Substack, newsletter, or blog allows people to subscribe to your updates and you can create opportunities for paid, exclusive content.
- A personal website can also be valuable, serving as a central hub where people can easily find and share your work, upcoming events, and booking information.
- Consistency is key – posting regularly on social media or routinely on Substack helps the algorithm favour your content and reassures your audience that you're active, building both trust and visibility over time.

Prizes

Invest any entrance fees wisely; make sure that you're comfortable with the terms and conditions and beware of prizes that take exclusive rights or oblige you to undertake extra work. SoA members are welcome to seek advice on competition terms and conditions if unsure. The Poetry Library maintains a list of UK poetry competitions [here](#). The SoA runs the free-to-enter [Eric Gregory Award](#) for poets under 30.

TOP TIP: MONEY FOR NOTHING or near enough

If you have anything published in print, it is well worth signing up to the [Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society \(ALCS\)](#), which distributes money from photocopying and scanning licensing. ALCS membership is free with SoA membership. You should also register for [Public Lending Right \(PLR\)](#), which ensures you are paid when your book is loaned from public libraries.

Funding and Subsidies

[Arts Council England](#) offers funding to poets for specific projects and the Society of Authors has [grants](#) for works in progress, access, and research. Keep an eye out for subsidised writers' residencies too. For more information about organisations that offer funding opportunities see [Opportunities for Poets](#).

Residencies and Commissions

Residencies give poets time, space, and financial support to develop their work, often in exchange for some engagement with a host community or institution. Usually, they're either a subsidised getaway for you to work on a project of your choice or they ask you to engage in a community, offer workshops and write a new piece on a theme.

Who usually offers them:

- Universities and schools
- Arts centres, theatres, museums, and galleries
- Writers' retreat organisations (e.g. Arvon, Hawthornden, Cove Park)
- International cultural exchange programmes

What's usually involved:

- A stipend or fee
- Accommodation and/or studio space
- Delivering workshops or readings for the host community
- Producing new work/commission during or after the residency

Teaching and Running Workshops

Teaching can be a significant source of income for poets. Workshops in schools, universities, community settings, and festivals not only pay but also help build reputation. Benefits can include a regular, reliable income, opportunities to inspire new writers and expanding your profile and networks.

The skills required often include lesson planning and facilitation, working with different age groups and abilities and clear communication and adaptability. Training is available through arts organisations and education networks to support poets in developing these skills.

Editing and Mentoring

Many poets supplement their income through editing and mentoring. Editing usually means giving detailed feedback on poems, manuscripts, or collections. This is often technical, focused on form, language, and structure. Mentoring tends to be longer-term, guiding a writer's development, providing encouragement, and helping them set and meet creative goals. Both require strong critical skills and sensitivity to the poet's voice, but mentoring involves more sustained personal support. Fees can vary depending on the scope of work, but both can provide reliable income and help you build professional relationships.

ABOUT US

The Society of Authors (SoA)

The SoA is the UK's largest trade union for all types of writers, illustrators and literary translators, at all stages of their careers. We have been advising individuals and speaking out for the profession for more than a century. Members receive unlimited free advice on all aspects of the profession, including confidential clause-by-clause contract vetting, and a wide range of exclusive offers.

We campaign and lobby on the issues that affect authors and hold a hundreds of events annually across the UK and online. [Find out more about membership.](#)

The SoA's Poetry and Spoken Word Group (PSWG)

The SoA's Poetry and Spoken Word Group (PSWG) is a professional community for poets and spoken word artists. We come together to discuss issues affecting poets and the spoken word community, offer advice and support, and raise the profile of poetry and performance. We run events to give members the opportunity to socialise, share experiences and learn about topics relevant to their craft. [Find out more.](#)

Other Relevant SoA Guides

This guide is one of several designed to support poets at all stages of their career.

You may also find useful:

- [Author Care: A Toolkit for Authors](#)
- [Basics of Self-Publishing](#) (M)
- [Competition submissions best practice guidance](#)
- [Fee-based Commissions](#) (M)
- [Forms of Collaboration](#)
- [Guidance for Authors Speaking at Events](#) (M)
- [Opportunities for Poets](#)
- [Prizes and Competitions](#) (M)