

Clichés are those worn-out phrases that everybody uses all the time. A few examples:

- *as red as a rose*
- *as strong as an oak tree*
- *sparkled like diamonds*
- *light as a feather*

Sometimes clichés can become a habit. It’s easier to say, “She ran like the wind” than it is to think of something original, like “She ran as fast as a taxi on a New York freeway.” Using a cliché is easier than coming up with something new and fresh, but it’s boring.

Avoiding clichés requires a certain independence. Let go of everything you have been taught about the world. Think of yourself as a child, seeing the world for the first time with wide open eyes and a wide open mind.

Rewrite the clichés below. Be funny or serious, witty or wise, but be original.

1. His hands were cold as ice.
2. We were packed into the car like sardines.
3. She is as strong as an ox.
4. His tummy shook like a bowlful of Jell-O.
5. It was a dark and stormy night.

Now read the paragraph below. Identify all the clichés.

I felt lazy as a sloth that afternoon. It was hot as a desert outside, and by the time I pulled myself off the couch and over to the window, it was also raining cats and dogs. There was no way I was going to walk the dog in the rain. He would just have to wait.

Besides, I needed something to eat. I hadn’t eaten for a full hour, and I was so hungry I could eat a horse. (Mom says if I keep eating so often, I’ll be as big as a house, but what does she know?) I looked around in the refrigerator for five or ten minutes before I realized that finding a candy bar in the midst of all those rotting vegetables would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. As luck would have it, Dad walked in before I’d shut the refrigerator door. True to character, he said it, his all-time favorite phrase: “Are you getting something to eat or trying to cool down the whole house? Electricity costs money, you know. Do you think money grows on trees?”

Rewrite the paragraph, replacing the clichés you underlined with more creative language.

Imagine that one of your favorite foods is sitting right in front of you on your desk. Imagine eating that food.

Think about how the food plays with all your senses. What does it *look* like? When you pick it up to take a bite, how does the food *feel*? Do you *hear* anything as you take a bite, like a crunch? How does the food *smell*? How does it *taste*?

Keep the images in your mind as you begin a poem about your favorite food. Start with the word gathering steps below. Remember that word gathering involves collecting words, phrases and sentences about your subject. The point is to write as much as possible and not to worry about doing it “right.” You should concentrate on getting interesting details down on paper. Later you will choose the best words and phrases for your final poem.

WORD GATHERING

Step 1: Imagine that you live in the land of your favorite food. Write a statement about that food, being sure to include the name of the food in your sentence.

Example: *I could exist forever on just linguini.*

Step 2: Describe your food. What are its parts, traits, characteristics, ingredients, etc.? Try to include as many senses as possible in your description.

Example: *Long, lean linguini smells like it slithered through a nest of garlic.*

Step 3: Describe how to eat your favorite food. Be specific. Try to use strong, interesting verbs.

Example: *I twirl the linguini around on my fork and then slurp.*

Step 4: If your food could think, what would its thoughts be?

Example: *The strands of linguini nervously wait for the moment when I will plop a giant meatball on top of them. They are worried about being squashed.*

Step 5: How does your food make you hunger for it? What does it “do”? Remember, you don’t have to think logically here. Use your imagination.

Example: *Basil and garlic leap out of the sauce and yank me to the table.*

Step 6: Is there something people should know about your food? If so, tell what.

Example: *Linguini is dangerous. It’s as addictive as nicotine.*

Now you are ready to go on to the next stages of writing your poem. See “Extracting a Poem,” “Revising” and “Sharing” (pages 135-153).