



How to ... put on a poetry reading

By Andrew Parkes of [clinicpresents](#)

Venue

- Consider readings you've attended and spaces that worked for you. Popular venues include pubs, theatre-bars, galleries and bookshops. The best venues are lively, but with a separate space: you want minimum distraction from noise or people wandering around mid-reading.
- More unusual spaces give your reading an edge. We've enjoyed events in an abandoned strip club, an outdoor play park and in the basement of a paint factory: **where there's room for an audience, there's room for poetry.**
- Find out if the venue has a PA and, if not, whether one is appropriate. Poets may need amplification in a very large space or over background noise, but reading with a mic in a small/quiet room is overwhelming. No one wants to be deafened by poetry.
- Draw up rough parameters before settling on a venue (i.e. proposed dates, rough audience size and demographic, whether you can hire a venue or need a free one), as these can help you choose your location.
- Think about accessibility: will everyone attending and involved in your event be able to get into the space comfortably? Is it wheelchair accessible? Are there enough places to sit? There's nothing worse than sitting on a hard floor during a reading (or having to read over people fidgeting.)
- Contact your venue well before your event to iron out any queries and guarantee you're in their schedule. Also make sure to maintain communication in the build-up, so you are not forgotten

Line Up

- If your reading is to launch a book or magazine, the majority of your readers/performers should be from this publication.
- If it's a more spontaneous event, try to strike a balance between regular favourites and poets your audience may not have seen before; a mix of old and new makes for distinctive events and guarantees a returning audience.
- Give thought to the order in which poets will read, considering which readers complement each other and which ones need some distance between them.

Filthy Lucre

- If you're hiring the venue you may need to charge for entry: look at similar events for a reference on what to charge. Eventbrite or similar online ticket sellers can deal with the transactions for you, but will charge a fee.
- Some venues do a deal: they get the bar-takings, you take the ticket income. Write down your agreement and ensure both sides sign it off.
- If selling tickets on the door, make sure you have someone to manage this – you will **always** need more change than you think.
- Think about your poets/readers here. Does your budget run to offering a fee or a share of the ticket sales? If not, be up-front and don't fudge the issue. What you can do instead to make it worth their while? Offer them guest tickets? Set up a stall so they can sell their books?
- At the very least, it should not cost your poets to perform, so cover their travel expenses where possible.

Rattle Up the Crowds

- More people will say they are coming than will actually turn up, so be sure to advertise thoroughly – and don't get cross.
- Encourage your venue to include your event on its website and in its calendar, and do its share of promotion.

- Your poets/readers have their own networks: treat them well and encourage them to promote the reading, especially on social media.
- Add your reading to local events and poetry calendars. [The Poetry Library](#) and [Write Out Loud](#) have good ones. If your event is on National Poetry Day – 28 September 2017 - list on the [National Poetry Day events map](#).
- An online presence is very important but that doesn't have to be a website: a good, up-to-date Facebook page is often better.
- Use your network: organisations are often very happy to share marketing material. Think about who your audience is and aim for related organisations with a similar demographic.
- Make this easy: sympathetic organisations will often post a pre-written 'suggested' tweet online, or include a pre-written bit of newsletter text, but they're unlikely to type it out themselves.

The Reading Itself

- It's possible to have too much of a good thing. As a rule, a reading shouldn't last more than two hours in all and you probably want around 5-10 minutes from each poet. Audiences need comfort breaks after an hour.
- Poets always overrun and punters are always late. Tell your poets they've got 5 minutes if you want them to do 8. Advertise the start time as (at least) 15 minutes before you actually want to begin.
- Ensure someone introduces the event and readers, so your audience has an idea of the its structure and some context about the poets.
- Keep these intros short though – people want poets, not a long list of their accolades – and break it down to introduce the readers in each section, rather than all in one go.
- Lastly, make sure you've got help on the night. It's impossible to compere, run the door and a PA at the same time. Recruit everyone you can: friends, colleagues and family.