



## How to ... put on a poetry reading

By Andrew Parkes of [clinicpresents](http://clinicpresents.com)

### Venue

- Consider readings you've attended and spaces that worked for you. Popular venues include pubs, theatre-bars, galleries and bookshops (of course). Try to find a venue with a quiet space to avoid distraction from noise or people wandering around mid-reading.
- More unusual spaces can give your reading a bit of edge or site-specificity. 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, the majority of your readers or 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 good mix of old and new makes for distinctive events and guarantees a returning audience.
- Give some thought to the order in which poets will read, considering which readers would complement each other and which ones might 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.
- If selling tickets on the door, make sure you have someone to manage this – they will **always** need more change than you think.
- Think about your readers here too. Is there enough in your budget to offer them a fee or a share of the ticket sales? If not, think about what you can do instead. Can you mention their new book in your intro? Buy them a drink? Offer them a couple of guest tickets? Can you set up a stall so they can sell their books?
- At the very least, it should not cost your poets to perform, so try to 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 readers are invaluable here: treat them well and encourage them to promote the reading where they can, 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 around National Poetry Day (late Sept to mid Oct), list on its map/calendar.
- An online presence is very important but that doesn't have to be a website: a good, up-to-date Facebook page is often far 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.
- Be sure to give your audience a couple of breaks too, so they can top up drinks, nip to the loo and re-focus for subsequent sections.
- 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.
- It's generally good to have someone to introduce the event and readers, so as to give your audience some idea of the structure of the night and a bit of context about the poets.
- Keep these intros short though – people are there to hear the 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 – your friends, colleagues and family can all be invaluable here.