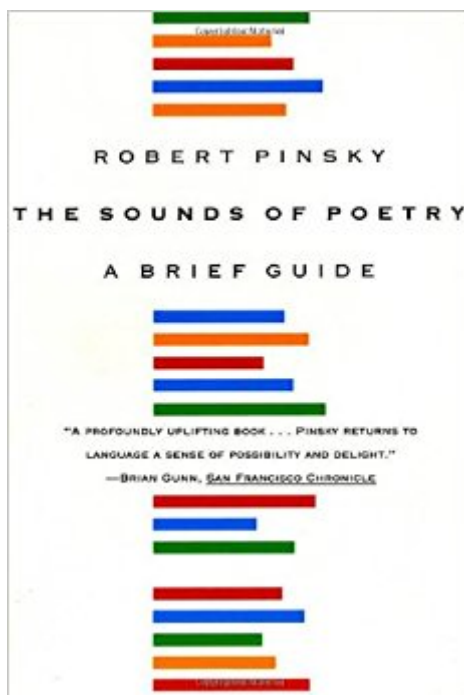


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# The Sounds Of Poetry: A Brief Guide



## Synopsis

The Poet Laureate's clear and entertaining account of how poetry works. "Poetry is a vocal, which is to say a bodily, art," Robert Pinsky declares in *The Sounds of Poetry*. "The medium of poetry is the human body: the column of air inside the chest, shaped into signifying sounds in the larynx and the mouth. In this sense, poetry is as physical or bodily an art as dancing." As Poet Laureate, Pinsky is one of America's best spokesmen for poetry. In this fascinating book, he explains how poets use the "technology" of poetry--its sounds--to create works of art that are "performed" in us when we read them aloud. He devotes brief, informative chapters to accent and duration, syntax and line, like and unlike sounds, blank and free verse. He cites examples from the work of fifty different poets--from Shakespeare, Donne, and Herbert to W. C. Williams, Frost, Elizabeth Bishop, C. K. Williams, Louise Glück, and Frank Bidart. This ideal introductory volume belongs in the library of every poet and student of poetry.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

While it's hardly the most traveled of literary destinations, poetry has suffered from no shortage of guidebooks. Still, these poetic baedekers tend to get bogged down in terminology and historical hairsplitting, while the actual music gets lost in the shuffle. We should be thankful, then, for Robert Pinsky's brief, wonderfully readable volume, in which he zooms in on verse as acoustic artifact: "When I say to myself a poem by Emily Dickinson or George Herbert, the artist's medium is my breath. The reader's breath and hearing embody the poet's words. This makes the art physical, intimate, vocal, and individual." Not that Poet Laureate Pinsky gets vague or touchy-feely on us.

Poetry, like God, is in the details, and the author starts with the building blocks, the amino acids, of verse: accent and duration. Even the most jaded of readers will benefit from his syllable-by-syllable examination of Thomas Campion's "Now Winter Nights Enlarge" and Wallace Stevens's "Sunday Morning." Moving on through discussions of syntax and line, meter and rhyme (or lack thereof), Pinsky enlists both the usual suspects (Shakespeare, Frost, Hardy, Eliot, Bishop) and some less customary ones (Gilbert & Sullivan, Louise Gluck, and the splendid James McMichael) to make his points. These poems are, in some sense, teaching tools for the author. Yet even his on-the-fly commentary causes us to see them in a new light. Here he is, for example, on the near-monotonous minimalism of W.C. Williams's "To a Poor Old Woman": "The poem dramatizes the taking in of a supposedly ordinary experience, and the playful, almost hectoring repetitions are like an effective sermon in praise of simplicity." *The Sounds of Poetry* is no less effective a sermon. It leaves your ear (and your heart) attuned to the pleasurable play of poetic language and persuades you that hearing is, indeed, believing. --James Marcus --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Though this book is written by a celebrated poet (the poet laureate of the United States), there is little to be gleaned from it. The work is organized in five chapters about the mechanics of poetry: accent, syntax, terms, chimes, and some notes on blank and free verse. This title, oddly written in a humorless, academic first person for the novice, tells us more about what Pinsky thinks than about the subtle merging of the oral and written craft of English verse. Perhaps straining to make the mysteries of poetry accessible, the passages define, advise, and recommend like a set of cobbled lecture notes. Better to stick with Alfred Corn's quality guide, *The Poem's Heartbeat* (LJ 4/1/97). Pinsky's endeavor is a disappointing enterprise. --Scott Hightower, NYU/Gallatin, New York Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I've studied poetry in high school and then again for a semester last year. Pinsky provides the serious student with an enjoyable dive into the most helpful methods to read poetry. He has many diverse suggestions for what might help a reader (beginner to advanced) to gain a wider access to a poem's meaning and beauty. It is a piece to aid in the study and appreciation of poetry. It heightened my own enjoyment of poetry and the book itself is fun to read and full of great poetry used as examples and exercises. Strongly recommend it for readers of all levels.

As one would expect, any book on the craft of writing poetry by Robert Pinsky would be exceptional. This was no exception! True to the poetic stance of brevity, this book provides a lot of information in 129 pages. As a published poet who also teaches poetry, I found this book helpful not only for my personal improvement, but for tips to share on how one can better appreciate poetry.

A quick read that invites many re-readings for those serious about learning about the methods of poetry. He writes in a way that anyone can understand even if they have no background in literature or poetry. Highly recommended for those discovering poetry who want more depth about the methods to the madness.

Good for students in writing class for poetry understanding

wonderful book, what I wanted. Arrived promptly

A very good addition to my library.

This book enlightened me regarding both the nuts-and-bolts and the art of poetry. I would recommend it to a thoughtful reader. However, I had to read a couple of sections more than once, and it took me a while to get through it. I'd say it's a little bit "wordy." I learned from it. I'm glad I read it. I now appreciate more of the remarkable "language behind the language."

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