

MY FAVORITE BOOK ON POETRY WRITING

My favorite book about writing poetry is one by Richard Hugo, [The Triggering Town](#). This book has had a huge influence on my style of writing. The Poetry Foundation has a good essay, referenced above. It quotes his work, and its introduction says:

Richard Hugo was a Pacific Northwest poet whose work often used frayed landscapes—real and imagined, external and internal—as a base from which to explore themes of memory, loss, and obsession.

His book of poetics, [The Triggering Town](#) (1979), contains a series of essays arguing against the idea that a poet should "write what you know," advocating instead an approach to poetry based on triggering subjects and words. In this title essay to the collection, Hugo explains triggering subjects, using the example of towns, as points of entry into the realm of the imagination. Hugo suggests that new poets take emotional ownership of an imagined, or barely-known, town, rather than trying to convey the actual hometown in which "the imagination cannot free itself to seek the unknowns."

Once a triggering subject is located as a base from which to write, Hugo argues that a poet should turn his attention to the play and music of the language, allowing a private language—a personal connection, and perhaps frequent return, to certain words, and the richness of the poet's complex associations with those words—to drive the poem forward. Notes Hugo, "Your triggering subjects are those that ignite your need for words. When you are honest to your feel-ings, that triggering town chooses you. Your words used your way will generate your meanings. Your obsessions lead you to your vocabulary. Your way of writing locates, even creates, your inner life. The relation of you to your language gains power. The relation of you to the triggering subject weakens."

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69402/the-triggering-town>