

It is said that Pablo Picasso once stated, "Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist." A writer is an artist with words, crafting entire universes and histories onto the page with the stroke of a keyboard or a pen.

For Assignment 3, you worked within the constraints of rules. For Assignment 4, we ask that you try breaking these rules.

Experimental poetry plays heavily with the construction of stanzas, with meter, with line breaks, and with the overall shape of the poem. For example, at first glance, the Week 4 reading "Drone," by Solmaz Sharif, appears to be prose, but a closer look reveals that the line breaks of the poem have been replaced with dots; selected sounds and images are emphasized through the application of italics rather than line breaks. The Week 4 reading "Reading Celan at the Liberation War Museum," by Tarfia Faizullah, stretches rather than compresses the poem's form; the poem embraces and then discards a series of traditional forms as it moves from stanza to stanza, creating an unexpected and startling series of rhythms.

The writer of an experimental play may use structure and/or character in nontraditional ways. In the Week 4 reading Return to Haifa, by Boaz Gaon, the play jumps back and forth in time; as it unfolds, the structure ignores the constraints of time and place to bring past and present characters together within a scene. In their Week 4 videos, both Matthew Maguire and Tameka Cage Conley discuss using character in surprising ways: for example, Cage Conley discusses the voices she gave to objects and spirits in Gathering of Sons and explains what she hoped to achieve through the construction of interactions between those human and non-human characters. Like Faizullah's "Reading Celan at the Liberation War Museum," the Week 4 reading "Inheritance" by Elaine Romero reprises the tradition of the Greek chorus to create a dual sense of familiarity and disorientation for the reader.

For Assignment 4, please choose one of the following options:

Option A: Rework the poem or the scene you wrote for Assignment 3. Find the work you submitted for Assignment 3 and take a long look at it. You've worked hard to create a poem or a scene that honors traditional forms while examining a traditional cultural role: notice its strengths; notice the moments your classmates may have said were exciting or interesting. Notice what you love most about it. Copy and paste the part you love the most - the line, the monologue, the stanza - into a new Word document.

If you are writing a poem, start playing with that scrap of words. Push it into new realms. Break up the lines, break up the meter, play with the white space, delete every nonessential word. Then build upward into a new poem, on the same traditional cultural role. What new images might form on your page? What wild new rhythms might emerge?

If you are writing the first scene of a play, take that scrap of dialogue or monologue and imagine

what new lines might surround it - still focusing on the same traditional cultural role. What new events might break up your traditional timeline? What new characters might strain your reader's imagination? What elements of unreality might bring you to show the reader this cultural role in a completely different way?

Option B: Expand the poem or the scene you wrote for Assignment 3. Again, find the work you submitted for Assignment 3 and take a long look at it. You've worked hard to create a poem or a scene that honors traditional forms while examining a traditional cultural role - so again, notice its strengths; notice the moments your classmates may have said were exciting or interesting. Notice what you love most about it. Copy and paste the entire poem or scene into a new Word document.

If it is a poem, think about where it starts and stops. Must those be its first and last lines? Is there room for its form to bulge or sway in the center? Find ways to expand it. You might try to double its length, or to give it an entirely new shape on the page. Notice how you do this: do you find more to say about this cultural tradition, or do you find an image or a phrase that calls for deepening or repetition?

If it is the first scene of a play, think about the story it is beginning to tell. These are your characters; this is your place and time. What are the limitations of these people and their context? What can you do to push past those limitations? Could three characters become three sides of the same person, or could a fourth character be an object, a spirit, a disembodied voice, a Greek chorus that does not speak? Could time or place work in strange, unexpected ways? Notice how you do this: do you instinctively move toward experimentation with character, or with structure? As you write, does this cultural tradition look the same to your characters - and to your reader, your audience - as it did before?