

# Tupelo Press Writing Conferences

## December Online “Perfect Fifteen”

**Tupelo Press Writing Conferences, Online Perfect 15 Poetry Conference,  
Friday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> – Monday, December 6<sup>th</sup>**

Warm congratulations on your acceptance into this conference, the only one of its kind, for poets who are serious about their writing. We guarantee a vitally important experience, one that will elevate your work and fill you with ideas about craft for, and the inner life of, your poems, your revisions and your future writing. Most important, either you will end the conference with 10-15 poems ready to send out, or you will leave with the tools to make those poems publish-worthy.

This December we are featuring four faculty members (depending on enrollment), and you will get to work with each one. This means that you will receive closest possible personal attention, and derive unmatched opportunities for growth. If you’ve never worked with Kristina Marie Darling, Kevin Prufer or Cole Swenson, you’re in for a brilliant time. As Publisher and Artistic Director of Tupelo Press, it’s my pleasure to roll up my sleeves and work with you as well.

### **Our coming time together:**

In this conference, working in small groups of participants (with rotating faculty) you will receive deep, transformative attention to your work, both at the level of the individual poems, and in a broader exploration of a healthy packet of poems. Some of you have already elected to have a full manuscript review with me, and there’s still time to take advantage of this offering post-conference, if you feel so motivated.

Reap the benefit of epiphanies about your own writing through insights and instruction offered by the faculty, each of whom is an editor, publisher, and/or renowned writer. You will also gain a practical knowledge borne of an inside look at the markets for your writing. Which journals and presses are right for submissions of individual poems, for submissions of chapbooks, and for submissions of full-length books? We will help you design an effective submission plan.

### **How to prepare:**

**Select a packet consisting of 15 unpublished poems.** Please plan to come prepared to work hard on each of those poems in furtherance of better realizing your artistic gifts and aims.

### **Manuscript Option:**

**If you have registered for the full or chapbook length manuscript review option with me (Jeffrey Levine), please make certain to get your manuscript to me as soon as possible. Please let Kirsten Miles know of your interest [kmiles@tupelopress.org](mailto:kmiles@tupelopress.org)**

**I will read your manuscript thoroughly and annotate if fully, getting it back to you prior the conference (or post-conference, if you so choose). I review manuscripts both with attention to the individual poems, and the possibilities for the manuscript as a whole.**

# Tupelo Press Writing Conferences

## December Online “Perfect Fifteen”

Even though I’m reviewing your entire manuscript, please see the “pre-conference work” in this packet. You’ll want to dive into it in order to make the most of our time together, and of the conference as a whole.

### Pre-Conference Work:

In preparation for our conference, take a look at the following questions and spend some quality time thinking about, and answering them.

1. **Select and have readily available throughout the conference a packet consisting of 15 unpublished poems.** Please plan to come prepared to work on each of those poems in furtherance of better realizing your artistic gifts and aims.
2. Write briefly about 3-5 important influences upon your writing. These influences should be widely inclusive: writers, contemporary or past, poets or prose writers, philosophers, scientists, mathematicians, chefs, linguists, etc.

### Other questions and challenges to consider:

3. Have your poems found an idea? Do your poems develop an idea? If so, what is that idea? If not, how might an idea (or shadow story) be discovered hiding between the lines?
4. Where do you see the possibility of layers being peeled back? What discoveries might be made by peeling back those layers? What risks might be taken by peeling back those layers?
5. Are there places in the poem where you are substituting telling for showing? (Yes, I know that’s basic stuff, but far too often passed off as “old” advice.) In other words, where can you rely on nouns and verbs more than adjectives and adverbs to bring the reader and yourself more fully—more bodily—into the experience(s) suggested by the poem.
6. What *senses* are invoked by the poem in order to provide a sensory experience of its material? What other senses might be employed, and how? How might a poem live in the sensory world, rather than the explanatory world?
7. Where has the poem used gestures—that is to say human gestures—to make the poem more tangible and tactile?
8. Are there phrases or strategies that feel wholly original?
9. Are there phrases and or strategies that might be thought of as mannerisms?
10. Have you found a way to experiment in some regard, large or small, in your approach to the poem—either in how the poem is choreographed on the page, or in some innovative form, some sort of hybridizing, or collaging. Take a poem or two

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and try incorporating some hybridizing of form and/or some collaging (i.e., finding “outside” sources to incorporate into the poem).

11. If the poem involves a personal experience or emotion, in what way does the poem make that experience or emotion transcend the merely personal? In other words, for example, what makes your suffering or triumph so special? Make it special by appealing to something outside of the self, something related to universal experience.
12. Does your poem permit for the possibility of something ecstatic?
13. Think carefully about what makes each poem “matter,” about how each speaker goes about revealing (or occluding) what matters to the poem, the speaker, the poet, and the book.

**Finally, in advance of the conference as preparation for Kristina’s presentation on “The Shadow Story,” (and to exponentially enhance what you take from it), please note the following:**

In a recent craft essay that appeared in *The Black Warrior Review*, Jennifer Cheng notes that “every story has a shadow story.” The “shadow story” haunts the narrative proper, following the implicit or explicit arc of your poems with the utmost fidelity, but never making itself fully known. When considering a packet of poems, this “shadow story” can be incredibly meaningful, even more so than what is plainly stated in the poems.

In preparation for our discussion, make a list of all the elements of plot and narrative we are given in your packet. Then consider the following questions:

- What is left unsaid in each individual poem, and in the larger arc of your packet, and why?
- What is the story of that silence?
- What do these silences reveal about the speaker(s) of your poems and their emotional/psychic landscapes?
- Where in your packet of poems could you potentially exercise greater restraint, allowing the silence to speak?

Please think through these questions in advance of our discussions. We will talk about ways of using silence in poetry collections, and how what is left unsaid can heighten the impact of what’s already on the page.

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### CONFERENCE SCHEDULE:

**FRIDAY AFTERNOON:** you will receive your online conference \*link via email well in advance, and a reminder during the morning, well before our 3 pm introductions, with BYO wine and cheese, and a full orientation and overview of what’s in store for the weekend. **We’ll also have a participant reading!**

**Saturday and Sunday:** workshops begin at 10 am EST to accommodate those in all US mainland time zones. Morning sessions will run from 10:00 to 1:00 pm, and afternoons sessions from 2:30 pm to 5:30 pm. You will have assignments to work on in the off hours. Each of the faculty will rotate among small, intimate work groups.

**NOTE:** There will be several built-in breaks each day, including generous time for lunch and snacks.

### **SATURDAY**

Participants will work on their packets of poems, in small groups, and faculty will rotate among those groups, so that each participant will have the opportunity of working with each faculty member at least once. We’ll make liberal use of the “share screen” online options.

In order to prepare each participant further for the following day’s work, day one will conclude with a homework assignment.

### **SUNDAY**

Sunday will be a continuation of the previous day’s work, and further, will address the “homework” brought to the session by each participant.

### **MONDAY MORNING**

Overview of publishing nuts and bolts with advice on where, when and how to submit individual packets of, along with proprietary information about how to “improve the odds,” including an unforgettable segment on literary citizenship.

Finally, you will have a participatory craft talk by Kristina Marie Darling on “The Shadow Story.”

**\*For our previous online conferences, we use ZOOM,** which is an easy-to-use online application that’s gotten a lot of positive attention and use during our months of sheltering and “remote’

***We faculty so very much look forward to working with you in just a few weeks!***

***Warmly, Jeffrey Levine, Publisher & Artistic Director, Tupelo Press***