Found poems take existing texts and manipulate them to create original poems. They are often referred to as literary “collage”. Original sources can be newspaper clippings, speeches, existing poems, books, etc.

This type of poetry gained relevance in the 1900’s alongside the pop art of Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein. The above excerpt is from 20th century poet John Ashbery’s “To a Waterfowl”. In just this section, Ashbery borrows from seven other poems, including T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets 4: Little Gidding* and Shakespeare’s *Sonnet 94*.

To craft poems, artists use techniques such as cutting and rearranging text or writing ‘two-voice’ poems, in which they take a line from a source and respond to it in their own voice.

Go, lovely rose,
This is no country for old men. The young
Midwinter spring is its own season
And a few lilies blow. They that have power to hurt, and will do none.
Looking as if she were alive, I call.
The vapours weep their burthen to the ground.
Blackout Poetry

A poet starts with established text and redacts from it until a new, original poem is formed.

Our focus is on blackout poetry, a form of found poetry in which a poet chooses an original text and eliminates words until forming an original poem.
Poetry and Process

take what is ‘yours’ and make it ‘ours’

Process is the unique perspective we bring to the creation of translating our ideas to the poetic page. Process, the way we write a poem, captures the struggle of articulating experiences to our audience, and the myriad of ways a poet can try to engage those translations. We often grapple with large, abstract concepts (emotive and charged by our feelings towards a subject: joy, fear, injustice, memory). Ultimately, through the creative process, you are taking what is yours and making it ours.
Half of the fun is choosing the original source and medium.

Found poetry provides us with an opportunity to better express our process. In blackout poetry, half of the fun is choosing a source and deciding how you’d like to ‘perform’ the poem. Poets can choose anything from a full-length book to an old grocery list in conjunction with markers, paint, the highlighter tool of a word processor, etc.

It challenges us to find new ways to communicate our large, abstract concepts.
Craft provides the tools essential for poetry: compression of imagery, the carrying capacity of a metaphor, beautiful economy of language. Understanding craft helps writers create successful metaphors and conceit; how to break a line and why/effects (enjambment vs end stops); rhythm and meter; development of voice, and how to revise, etc.
Applying Craft

How does craft help you find the Found poem?

How is craft applied to blackout poetry? Think about what you know about craft as you begin to look at the text, circling words, blacking out text... what about your knowledge of craft helps you conjure subject—images—metaphor – theme towards the surface of a new text?
The O Mission Repo is a full-length book of blackout poetry and a perfect example of the power of writing poetry in this way. Because it’s written atop the 9-11 Commission Report, the already daring themes are even more eye-catching and evocative.

It also utilizes a variety of techniques such as using a translucent highlighter to black out pages so that the original text is still visible to the reader. The title itself is crafted by blacking out the phrase “The Commission Report”.
A quick Google search yields thousands of examples of blackout poetry. Many are crafted so that they also form a piece of visual art.
Why Blackout Poetry?

- Escaping writer’s block
- Introduction to poetry
- Creating evocative poetry
- Communicating through process
- Practicing poetic craft

Blackout poetry is a good exercise for any writer, as it can help provide fresh inspiration and get the brain moving in new ways. It can introduce a poet to themes they wouldn’t normally think to write about and help with brainstorming.

It is also a great introductory exercise for new writer, as it may feel less daunting than starting with a blank page.

As is evident from *The O Mission Repo*, using an original source can help to pack even more of a punch.