Fermentation (A Generative Writing Workshop)

We will bubble and froth words like the yeast in the air that rises sour dough bread, fungi morph grapes into wine, bacteria process cabbage into sauerkraut. Words that show action are our micros. We will ignite our senses like sugar activates yeast. We will ferment observations into engaging prose or poetry full of imagery.

This workshop is different from others that I taught because this craft you will apply after you got something written, knows its directions and you like where it is going.

1. We will talk about action words. What they are and what they do.
2. Read examples
3. Each one of us will create our own word pool of action words from what we will find on a printed page. Then ferment them.

When we write, we write for somebody. Even if is just for you because you are a somebody. Regardless if you write a memoir or poems to share with family friends or for any genera with the hope of publication, you want to keep the reader interested so they will read with pleasure and with excitement. But remember write to feel good and discover.

1. The Verb “TO Be” = be, is, am, are, was, were – a No NO

   Least descriptive - Must commonly use – Nothing much happens with an equal sign. Sun = yellow, The sun is yellow; or The sun blazes yellow. Feathers = soft, The feathers are soft; or The feathers feel soft.

   HOWEVER;
It's the Little Towns I Like

BY THOMAS LUX

It’s the little towns I like
with their little mills making ratchets
and stanchions, elastic web,
spindles, you
name it. I like them in New England,
America, particularly-providing
bad jobs good enough to live on, to live in
families even: kindergarten,
church suppers, beach umbrellas ... The towns
are real, so fragile in their loneliness
a flood could come along
(and floods have) and cut them in two,
in half. There is no mayor,
the town council’s not prepared
for this, three of the four policemen
are stranded on their roofs ... and it doesn’t stop
raining. The mountain
is so thick with water parts of it just slide
down on the heifers—soggy, suicidal—
in the pastures below. It rains, it rains
in these towns and, because
there’s no other way, your father gets in a rowboat
so he can go to work.
II. Nouns & Verbs

With every noun there is something for you to envision. We have personal associations to nouns. We want to direct the reader to see our vision, not thiers.

(Chicken, half melted candle in the neck of a jug). Nouns can bring associations. Verbs move these things around, defining their actions.

   Exp. She has eyes like a chicken. (fluffy white chickens laying eggs. That mean rooster in the chicken yard, multicolored chickens at the county fair).

Yet verbs move these things around, defining their actions. He grabs the chicken’s neck. Its red eyes bulge.

Half melted candle in the neck of a jug. We watch the flame of a half-melted candle twisted inside the neck of a wine jug dance to Jimi Hendrix’s guitar riffs.

Modifiers –

   A. Adjectives – if use with respect they can help limited the associations.
      Exp. She had eyes like a chicken, glossy.

Too many adjectives can sap the energy of a poem. Using modifiers when they are not needed weakens the poems/essay, story; prevents them from being strong and forceful. Use adjectives sparingly. He threw a hard and white baseball.

However- The boys play with a scuffed baseball.

A big dog = greyhound, great dane
Fiery Planet = the sun, Sirius the dog star
Hardwood = mahogany, oak
Parched land = Mojave desert, Australian Outback

   B. Do your best to avoid adverbs. A strong verb does not need an adverb.
      Exp “She walked very slowly and warily up the stairs.” Instead “She crept up the stairs.”
      Walk slowly = saunter, meander, stroll
      Run slowly = jog, trot
      Run quickly = sprint, gallop, dash, fly, scurry
      Pull quickly = jerk, tug, yank
IV. EXAMPLES:

Because She Says Too Spicy --- (First Stanza in two versions)
Salvatore Marici with help from friends)

A blond woman wears pageboy haircut. She came from the salon on a Monday, December afternoon in Naples Florida sits at outdoor bar of restaurant during happy hour. Half price drinks & appetizers! All stools taken by baby boomers.

Boomers scramble for scarce stools driven by half price drinks & appetizers at outdoor bar of upscale restaurant on Monday winter afternoon, Naples Florida. Blonde woman fresh from salon flaunts pageboy haircut, nabs one.
Night Train

Theodore Genoways  American in Life of Poetry

He stirs before dawn, tucks a lantern in his pack
and leans out into the cold. Half-dark, chimney smoke
feathers and molts, circling the frozen window glass,

fading across drifted fields. He wades through snowbanks,
windblown to the eaves of an abandoned milk shed,
and across the barnyard, where leaf-bare cottonwoods

and evergreens stretch from the farm to deeper woods.

His skates curl like a promise in his canvas pack.

At the river’s edge, he builds a small fire and sheds

His overshoe, while guests send a thick rope of smoke
and cherry sparks, swirling toward the distant banks.
Late last August, he honed his father’s reading glass

on a knot of bluestem and dried cobs, till the glass
shimmered, grass curled and burned. He piled on scrubwood,
then whole logs. Together, the boys walked the ditch bank,

touching torches to each row, but Ted trailed the pack,
blinking as his brothers -one by one-passed into smoke.
He kindles his lantern. The little light it sheds

casts his legs in wide shadow, down the watershed
and across the river, stretched below like frosted glass.
He buckles his skates, watching the gray thread of smoke

from his chimney stich across the sheltering woods
firs straight and green as soldiers. He shoulders his pack
and takes a long, gliding step from the near bank,
buoyed on a scalpel blade of steel, toward the bank on the far shore. For the moment, the valley – washed in moonlight, the sky-blue glow of ice and snowpack—

Speeds and scrolls by him, as if passing through the glass of a Pullman car. Boys fresh from the backwoods crowded the platform this summer morning, coal smoke dotting girl’s dresses with soot s the train left, smoke clinging to their tear-streaked cheeks. He curls on the bank Under the bridge, waiting for the thunder from the woods

To jar ashes, bitternut. Bur-oak till they shed their brittle leaves. Its hiss echoes like breaking glass or a snake in tall reeds. He braces for impact.

From the bone-black woods, the night train rockets past, packed with sleeping recruits. It banks through the plume of smoke it sheds like a skin and slithers on tracks of grass.
Summer Wane in Upper Mississippi Valley
(Salvatore Marici)

In a sky,
   day paints Egyptian blue
   an angel fluffs wings
whose breath wafts dry warmth
with specks of coolness.
Pockets of fading-green
spot crowns of trees like bubbles
above cartoon characters
filled with scripts
of leaves’ last wishes.
Fallen apples, pears
ooze hard cider, bees slurp.
They brawl in sugared air.
Goldenrod spikes burst
metallic-yellow. Sun scatters lusters
some settle, some suspend.
Pumpkins, butternut squashes,
lie amidst seared vines, split tomatoes.

Then dusk,
a minute before yesterday,
owls’ ears trace moles’ scurries
who through small eyes
see sunlight dim.

V. We rip pages from a book, find action words to create our word pool. Then use those words and discover.

Credits:
The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Writing Poetry, Moustakli, Nikki
Ordinary Genius, Addonizo, Kim
The Poetry Home Repair Manual, Kooser, Ted
Poem Crazy, Wooldridge, Susan, Goldsmith