

Free Verse & Formal Verse

Free Verse is lyric poetry that doesn't follow a particular rhyme pattern or metre but varies in its rhythm according to the mood the poet wants to create. “

Free Verse poetry has:

- No set rhythm that is very obvious
- No set rhyme scheme
- Lines of irregular length

(**do not confuse free verse with BLANK VERSE. Blank verse does not rhyme, but it does follow a regular rhythm—iambic pentameter.)

Free Verse

The Street

A long silent street.
I walk in blackness and I stumble and fall
and rise, and I walk blind, my feet
stepping on silent stones and dry leaves.
Someone behind me also stepping on stones, leaves:
if I slow down, he slows;
if I run, he runs. I turn: nobody.
Everything dark and doorless.
Turning and turning these corners
which lead forever to the street
where nobody waits for, nobody follows me,
where I pursue a man who stumbles
and rises and says when he sees me: nobody.

--Octavio Paz

Formal Verse

Formal verse is poetry that follows one of the traditional, named patterns for rhythm, rhyme and stanzas. Formal verse includes sonnets.

Types of Poetry

Sonnets:

A type of formal lyric poetry that was developed in Italy in the early 14th century. The writer Petrarch wrote a series of love poems in this style to a woman he called Laura. The sonnet form became popular in England in the sixteenth century. Many sonnets deal with the theme of romantic love. The power and pleasure of nature is also a popular topic.

Italian Sonnet (Petrarchan/ "pete-trarch"): There are two parts, although there are no stanza divisions to separate them. The first eight lines rhyme: abbaabba; the remaining six lines usually rhyme cdecde, but they may vary, as long as it is the cde combination and the last two lines do not rhyme.

Shakespearean Sonnet: Divided up into three groups of four lines (quatrains) with a rhymed couplet to finish things off. The rhyme scheme is usually: abab cdcd efef gg. Typically, the statement of the idea or problem is expanded to twelve lines and the couplet at the end sums up the central theme of the sonnet. The meter of the sonnet is usually iambic pentameter.

Formal Verse: The Sonnet

Shall I Compare Thee To A Summer's Day?

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

-- William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

Poetic Forms: Some Examples

Haiku

Haiku is a lyric form of poetry from Japan consisting of seventeen syllables arranged in unrhymed lines of five, seven, and five syllables. Traditionally, haiku have as their subject's images from the natural world. Through haiku's simple images, the poet wants to elicit a sudden, intense response in the reader.

*Falling upon earth,
Pure water spills from the cup
Of the camellia.
---Basho*

Quatrain

The quatrain is a poem or stanza of four lines. It is a very popular form of poetry. Famous poets like William Blake and T. S. Eliot used quatrains. A quatrain is formed by two rhyming couplets. This pattern is called a a b b. The first line rhymes with the second (sky and by) and the third line rhymes with the fourth line (edge and ledge). Other quatrain patterns are a b a b, a b b a, and a b c b.

Read these examples:

The Tyger by William Blake

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

The Mountain by Donna Brock

The mountain frames the sky (a)
As a shadow of an eagle flies by. (a)
With clouds hanging at its edge (b)
A climber proves his courage on its rocky ledge. (b)

Poetic Forms: Some Examples

Cinquain

cinquain is a five line poem.

triangles
pointy edges
revolving, rotating, angling
Triangles are all different.
180°

- Line 1: one word
(subject or noun)
- Line 2: two words
(adjectives) that describe line 1
- Line 3: three words
(action verbs) that relate to line 1
- Line 4: four words
(feelings or a complete sentence) that relates to line 1
- Line 5: one word
(synonym of line 1 or a word that sums it up)

Limerick

A limerick is a rhyming, humorous, and often nonsensical five-line poem. The first, second, and fifth lines rhyme (forming a triplet), and have the same number of syllables. The third and fourth lines rhyme (forming a couplet), and have the same number of syllables. Limericks often begin with the words: *There once was. . .* or *There was a. . .* Typically you will find the a-a-b-b-a rhyming structure in limerick poetry. Limericks are usually written about individuals or specific characters and are good natured and humorous.

There once was a gray schnauzer named Spark 9 syllables
Quite talkative, he so liked to bark. 9 syllables
Sometimes running he found 6 syllables
His feet all off the ground 6 syllables
Especially on larks in the park. 9 syllables

There once was a girl who loved rhyme; 8 syllables
She felt her writing was sublime. 8 syllables
Indeed quite a poet, 6 syllables
Though some didn't know it, 6 syllables
She'd be rich if each paid a dime. 8 syllables

There was a mean clown in the circus. 9 syllables
For fun he would push us and jerk us. 9 syllables
He would hit us with pies 6 syllables
That left cream in our eyes. 6 syllables
His act never once failed to irk us. 9 syllables

Poetic Forms: Some Examples

Ode

Odes are long poems which are serious in nature and written to a set structure. John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "Ode To A Nightingale" are probably the most famous examples of this type of poem.

Ode To A Nightingale by John Keats

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:

Tanka

A short lyrical Japanese poem structured in 31 syllables arranged in groups of 5, 7, 5, 7 and 7, syllables, Example:

Saying Goodbye

Carefully I walk
Trying so hard to be brave
They all see my fear
Dark glasses cover their eyes
As mine flow over with tears

List

A poem that is made up of a list of items or events. It can be any length and rhymed or unrhymed.

Elegy

A sad and thoughtful poem about the death of an individual. The elegy began as an ancient Greek metrical form and is traditionally written in response to the death of a person or group. Though similar in function, the elegy is distinct from the epitaph, ode, and eulogy: the epitaph is very brief; the ode solely exalts; and the eulogy is most often written in formal prose.

Funeral Blues

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead

Poetic Forms: Some Examples

Scribbling on the sky the message He is Dead.
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong

The stars are not wanted now; put out every one,
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the woods;
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

--W. H. Auden

Couplet

A couplet has rhyming stanzas made up of two lines. You know a couple means two. So a couplet is a pair of lines of poetry that are usually rhymed. We think the idea of the couplet came from the French and English. Couplets can also be used to "build" other poems.

We are going to use a couplet for a "play on words," or a word game. This type of couplet is called a "terse verse." Here's the way you play,

"If turkeys gobble,
Do Pilgrims squabble?"

"If cars go zoom,
exhaust smoke will plume!"

"If the phone rings,
hope then still clings."

The Acrostic Poem

The acrostic is a fairly simple poetic form, and odds are just about everyone has written one, whether they realize it or not. An acrostic poem is created by using the first letter of each line to spell out another, usually related, word. That is, by reading down the left margin, the reader discovers a word. In simple acrostic poems, this may be the subject of the poem.

Garbage

Grounds (coffee)
Apple (core)
Rinds (mellon)
Banana (peel)
Anchovies (from a pizza I wouldn't eat)
Grapes (too ripe to eat)
Emptying the stinking bag (my job)

The Concrete Poem

The concrete or image poem is another simple form often practiced in school. In this type of poem, a single word is written repeatedly to create the shape of the object the word describes. For example, the word "apple" would be written to form the shape of an apple.

