

A Short Guide to Poetry

Part 1: Rhyming

Types of Rhyme

End rhyme

This is the sort of rhyme we're all used to: a rhyme that comes at the end of a line.

Here are some examples (all of the examples are end-rhyme):

Humpty Dumpty sat on a **wall**
Humpty Dumpty had a great **fall**

This beat is my **recital**
I think it's very **vital**

Mary had a little lamb
Its fleece as white as **snow**
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to **go**

[You might have noticed that in the last example, only the second and fourth lines rhyme. The first and third lines do not. This is totally acceptable.]

Internal rhyme

Internal rhyme is rhyme that comes *within* a line of poetry. It is often combined with end-rhyme.

Here's an example from Eminem, who uses internal rhyme in all of his raps:

His palms are **sweaty**, knees weak, arms are **heavy**
There's vomit on his sweater **already**, mom's **spaghetti**

Here's another example, from "The Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll:

He left it **dead**, and with its **head**
He went galumphing back

Two-syllable rhyme

You can rhyme two syllables, as well as one (you can also rhyme three syllables, if you'd like to!). Normally, this works best if the stress comes on the first syllable rather than the second syllable.

Here's an example from "Bust a Move" by Young MC (it also includes internal rhyme):

You're on a **mission**, And you're **wishin'**
Someone could cure your lonely **condition**

It can be very effective to combine two-syllable rhyme with one-syllable rhyme, as Rudyard Kipling does in his classic poem, "If":

If you can dream - and not make dreams your **master**;
If you can think - and not make thoughts your **aim**;
If you can meet with Triumph and **Disaster**
And treat those two impostors just the **same**;

[There is also an example of two-syllable rhyme on the previous page. Can you find it?]

Partial Rhyme

Partial rhyme makes some people really uncomfortable, but others love it. It's what you get when you rhyme two words that share some sounds in common, but don't rhyme perfectly. For example, when Eminem rhymes "sweaty" with "heavy", that's partial rhyme.

Here's another example, from "[Strange Meeting](#)" by Wilfred Owen:

I am the enemy you killed, my **friend**.
I knew you in this dark; for so you **frowned**
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and **killed**.
I parried; but my hands were loath and **cold**.

Part 2: Poetic Devices

Messing around with the line: end-stopping and enjambment

End-stopping: sticking to the lines

End-stopping means writing one thought per line (which, in most cases, means one sentence per line).

Example:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
-William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 18"

Enjambment: crossing the line

An enjambment occurs when the line ends before your thought does, so it carries on into the next line. You pronounce it like this: "En - jamb - ment"

Examples:

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
come gargling forth from froth-corrupted lungs
-Wilfred Owen, "Dulce et Decorum Est"

And death is better, as the millions know,
Than dandruff, night-starvation, or BO.
-WH Auden, "Letter to Lord Byron"

For your purposes, the most important thing to remember about this is that you don't need to write your poems so that every idea begins at the start of a line, and ends at the end of it.

Devices for description: Metaphor and Simile

Metaphor and simile are very similar. The distinction between the two is that in metaphor you describe something as *if it is* something else, while in a simile you just say that something *is like* something else.

An example of metaphor

Fog
BY CARL SANDBURG

THE fog comes
on little cat feet.
It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.

Two examples of simile

There are several lovely similes in this poem (in order to understand it, you should know that you can use a piece of flint to start a fire):

Flint

CHRISTINA ROSETTI

An emerald is as green as grass,
A ruby red as blood;
A sapphire shines as blue as heaven;
A flint lies in the mud.

A diamond is a brilliant stone,
To catch the world's desire;
An opal holds a fiery spark;
But a flint holds a fire.

And this quote from George Orwell, though not from a poem, contains an excellent simile:

"A sickly light, like yellow tinfoil, was slanting over the high walls into the jail yard."
-George Orwell, *"A Hanging,"*

Part 3: Poetic Forms

Some open forms: Heroic verse, the quatrain, the ballad, and Terza Rima

“Open” forms consist of a specific rhyme scheme, and, sometimes, a specific meter, but they don’t have a set number of lines - or, if they do have a set number lines, it is a set number of lines *per stanza*. But the poem itself can go on for as long as you want it to.

Rhyming couplets

Rhyming couplets are about as simple as it gets: pairs of lines that rhyme with each other. Here’s a great example, taken from Wilfred Owen’s “A Terre (Being the Philosophy of Many Soldiers)”. This is also an excellent example of partial rhymes.

A Terre (Being the Philosophy of Many Soldiers) (excerpt)

BY WILFRED OWEN

Sit on the bed; I'm blind, and three parts shell,	A
Be careful; can't shake hands now; never shall.	A
Both arms have mutinied against me - brutes.	B
My fingers fidget like ten idle brats.	B

I tried to peg out soldierly - no use!	C
One dies of war like any old disease.	C
This bandage feels like pennies on my eyes.	D
I have my medals? - Discs to make eyes close.	D
My glorious ribbons? - Ripped from my own back	E
In scarlet shreds. (That's for your poetry book.)	E

The quatrain

The quatrain is a four-line stanza. There are a few different varieties of quatrains, but by far the most common type of quatrain has a rhyme scheme like this:

Elegy written in a Country Churchyard

BY THOMAS GRAY

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,	A
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,	B
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,	A
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.	B

Now fades the glimm'ring landscape on the sight,	C
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,	D
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,	C
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;	D

The ballad

The ballad is a really fun poetic form - it lends itself extremely well to telling stories.

The basic form is an iambic tetrameter, followed by an iambic trimeter, which looks like this:

- / - / - / - /	A
- / - / - /	B
- / - / - / - /	A
- / - / - /	B

In fact, the first and third lines don't *need* to rhyme with each other, but the second and fourth lines do.

"The Walrus and the Carpenter" by Lewis Carroll is a ballad. Here's an excerpt:

The Walrus and the Carpenter

BY LEWIS CARROLL

The Walrus and the Carpenter
Were walking close at hand;
They wept like anything to see
Such quantities of sand:
"If this were only cleared away,"
They said, "it would be grand!"

"If seven maids with seven mops
Swept it for half a year.
Do you suppose," the Walrus said,
"That they could get it clear?"
"I doubt it," said the Carpenter,
And shed a bitter tear.

Terza Rima

A series of tercets (3 line stanzas) with an interlocking rhyme scheme: aba, bcb, cdc, ded, etc.

This is a fancy Italian name for a fairly simple rhyme scheme. The following poem, "From Blood to Diamonds", is written in Terza Rima. This is a nice form to write in.

From Blood to Diamonds

BY ALEC PATTON

Six years ago, I camped out on this field.	A
I hadn't bathed in weeks - I'd barely slept -	B
a life outside of war seemed quite unreal.	A

Today that war's just memory, except -	B
the stern-faced men in uniform are back,	C
approaching us with long, athletic steps.	B

It's different now, it's just a game, it lacks **C**
the sense of desperation that we knew **D**
when we were marching in the cannon's tracks. **C**

And anyway, look at this well-drilled crew: **D**
they're all professionals, none of them care **E**
about the causes that inspired you. **D**

But look at how they play! So we all stare, **E**
and for the privilege pay the owners well, **F**
even if, in our hearts it feels unfair. **E**

And now the Kekiongas got a run! **G**
So play the game, while we enjoy the sun. **G**

The one tricky thing about terza rima is that it never feels like it comes to a natural ending, so I recommend tagging on a rhyming couplet at the end to finish it off (actually, ending with a rhyming couplet works well for ending lots of open poetic forms).

Closed forms: two types of sonnet

A closed poetic form has a set number of lines, so every example of this type of poem is the same length.

The most well-known closed form is the sonnet. The two most famous types of sonnet are Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnets (both are written in iambic pentameter).

Here's an example of each form (I'll let you work out the rhyme schemes yourself):

Petrarchan sonnet

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways
BY ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

Two Shakespearean sonnets

Sonnet XVIII: Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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.

America

BY CLAUDE MCKAY

Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,
And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,
Stealing my breath of life, I will confess
I love this cultured hell that tests my youth.
Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,
Giving me strength erect against her hate,
Her bigness sweeps my being like a flood.
Yet, as a rebel fronts a king in state,
I stand within her walls with not a shred
Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer.
Darkly I gaze into the days ahead,
And see her might and granite wonders there,
Beneath the touch of Time's unerring hand,
Like priceless treasures sinking in the sand.