



## Poetry Forms and Definitions

Poetry comes in a wide variety of forms, each with its own characteristics and rules. Here are some of the common forms and their definitions:

### Narrative Forms:

**Epic:** A long, narrative poem that typically recounts the deeds of a hero or the history of a nation.

**Ballad:** A poem that tells a story, often set to music.

**Narrative Poem:** A poem that tells a story, similar to an epic, but can be shorter.

### Lyric Forms:

**Sonnet:** A 14-line poem with a specific rhyme scheme and structure.

- **Shakespearean/English Sonnet:** Three quatrains (four-line stanzas) and a concluding couplet (two-line stanza), with the rhyme scheme ABAB CDCD EFEF GG.
- **Petrarchan/Italian Sonnet:** An octave (eight lines) and a sestet (six lines), with the rhyme scheme ABBAABBA for the octave and CDCDCD or CDECDE for the sestet.



Ode: A lyrical poem that expresses praise or admiration for a person, place, thing, or idea.

Elegy: A poem that reflects on death or loss.

Lyric Poem: A poem that expresses personal emotions or thoughts.

## Sestina:

A complex poem consisting of six stanzas of six lines each, followed by a three-line envoy.

The end words of the first stanza are repeated in a different order as the end words in the subsequent five stanzas.

The envoy contains all six end words, often two per line, typically placed in the middle and at the end of the three lines.

Sestinas are usually unrhymed, relying instead on the repetition of end words for a type of rhyme.

## Other Forms:

Haiku: A Japanese form of poetry with three lines, with a 5-7-5 syllable pattern.

Limerick: A humorous, five-line poem with an AABBA rhyme scheme.

Free Verse: Poetry that does not have a set rhyme or meter. Blank

Verse: Poetry written with a specific meter (usually iambic pentameter) but without rhyme.

Villanelle: A nineteen-line poem consisting of five tercets (three-line stanzas) and a final quatrain (four-line stanza), with a repeating rhyme scheme and two refrains.



**Acrostic:** A poem in which the first letter of each line spells out a word or phrase.

These are just a few examples, and there are many other poetic forms to explore, each with its own unique structure and possibilities for expression.

## Poetry Structure

### 1. Lines and Stanzas:

- **Lines:** A poem's basic unit is a line, which can vary in length.
- **Stanzas:** Lines are often grouped into stanzas, which are like paragraphs in poetry, usually separated by a blank line. Stanzas can have different numbers of lines (e.g., a [quatrain](#) is a four-line stanza).

### 2. Rhythm and Meter:

#### **Rhythm:**

The way syllables are stressed and unstressed creates the rhythm of a line.

#### **Meter:**

A recurring pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, which can also be identified by foot. For example, an iamb is a two-syllable foot where the first syllable is unstressed and the second is stressed (e.g., "to-DAY").

### 3. Rhyme and Rhyme Scheme:

- **Rhyme:** Words with similar end sounds can be used to create rhyme.



- **Rhyme Scheme:** A pattern of rhyming words within a stanza, often represented by letters (e.g., ABAB).

#### 4. Poetic Forms:

- **Ballads:** Narrative poems often with a story-telling structure and ABAB or ABCB rhyme scheme.
- **Sonnets:** A 14-line poem with a specific rhyme scheme and meter.
- **Free Verse:** Poetry that does not follow a strict rhyme or meter, offering more flexibility in structure.

#### 5. Impact of Structure:

##### Effect on Reader:

Poetry's structure can guide the reader through the poem, creating a certain mood, pace, and overall impact.

##### Artist's Intent:

The way a poet chooses to structure a poem can reveal their artistic intent and how they want the reader to experience the piece.

#### Beginner-Friendly Forms:

##### Haiku:

- A Japanese form of poetry with three lines.
- The syllable count is 5-7-5.
- Traditional haiku focuses on nature and often includes a seasonal reference.

##### Limerick:

- A humorous, five-line poem with an AABBA rhyme scheme.
- Lines 1, 2, and 5 typically have 8-10 syllables, while lines 3 and 4 have 5-7 syllables.



### Acrostic:

- A poem where the first letter of each line spells out a word or phrase, usually vertically down the page.

### Free Verse:

- Poetry that does not have a set rhyme or meter.
- This form offers more freedom to experiment with line breaks and rhythm.

### Couplet:

- A pair of successive lines in verse.
- Couplets may rhyme or not and can stand alone or be part of a longer poem.

### Cinquain:

- A five-line poem with a specific syllable structure: 2-4-6-8-2.
- Cinquains often focus on nature.

## Tips for Beginners:

**Start Simple:** Don't feel pressured to immediately try complex forms like the sestina. Start with something like a haiku or acrostic, which have simpler structures.



**Read Widely:** Reading other poets can expose you to different styles and techniques. Pay attention to how they use language and create images. **Don't Be Afraid to Experiment:** Try different forms and styles to see what resonates with you. There's no single "right" way to write a poem. **Focus on Your Subject:** What do you want to say? Start there and let that guide your choice of form and language.

**Revise and Edit:** After writing a first draft, take time to read it aloud and consider changes to enhance its impact and clarity.