

THE POETRY OF POETRY

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CARL SANDBURG, POETRY CONSIDERED

"Poetry is the journal of the sea animal living on land, wanting to fly in the air. Poetry is a search for syllables to shoot at the barriers of the unknown and the unknowable. Poetry is a phantom script telling how rainbows are made and why they go away."

ELI KHAMAROV, THE SHADOW ZONE

Poets are soldiers that liberate words from the steadfast possession of definition.

ROBERT GRAVES

There's no money in poetry, but then there's no poetry in money, either.

ROBERT FROST

A poem begins with a lump in the throat.

G. K. CHESTERTON

"Poets have been mysteriously silent on the subject of cheese."

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## WHAT IS POETRY?

Poetry really has no one set definition. The site, "Shadow Poetry" defines poetry as "The art of writing thoughts, ideas, and dreams into imaginative language, which can contain verse, pause, meter, repetition, and rhyme."

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A LITTLE ABOUT THE RULES OF POETRY

(Find more at <http://www.shadowpoetry.com> and
<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/poetry/index.html>)

Poetry is distinguished from other literary works because of the "mechanics of poetry"-- the rules which transform words into art. Most poems follow a strict set of rules, some of which are hundreds or even thousands of years old. Just as most sports have rules that prevent players from running all over the field in a free-for-all, the rules of poetry help poets with everything from when to use rhymes to how long each line should be.

Rules for form might include the number of words, indentations, capitalization, number of syllables, placement of rhymed words, and/or the number or placement of lines. A new poet will find that rules can be very helpful! If you don't like the rules for poetry, claim "poetic license" and follow your heart. This move outside of traditional poetry rules is referred to as free verse.

Above all, remember, writing poetry should be a fun, enjoyable, and creative adventure. However, by equipping yourself with some basic knowledge of poetic forms and devices, you'll ensure that your writing is the best it can be.

Continue on to the next page for some basic definitions and examples...

SOME DEFINITIONS & MECHANICS OF POETRY

RHYTHM

In ancient Greece, they referred to rhythm as the long and short syllables of words. These long and short syllables correspond to quarter notes and half notes in our written music today. For example, if you take the word syllable and break it up, (syl-la-ble), it has three syllables in it.

IAMB

An *iamb* or *iambus* is a "metrical foot" used in various types of poetry. The foot consists of a short syllable followed by a long syllable (as in i-amb). One syllable is accented and the next is not as in "a-**bove**" where "bove" is accented. It sounds like "Da-**DUM**."

METER

Meter refers to how the *feet* are put together to form lines of poetry. The combinations of long and short syllables give poetry a lyrical feel.

IAMBIC METER

The amount of times to use a foot in repetition. It could also be stated; how often to repeat "Da-DUM." So, "Iambic Pentameter," the most common iambic meter, would use the "foot" five times (since penta means five) in each line: Da-DUM, Da-DUM, Da-DUM, Da-DUM, Da-DUM. Note: In some cases, poets may not use true "iambus" but rather inverted ones: DUM-Da. This is shown in the following line of Shakespeare's "Richard III" where I'll bold the accented syllables: **Now** is the **winter** of **our discontent**. Shakespeare's most famous line also adds an extra non-accented syllable which creates what is called a "feminine ending": To **be** or **not to be**; **that** is the **question**. Reads as Da-DUM, Da-DUM, Da-DUM; DUM-Da, Da-DUM, Da-DUM, Da.

STANZA

In poetry, a stanza is a unit within a larger poem. In songs, we call these verses and choruses. In Italian, the term stanza means, "stopping place."

RHYME

The basic definition of rhyme is that words have the sameness of final sounds at the ends of lines or sentences. However, rhyme has its own sub-definitions:

- Perfect Rhyme (also called *true rhyme*, *full rhyme*, or *exact rhyme*): The vowel sounds and the sounds of the final consonants (in words ending in consonants) are the same.
 - Violets are blue, and roses are red,
 - They look nice together in my flowerbed.
- Near Rhyme (also called *half rhyme* or *slant rhyme*): Uses consonance to match the final consonant sounds even when the vowel sounds are different.
 - I gave to Jesus my all and all,
 - My heart, my mind, my body, my soul.
- Broken Rhyme (or split rhyme): The result of dividing a word at the end of a line to force a rhyme.
 - For example, to rhyme stain with raincoat one must end a line with "rain-" and carry "coat" to the next line of verse.

Continue on to the next page for some types of poetry...

SOME TYPES OF POETRY

ACROSTIC

When the first letter of each word, when read vertically, spells out a word.

STANZA FORMS

Describe how many lines will be in each stanza. Some examples:

- Couplet - Two-line poems where each line has the same meter and their endings rhyme with one another. Couplets are often humorous.
- Tercet - Three lines of poetry, forming a stanza or a complete poem. Haiku is an example of an unrhymed tercet poem.
- Quatrain - a poem, or a stanza within a poem, that consists always of four lines.

HAIKU

The ancient Japanese form of poetry with no rhyming. Haiku often deal with nature and always have three lines with a fixed number of syllables:

Line 1= 5 syllables; Line 2= 7 syllables; Line 3= 5 syllables

This is a hai-ku;

se-ven-teen syl-la-bles are

cap-tured in three lines.

Multiple haiku are called "Renga"

LIMERICKS

Whimsical poems with five lines: Lines one, two, and five rhyme with each other and lines three and four rhyme with each other. Rhyme pattern: AABBA

Hickory, dickery, dock,

The mouse ran up the clock.

The clock struck one,

The mouse ran down,

Hickory, dickery, dock.

SONNETS

Poems of 14 lines that begin with three quatrains and end with a couplet. The couplet usually contains a surprise ending or "turn."

NARRATIVE POETRY

Tells some type of story and is usually long. *Epics* and *Ballads* are types of narrative poetry.

SHAPE POEMS (or concrete poems)

Poems that form a visible picture on the page. The shape usually reflects the subject of the poem. (These should be quite fun to try at least once in the next month.)

Trees blossoming in the spring

Clouds above give rain

Fruit will come soon

Nature is at work

while

trees

stand

still

SOME SUBJECTS FOR POETRY

- The colors of the rainbow (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple)
- Other colors (magenta, violet, gold, silver, black, white)
- Different kinds of trees (oak, elm, cypress, maple, gingko, sycamore)
- Fruits (apples, oranges, bananas, lemons, limes)
- Animals (cats, dogs, lions, tigers, bears)
- Seasons (Spring, Summer, Winter, Fall)
- Shapes (square, circle, diamond, hexagon, octagon)
- Weather (sunny, cloudy, rainy, dreary, misty, foggy)
- Vegetables (peas, corn, carrots, potatoes, beans)
- Towns (Louisville, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York)
- Countries (USA, Argentina, Ireland, Italy, Germany)
- Days of the month
- Letters of the alphabet
- Days of the week
- Family members (specific or types like aunt, uncle, grandma, grandpa, mom, dad)
- Friends (by name or relationship)
- Pets (All those you've had since childhood)
- Stages or years of life (When I was one; when I was a child)