

Closed Form Poetry

Poetry Genres

Narrative—non-dramatic verse that tells a story

Dramatic—poetry that involves the techniques of drama; often includes dialogue

Lyric—poetry where a single speaker expresses his or her thoughts and feelings about a subject in a brief but musical manner

You will find just about every genre of poetry in both open and closed form poems.

Genre is the classification or type of poem; form refers to the poem's structure.

Poetry Forms and Terms



Open Form Poetry (a.k.a. **Free Verse**)—poetry that does not follow a regular, predictable pattern of rhyme, rhythm/meter, or line length; relies more on natural speech rhythms

Closed Form Poetry—poetry that follows a regular or prescribed pattern of rhyme, rhythm/meter, line length, or stanza division

→ **(End) Rhyme**—the repetition of similar/identical vowel sounds at the end of lines of verse; often reveals stanza division

→ **Rhythm**—the repeated pattern of beats created by the syllables and stresses of the words in lines of poetry

◇ **Scansion**—the process of marking each syllable in a line of poetry to determine rhythmic patterns, specifically foot and meter

1. Mark each syllable (beat) with a  if it's a stressed/strong beat and a  if it's unstressed/weak.
2. Identify the pattern of the repeated combination of beats and determine the foot.
3. Count the number of feet in each line to determine the meter.

◇ **Foot**—a metric unit within a line of verse consisting of stressed and unstressed syllables; the smallest unit of rhythm in a line of poetry

Create more examples below for each

foot!

- **iamb** (n.)   de pend

(iambic—adj.)

-
- **trochee** (n.)   win dow

(trochaic—adj.)

- **anapest** (n.)  to the dance


(anapestic—adj.)

- **dactyl** (n.)  yes ter day

(dactylic—adj.)

- **spondee** (n.)  Who's there?

(spondaic—adj.)

- **dibrach** (n.)  When the blood creeps and the nerves prick . . .

(pyrrhic—adj.)

◇ **Meter**—(measure) counting the number of feet in a line of poetry; the recurrence in a line of poetry of a regular rhythmic unit (foot)

- Monometer: one foot
- Dimeter: two feet
- Trimeter: three feet
- Tetrameter: four feet
- Pentameter: five feet
- Hexameter: six feet

Example: Scan the following lines, identify the repeated foot, and count the number of feet to determine the meter.

From forth the fatal loins of these two foes

A pair of star-crossed lovers takes their life

_____	_____
(foot)	(meter)

(**Blank Verse**—unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter)

◇ **Stanza**—a group of lines which form a division of a poem

- Couplet: two lines
(*heroic couplet*—two rhyming lines of iambic pentameter)
- Tercet: three lines
- Quatrain: four lines
- Quintain: five lines
- Sestet: six lines
- Septet: seven lines
- Octave: eight lines

Types of Closed Form Poems

(not an exhaustive list)

Haiku	Villanelle
Ballad	Sestina
Sonnet	Epigram

Ballad—a narrative, closed-form poem that tells a story that progresses in small units to a climax

→ Stanza division and rhyme scheme: four-lined stanzas (*aka* _____), usually rhyming *abab* or *abcb*; often includes a refrain (repeated line or stanza)

→ Rhythm/Meter: lines 1 & 3 = iambic tetrameter
lines 2 & 4 = iambic trimeter

Barbara Allen

It was in and about the Martinmas time,
When the green leaves were a-falling,
That Sir John Graeme, in the West country,
Fell in love with Barbara Allen.

He sent his men down through the town
To the place where she was dwelling:
"O haste and come to my master dear,
Gin ye be Barbara Allen."

O hooly, hooly, rose she up,
To the place where he was lying,
And when she drew the curtain by'
"Young man, I think you're dying.

"O it's I'm sick, and very, very sick,
And it's a' for Barbara Allen;"
"O the better for me you shall never be,
Though your heart's blood were a spilling."

"O dinna ye mind, young man," she said,
"When the red wine ye were filling,
That ye made the healths gae round and round,
And slighted Barbara Allen?"

He turned his face unto the wall,
And death was with him dealing;
"Adieu, adieu, my dear friends all,
And be kind to Barbara Allen."

And slowly, slowly rase she up,
And slowly, slowly left him;
And sighing said she could not stay,
Since death of life had 'reft him.

She had not gone a mile but twa,
When she heard the dead-bell knellin',
And every jow that the dead-bell ga'ed
It cried, "Woe to Barbara Allan!"

"O mother, mother, make my bed,
O make it soft and narrow;
Since my love died for me today,
I'll die for him tomorrow."

Anonymous Scottish Folk Ballad

Ballad of Birmingham

(On the bombing of a church in Birmingham, Alabama, 1963)

"Mother dear, may I go downtown
Instead of out to play,
And march the streets of Birmingham
In a Freedom March today?"

"No, baby, no, you may not go,
For the dogs are fierce and wild,
And clubs and hoses, guns and jails
Aren't good for a little child."

"But, mother, I won't be alone.
Other children will go with me,
And march the streets of Birmingham
To make our country free."

"No baby, no, you may not go
For I fear those guns will fire.
But you may go to church instead
And sing in the children's choir."

She has combed and brushed her night-dark hair,
And bathed rose petal sweet,
And drawn white gloves on her small brown hands,
And white shoes on her feet.

The mother smiled to know that her child
Was in the sacred place,
But that smile was the last smile
To come upon her face.

For when she heard the explosion,
Her eyes grew wet and wild.
She raced through the streets of Birmingham
Calling for her child.

She clawed through bits of glass and brick,
Then lifted out a shoe.
"O, here's the shoe my baby wore,
But, baby, where are you?"

Dudley Randall

Ballad of Hector in Hades

Yes, this is where I stood that day,
Beside this sunny mound.
The walls of Troy are far away,
And outward comes no sound.

I wait. On all the empty plain
A burnished stillness lies,
Save for the chariot's tinkling hum,
And a few distant cries.

His helmet glitters near. The world
Slowly turns around,
With some new sleight compels my feet
From the fighting ground.

I run. If I turn back again
The earth must turn with me,
The mountains planted on the plain,
The sky clamped to the sea.

The grasses puff a little dust
Where my footsteps fall.
I cast a shadow as I pass
The little wayside wall.

The strip of grass on either hand
Sparkles in the light;
I only see that little space
To the left and to the right,

And in that space our shadows run,
His shadow there and mine,
The little flowers, the tiny mounds,
The grasses frail and fine.

But narrower still and narrower!
My course is shrunk and small,
Yet vast as in a deadly dream,
And faint the Trojan wall.
The sun up in the towering sky
Turns like a spinning ball.

The sky with all its clustered eyes
Grows still with watching me,
The flowers, the mounds, the flaunting weeds
Wheel slowly round to see.

Two shadows racing on the grass,
Silent and so near,
Until his shadow falls on mine.
And I am rid of fear.

The race is ended. Far away
I hang and do not care,
While round bright Troy Achilles whirls
A corpse with streaming hair.

Edwin Muir

Haiku—originating in the Japanese culture, the haiku is the epitome of compression of ideas through imagery. These three-line poems follow a strict pattern: line one contains five (5) syllables, line two contains seven (7) syllables, and line three contains five (5) syllables. Haiku does *not* employ end rhyme.

According to Perrine’s *Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense*, “Haiku are generally concerned with some aspect of nature and present a single image or two juxtaposed images *without comment*, relying on suggestion rather than an explicit statement to communicate . . . meaning.”

Examples of Haiku

like a dead friend putting
a hand on the shoulder
the autumn sun warms
Kusatao Nakamura

Oh, the wide world’s ways!
Cherry blossoms left unwatched
Even for three days!
Ryoto

You never feed me.
Perhaps I’ll sleep on your face.
That will sure show you.
Author Unknown

As the spring rains fall
soaking them on the roof,
is a child’s rag ball.
Taniguchi Buson

haikus are easy
but sometimes they don’t make sense
refrigerator
Author Unknown

228
The sudden thunder
Startles the magnolias
To a deeper white.
Richard Wright

97
In the setting sun,
Each tree bud is clinging fast
To drying raindrops.
Richard Wright

31
In the falling snow
A laughing boy holds out his palms
Until they are white.
Richard Wright

101
Quickly vanishing,
The first drops of summer rain
On an old wood door.
Richard Wright

187
In an old woodshed
The long points of icicles
Are sharpening the wind.
Richard Wright

200
A silent spring wood:
A crow opens its sharp beak
And creates a sky.
Richard Wright

226
Like a spreading fire,
Blossoms leap from tree to tree
In a blazing spring.
Richard Wright

morning tea
sunlight rests on the chair
we still call yours

Dorothy McLaughlin

(How does this poem not meet the requirements of the haiku form? Try to revise it to make it fit. Is the resulting poem stronger or weaker as a result? Discuss!)

Epigram—a short poem ending in a witty or ingenious turn of thought, to which the rest of the composition is intended to lead up.

The epigram is a brief couplet or quatrain. Epigrams are usually satirical, aphoristic and witty and often express a comic turn of thought. The term epigram is derived from the Greek word *epigramma*, meaning "inscription," but its greatest practitioner was the first-century Roman poet Martial, who is credited with popularizing the form. The spirit of the epigram is in its terse and succinct form: much can be said with few words.

The witty tone of the epigram was especially cultivated in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by poets like Ben Jonson, John Donne and Robert Herrick; the form has always been popular and one can find examples throughout the history of English literature. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, for example, displays the comic wit and clever turn of thought of the epigram in his verse "What Is an Epigram?" (Source for above two paragraphs: <http://www.english.emory.edu/classes/Handbook/epigram.html>)

What is an epigram? a dwarfish whole,
Its body brevity, and wit its soul.

Coleridge

A Poet Defended

You claim his poems are garbage. Balderdash!
Garbage includes some meat. His poems are trash.

Paul Ramsey

Which is Which

God bless the King! God bless the faith's defender!
God bless--no harm in blessing--the Pretender.
But who pretender is, and who is king,
God bless us all, that's quite another thing.

John Byrom

Cynicus To W.Shakespeare

You wrote a line too much, my sage,
Of seers the first, and first of sayers;
For only half the world's a stage,
And only all the women players.

James Kenneth Stephen

The Fool and The Poet

Sir, I admit your general rule,
That every poet is a fool,
But you yourself may serve to show it,
That every fool is not a poet.

Alexander Pope

Engraved on the Collar of a Dog Which I gave to His Royal Highness

I am His Highness' dog at Kew;
Pray tell me, sir, whose dog are you?

Alexander Pope

Villanelle—written in iambic pentameter, the villanelle is composed of five tercets followed by a final quatrain, usually rhyming—aba aba aba aba abaa—alternately repeating the first and third lines at the end of each stanza.

Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on that sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Dylan Thomas

Mad Girl's Love Song

I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead,
I lift my lids and all is born again.
(I think I made you up inside my head)

The stars go waltzing out in blue and red,
And arbitrary darkness gallops in.
I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.

I dreamed that you bewitched me into bed
And sung me moon-struck, kissed me quite insane.
(I think I made you up inside my head).

God topples from the sky, hell's fires fade:
Exit seraphim and enter Satan's men:
I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.

I fancied you'd return the way you said.
But I grow old and I forget your name.
(I think I made you up inside my head).

I should have loved a thunderbird instead;
At least when spring comes they roar back again.
I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.
(I think I made you up inside my head).

Sylvia Plath

One Art

The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
places, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster.

Elizabeth Bishop