

Fixed Poetic Form: Sonnet

Sonnet: a lyric poem comprising **14** rhyming lines of equal length: **iambic pentameters** in English, alexandrines (an **alexandrine** is a line of verse made up of six iambs. If you want to get all fancy about it, you can even say that an **alexandrine** is a line of **poetry** written in iambic hexameter -hex **means** six in Latin, in French, **hendecasyllable**(11) is sometimes used in English **poetry** to describe a line of iambic pentameter with an extra short syllable at the end.

The rhyme schemes of the sonnet follow two basic patterns.

- (1) The Italian sonnet (also called the Petrarchan sonnet after the most influential of the Italian sonneteers)
 - a. comprises an 8-line '**octave**' of **two quatrains**,
 - b. rhymed *abbaabba*, followed by a 6-line 'sestet' usually rhymed *cdecde or cdcddc*.
 - c. The transition from octave to sestet usually coincides with a 'turn' (Italian, *volta*) in the argument or mood of the poem.
 - d. In a variant form used by the English poet John Milton, however, the 'turn' is delayed to a later position around the tenth line. Some later poets--notably William Wordsworth--have employed this feature of the 'Miltonic sonnet' while relaxing the rhyme scheme of the octave to *abbaacca*.
 - e. The Italian pattern has remained the most widely used in English and other languages.
- (2) The English sonnet (also called the Shakespearean sonnet after its foremost practitioner)
 - a. comprises three quatrains and a final couplet,
 - b. rhyming *ababcdcdefefgg*.
 - c. An important variant of this is the **Spenserian** sonnet (introduced by the Elizabethan poet Edmund Spenser), which links the three quatrains by rhyme, in the sequence *ababbabccdcdee*.
 - d. In either form, the 'turn' comes with the final couplet, which may sometimes achieve the neatness of an epigram.

Lyric [li-rik]: In the modern sense, any fairly short poem expressing the personal mood, feeling, or meditation of a single speaker (who may sometimes be an invented character, not the poet).

- In ancient Greece, a lyric was a song for accompaniment on the lyre, and could be a choral lyric sung by a group, such as a dirge or hymn;

- the modern sense, current since the Renaissance, often suggests a songlike quality in the poems to which it refers.
- Lyric poetry is the most extensive category of verse, especially after the decline since the 19th century in the West--of the other principal kinds: narrative and dramatic verse. Lyrics may be composed in almost any metre and on almost every subject, although the most usual emotions presented are those of love and grief.
- Among the common **lyric forms** are the sonnet, ode, elegy, haiku, and the more personal kinds of hymn.
- Lyricism is the emotional or song-like quality, the lyrical property, of lyric poetry. A writer of lyric poems may be called a lyric poet, a lyricist, or a lyrist.
- In another sense, the lyrics of a popular song or other musical composition are the words as opposed to the music; these may not always be lyrical in the poetic sense (e.g. in a narrative song like a ballad).

Pentameter [pen-tamm-it-er]:

- A metrical verse line having five main stresses, traditionally described as a line of five 'feet.' In English poetry since Chaucer, the pentameter--almost always an iambic line normally of 10 syllables--has had a special status as the standard line in many important forms including blank verse, **the heroic couplet**, ***ottava rima***, **rhyme royal**, and the sonnet.
- In its pure iambic form, the pentameter shows a regular alternation of **stressed and unstressed** syllables, as in this line by Percy Bysshe Shelley:

“If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?”

- There are, however, several permissible variations in the placing of stresses, which help to avoid the monotony of such regular alternation;
- and the pentameter may be lengthened from 10 syllables to 11 by a **feminine ending**.
- In classical Greek and Latin poetry, the second line of the elegiac distich(metrical norm), commonly but inaccurately referred to as a 'pentameter' is in fact composed of two half-lines of two and a half feet each, with *dactyls or **spondees in the first half and dactyls in the second.
 - * Dactyl is a metrical foot, or a beat in a line, containing three syllables in which first one is accented followed by second and third unaccented

syllables (accented/unaccented/unaccented) in quantitative [meter](#) such as in the word “*humanly*.” In dactyl, we put stress on first syllable and do not stress on second and third syllables, try to say it loud-“HU-man-ly.”

- ** A metrical foot, spondee is a beat in a poetic line which consists of two accented syllables (stressed/stressed) or DUM-DUM stress pattern. Spondee is a poetic device that is not very common, as other metrical feet like iamb and trochee. We rarely find poems written in spondee alone; however, poets use spondee by combining other metrical feet. For instance, a word “faithful” contains spondee. If you say this word loudly, you would notice that you are putting an equal amount of stress on both syllables “faith” and “ful.”

Rhyme scheme: The pattern in which the rhymed line-endings are arranged in a poem or stanza.

- This may be expressed as a sequence of recurrences in which each line ending on the same rhyme is given the same alphabetic symbol: thus the rhyme scheme of a limerick is given the notation *aabba*.
- Rhyme schemes may follow a **fixed pattern**, as in the sonnet and several other forms, or they may be arranged freely according to the poet's requirements. The simplest rhyme schemes are those of rhyming couplets (*aabbcc*, etc.) and of the common quatrain forms (*abab*, *abcb*, *abba*), while those of *ottava rima*, rhyme royal, the Spenserian stanza, and the French fixed forms are far more intricate.