

Primary Poetry Writing Guide

This manual is designed to provide students and teachers with a guide to the poetry writing process. It includes:

- a range poetic forms
- tips on crafting a poem
- an editing checklist
- suggestions to generate creative ideas
- a marking criteria

Start early enough to produce your most polished writing. You'll be surprised at how much you can improve your work by drafting, editing and refining.

What makes a good poem?

A good poem will make the reader:

- feel something
- transport to another place
- appreciate the beauty of nature

Poems can:

- inform, inspire or excite
- tell a story, persuade, or carry a tune

Poems allow us to use creative expression that connects with an audience in unique and imaginative ways. Some poems follow a formal structure with clear structural guidelines, whilst others are more free style and seem to break all the rules.

With poetry,

—there are so many “rules”, but at the same time, no rules at all.

Source: <https://self-publishingschool.com/how-to-write-a-poem/>

The structure of poems

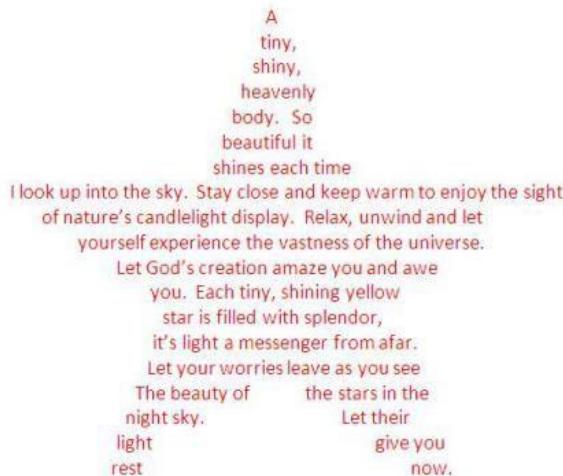
Poems can be made up of:

- Lines
- Stanzas (verses)
- Rhyming patterns (schema)
- Couplets - a pair of lines that usually rhyme and have the same meter
- Shape - the shape of the words on the page and the space around them
- Language choices – imagery - figurative language
- Meter - the number of syllables in a line - the pattern of emphasis on each syllable

Poetic Forms

There is an endless list of different forms of poetry. Some are simple and some more complex. On the next few pages, you will find a few examples. Allow this to guide you, not limit you!

Shape Poem – The main feature of a shape poem is that it is shaped like the thing it describes. The shape of the poem contributes to its meaning along with the words.



Source: [7f4daafc5b9eb0e6f49d6f141c62345d--poem-shape.jpg \(510x392\) \(pinimg.com\)](https://7f4daafc5b9eb0e6f49d6f141c62345d--poem-shape.jpg)

Prose Poetry – prose poetry is really just prose writing that uses some poetic techniques and qualities such as an emphasis on imagery and manipulation of sentence structure. Poetic prose is arranged into paragraphs that can be different in size and structure rather than regular stanzas.

The Adventures of a Turtle

The turtle carries his house on his back. He is both the house and the person of that house.

But actually, under the shell is a little room where the true turtle, wearing long underwear, sits at a little table. At one end of the room a series of levers sticks out of slots in the floor, like the controls of a steam shovel. It is with these that the turtle controls the legs of his house.

Most of the time the turtle sits under the sloping ceiling of his turtle room reading catalogues at the little table where a candle burns. He leans on one elbow, and then the other. He crosses one leg, and then the other. Finally he yawns and buries his head in his arms and sleeps.

If he feels a child picking up his house he quickly douses the candle and runs to the control levers and activates the legs of his house and tries to escape.

If he cannot escape he retracts the legs and withdraws the so-called head and waits. He knows that children are careless, and that there will come a time when he will be free to move his house to some secluded place, where he will relight his candle, take out his catalogues and read until at last he yawns. Then he'll bury his head in his arms and sleep...That is, until another child picks up his house....

- by [Russell Edson](#)

Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50777/the-adventures-of-a-turtle>

Limerick Verse – A verse made up of five lines with a rhyming pattern of AABBA and an anapestic rhythmic pattern (da da DUM da da DUM da da DUM). The third and fourth lines are sometimes fused into a single line with internal rhyme. Limericks are traditionally cheeky and a little bit irreverent.

Limerick Verse – The benefits of school

When I don't feel like going to school,
I try to remember it's cool
To get educated, (though sometimes berated),
And not end up being a fool.

-by Narelle Lethlean

Limerick Poem - A limerick poem is made up of a series of Limerick verses.

Happy Mother's Day Limerick Poem

There's a lady in each of our lives
Who endured all the lows and the highs
That her children went through
Like the mumps or the flu
Or the joy of a pleasant surprise

She strengthened our family ties
And wiped away tears from our eyes
She forgave all our flaws
And our social faux pas
And she baked really great apple pies

She saw through almost all of our lies
And plied us with sodas and fries
When our manners were good
And we did what we should
She was righteous and caring and wise

So to Mothers, both present and past
For the many good deeds you've amassed
I honor you all
With this verse on my wall
And I hope that your day is a blast

- by © Neil - Published: May 2014

Source: <https://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/happy-mothers-day-limerick>

Lyrical Poem – What is your favourite song? Have a close look at the lyrics. What do you notice? Basically, song lyrics are poems that express the feelings and emotions of the author, written in the first person. Lyrics are set to music, so need to have rhythm and sometimes they rhyme. The example below uses an AABBCC rhyming pattern for the first six lines in each verse, and the seventh line is a refrain, which is a line that is repeated throughout the poem/song (in this case, the refrain has a slight variation, but that is perfectly ok, as long as it is still recognisable).

The Sound of Silence

Hello darkness, my old friend
I've come to talk with you again
Because a vision softly creeping
Left its seeds while I was sleeping
And the vision that was planted in my brain
Still remains
Within the sound of silence

In restless dreams I walked alone
Narrow streets of cobblestone
'Neath the halo of a street lamp
I turned my collar to the cold and damp
When my eyes were stabbed by the flash of a neon light
That split the night
And touched the sound of silence

And in the naked light I saw
Ten thousand people, maybe more
People talking without speaking
People hearing without listening
People writing songs that voices never share
And no one dared
Disturb the sound of silence

"Fools" said I, "You do not know
Silence like a cancer grows
Hear my words that I might teach you
Take my arms that I might reach you"
But my words like silent raindrops fell
And echoed in the wells of silence
Within the sound of silence

- by Paul Simon [Simon & Garfunkel](#)
© Universal Music Publishing Group

Source: <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/simongarfunkel/thesoundofsilence.html>

Didactic Poetry – Didactic poetry is specifically written for the purpose of teaching a lesson of some sort, usually with a moral intention. Didactic poems are not required to follow a particular structure, rhythm or rhyming scheme, though many do. Like the example below, by Rudyard Kipling, which uses iambic pentameter rhythm and ABABCD CD rhyming patterns.

If

If you can keep your head when all about you
 Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
 But make allowance for their doubting too:
 If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
 Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
 Or being hated don't give way to hating,
 And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

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:
 If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
 Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
 Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
 And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
 And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
 And lose, and start again at your beginnings,
 And never breathe a word about your loss:
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
 To serve your turn long after they are gone,
 And so hold on when there is nothing in you
 Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch,
 If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
 If all men count with you, but none too much:
 If you can fill the unforgiving minute
 With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
 Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
 And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!

- by Rudyard Kipling

Sources:

<https://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/if-by-rudyard-kipling>
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/didactic-poetry>

Pantoum – One of my favourites! The fun with pantoums is that each line appears twice throughout the poem. In a twenty line pantoum, the following lines will be the same: 1+20, 2+5, 3+18, 4+7, 6+9, 8+11, 10+13, 12 +15, 14+17, 16+19. The rhyming pattern is: ABAB BCBC CDCD DEDE EAEA

Concert Night - a Pantoum

So much excitement! He's coming tonight!

Forty degrees on the last day of school

Had our final rehearsal with makeup and lights

Now we lay in the passage to rest where it's cool

Forty degrees on the last day of school

We've been practicing daily for several weeks

Now we lay in the passage to rest where it's cool

Mum tries to creep past but a loose floorboard creaks

We've been practicing daily for several weeks

Trying to rest up before the big night

Mum tries to creep past but a loose floorboard creaks

The arrival of Santa is sure to excite!

Trying to rest up before the big night

Wet towel on my forehead and ants in my pants

The arrival of Santa is sure to excite!

Awards night. I wonder if I have a chance

Wet towel on my forehead and ants in my pants

Had our final rehearsal with makeup and lights

Awards night. I wonder if I have a chance

So much excitement! He's coming tonight!

by Narelle Lethlean, 2022

Haiku - Chances are, you've heard of a haiku – and with good reason. A Haiku is a wonderful way to evoke images with words, using the Japanese formula of three lines of five, seven, and five syllables.

Haiku example:

Sowing, ignorant

of the method – it will grow

maybe anyway.

- by Paul Goodman

Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=29468>

Tanka - A tanka is like a haiku on steroids. While a haiku follows the 5-7-5 pattern, a tanka has an additional two lines at the end, both with seven syllables, so 5-7-5-7-7

Tanka – Fishing:

Fog on the water
Hiding the fish underneath
Fishermen creeping
Silently up to the edge
Who'll be having whom for tea?

- by Narelle Lethlean

Ballad – A ballad is a structured narrative poem that is often set to music. Ballads are made up of quatrains (4 line stanzas) with a regular rhythm and usually a rhyming pattern of ABCB but there are variations.

Rudolph the red-nosed Reindeer

Rudolph, the red-nosed reindeer
Had a very shiny nose
And if you ever saw it
You would even say it glows

All of the other reindeer
Used to laugh and call him names
They never let poor Rudolph
Join in any reindeer games

Then one foggy Christmas eve
Santa came to say (came to say)
"Rudolph, with your nose so bright
Won't you guide my sleigh tonight?"

Then how the reindeer loved him
As they shouted out with glee
Rudolph, the red-nosed reindeer
You'll go down in history

These are just a few samples of an endless array of poetic possibilities. If you have a favourite that is not on the list, don't be afraid to use it! One of the best things about poetry is that it allows your imagination to soar.

So go for it!

Generating Ideas

Having trouble getting started? Here are some simple activities to get the ideas flowing:

- Starting with real life experiences for inspiration - Write down your response to one or more of the following. Leave some space around it. Create a word bank around your answer. You now have some key words to start your poem.
 - Something that makes you laugh
 - A challenge you have overcome
 - Your favourite movie/game/band/sport
 - Your ideal job/house/holiday/school/pet etc
- Stream of consciousness writing – start writing about the first thing that comes into your mind. Write non-stop for 2-3 minutes without pausing. Highlight the interesting words or phrases. Use these to start your poem.
- Write, ‘LOCAL or PERSONAL STORIES’ in the middle of a blank page (choose one or use both). Brainstorm every word and idea that links to this theme. Choose your favourites to build your poem.
- Try using one of the images below to get your ideas flowing...

Visual Prompts



Image references

[Back in the Big Top, Flying Fruit Fly Circus \(Albury NSW\) | ArtsHub Australia](#)

[Australian vertical skate star Renton Millar gives new Albury Skate Park tick of approval | The Border Mail | Wodonga, VIC](#)

[Hume Dam | Murray-Darling Basin Authority \(mdba.gov.au\)](#)

[Hume Weir Kayak Bait Fishing - YouTube](#)

Editing checklist

You've finished your first draft. Congratulations!

Now put your poem down for at least 24 hours (or even a whole week if you have time) to let it "settle". Come back with a fresh view. Have someone else read your poem and note any parts that don't make sense, or where it doesn't flow well. Read over your poem again. Be honest and be prepared to delete words or lines and swap things around. If you are using a computer, the best way to do this is to save a copy of your draft before you begin deleting, then it won't feel like you are throwing your work away permanently. Repeat this process as many times as you need to until you are happy with your poem. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I know what form of poem I have chosen to write? E.g. tanka, pantoum, free verse etc.?
- Does my poem follow the structure of its form? E.g. does my limerick follow an AABBA rhyming pattern?
- Does the rhythm of my poem flow?
- Is my poem engaging? Does it keep me interested?
- Does the poem make me feel something - excited, sad, amused...?
- Could I have chosen more interesting or descriptive words in my poem?
- Have I used a variety of techniques in my poem to make it more interesting? E.g. assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia etc.?
- Have I checked my spelling?
- Have I included the poetic form in my title?

Primary Poetry Marking Criteria

The criteria assessed in the writing task are:

Criteria	1	2	3
1. Reader Engagement – Poem contains content which engages and affects the reader.			
2. Poetic Structure – Use of poetic structure that is sustained and relevant to poetic form.			
3. Cohesion – The portrayal of ideas, meaning and purpose is clear and effective.			
4. Vocabulary – Articulate use of a wide range of precise and effective words and phrases.			
5. Techniques - The use of effective structural and language techniques such as: – figurative language including imagery, sensory language, personification, metaphor, simile, onomatopoeia, hyperbole, etc. – creative use of language including nonsense words, spoonerisms, word play, neologisms and puns etc – structural techniques including alliteration, repetition, configuration of shape etc.			