

Mr Wieland's guide to poetic form: Rhyme schemes

A rhyme scheme is the pattern established by the arrangement of rhymes in a stanza or poem, generally described by using letters of the alphabet to denote the recurrence of rhyming lines, such as the **ababbcc** of the **Rhyme Royal** stanza form. The rhyme royal stanza consists of seven lines, usually in iambic pentameter. In practice, the stanza can be constructed either as a terza rima and two couplets (a-b-a, b-b, c-c) or a quatrain and a tercet (a-b-a-b, b-c-c). This allows for a good deal of variety, especially when the form is used for longer narrative poems and along with the couplet, it was the standard narrative metre in the late Middle Ages.

The two quatrains of the poem, "*La Tour Eiffel*," with end words of *form-warm-storm-insouciance* and *earth-mirth-birth-France*, have an **interlocking or chain rhyme** scheme of **aaab cccb**.

Capital letters in the alphabetic rhyme scheme are used for the repeating lines of a refrain; **the letters x and y indicate unrhymed lines**. For example the rhyme scheme of Fitzgerald's "*The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*", is aaxa

In quatrains, the **popular rhyme scheme of abab** is called **alternate rhyme** or **cross rhyme**, as in Wordsworth's "*She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways*". Tennyson used an **abba scheme, often called envelope rhyme**, for "*In Memoriam*."

Another popular rhyme scheme is **couplet rhyme**, which appears as **aabbcc**. When the couplet is "closed" — i.e. when it stands as a self-contained unit of thought as well as an arrangement of sound like in the end of a sonnet — it is an instrument of great wit or force.