

## Poetic Forms: The sonnet, the villanelle, and the rondeau

Required subjects: One has to be a ritual, the other an homage to someone you love or respect, and the recreates an experience or captures a place.

### Formatting an English sonnet

Step 1 - Write the first four lines of the sonnet. These first four lines usually follow an a-b-a-b rhyme scheme. These first four lines can be used as a sort of introduction to your sonnet. Tell your reader what you intend to write about, but don't think of in the sense of a typical introduction like you might read in an academic essay. Instead, think about the first four lines of your sonnet as a place to make a strong impact on your reader and a place where your intended topic should be made clear somewhere near the end.

Step 2 - Skip a line and then write another four lines of the sonnet. These four lines usually follow the c-d-c-d rhyme scheme. The second four lines of your sonnet can be used as a build up in the plot of your sonnet with a sort of climatic cliff hanger at the end of these four lines. This will set you up perfectly for the last set of four lines.

Step 3 - Skip yet another line and then write another four lines of the sonnet. These four lines should follow the rhyme scheme of e-f-e-f. The last four set of lines can be used at the conclusion, which would be a resolution to the climax that occurs in the end of the second four set of lines.

Step 4 - Skip another line and write the last two lines of the sonnet. The last two lines of your sonnet should rhyme. These last two lines, or the rhyming couplet, at the end of your sonnet is a great place to clearly lay out the "lesson" the reader is intended to learn by the end of your sonnet. To help you figure out how to approach these last two lines you might try to think of a way in which you could rewrite your whole sonnet in two lines. How can you really drive your point?

Step 5 - Proof read your sonnet for spelling errors and any grammatical errors that you didn't mean to make. Remember, poetry tends to be less strict when it comes to grammar, but the choice to go against the rules of grammar in poetry usually serves a purpose.

VII by Edna St. Vincent Millay

Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word!  
Give back my book and take my kiss instead.  
Was it my enemy or my friend I heard?—  
"What a big book for such a little head!"  
Come, I will show you now my newest hat,  
And you may watch me purse my mouth and prink.  
Oh, I shall love you still and all of that.  
I never again shall tell you what I think.

I shall be sweet and crafty, soft and sly;  
You will not catch me reading any more;  
I shall be called a wife to pattern by;  
And some day when you knock and push the door,  
Some sane day, not too bright and not too stormy,  
I shall be gone, and you may whistle for me.

**The Villanelle** - The essence of the fixed modern form is its distinctive pattern of rhyme and repetition. The rhyme-and-refrain pattern of the villanelle are below.

Refrain 1 (A<sup>1</sup>)

Line 2 (b)

Refrain 2 (A<sup>2</sup>)

Line 4 (a)

Line 5 (b)

Refrain 1 (A<sup>1</sup>)

Line 7 (a)

Line 8 (b)

Refrain 2 (A<sup>2</sup>)

Line 10 (a)

Line 11 (b)

Refrain 1 (A<sup>1</sup>)

Line 13 (a)

Line 14 (b)

Refrain 2 (A<sup>2</sup>)

Line 16 (a)

Line 17 (b)

Refrain 1 (A<sup>1</sup>)

Refrain 2 (A<sup>2</sup>)

The House on the Hill      by Edwin Arlington Robinson

They are all gone away,  
The House is shut and still,  
There is nothing more to say.

Through broken walls and gray  
The winds blow bleak and shrill.  
They are all gone away.

Nor is there one to-day  
To speak them good or ill:  
There is nothing more to say.

Why is it then we stray  
Around the sunken sill?  
They are all gone away,

And our poor fancy-play  
For them is wasted skill:  
There is nothing more to say.

There is ruin and decay  
In the House on the Hill:  
They are all gone away,  
There is nothing more to say.

# Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night by Dylan Thomas

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.

<http://www.poets.org/tellafriend.php/prmURL/%5E%5E%5Eviewmedia.php%5EprmMID%5E15377>

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 the 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.

A **rondeau** (plural **rondeaux**) is a French form with 15 lines. It makes use of refrains, repeated according to a certain stylized pattern. It was customarily regarded as a challenge to arrange for these refrains to contribute to the meaning of the poem in as succinct and poignant a manner as possible. The rondeau consists of thirteen lines of eight syllables, plus two refrains (which are half lines, each of four syllables), employing, altogether, only three rhymes. It has three stanzas and its rhyme scheme is as follows: (1) A A B B A (2) A A B with refrain: C (3) A A B B A with concluding refrain C. The refrain must be identical with the beginning of the first line.

## We Wear the Mask by Paul Laurence Dunbar

We wear the mask that grins and lies, (A)  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,— (A)  
This debt we pay to human guile; (B)  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile, (B)  
And mouth with myriad subtleties. (A)  
Why should the world be over-wise, (A)  
In counting all our tears and sighs? (A)  
Nay, let them only see us, while (B)  
We wear the mask. (C)  
We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries (A)  
To thee from tortured souls arise. (A)  
We sing, but oh the clay is vile (B)  
Beneath our feet, and long the mile; (B)  
But let the world dream otherwise, (A)

We wear the mask! (C)

A Rondeau

In Flanders Field  
by John McCrae

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place, and in the sky,  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly,  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.  
We are the dead; short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.  
Take up our quarrel with the foe!  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high!  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

## SONNET #43, FROM THE PORTUGUESE

by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.  
I love thee to the level of everyday's  
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.  
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;  
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.  
I love thee with the passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.  
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints!--I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life!--and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.

**The Sestina** is made up of seven stanzas, the first six of which have six lines, the seventh having only three. There is a very exact and complicated pattern to the sestina's stanzas:

The first stanza is the defining stanza, and the six words that are used to end each line are the defining words, as they will be repeated throughout the rest of the poem.

The second stanza is made by taking the six words that were used to end the last six lines and using them in a certain order: the last word used will now end the first line of this stanza; the first word used will now end the second line of this stanza; the second to last, the third: the second, the fourth; the third to last, the fifth, the third, the sixth.

For each new stanza of the first six, the same pattern is continued by using the previous stanza. For the last (seventh) stanza, there are only three lines, using the last three ending words, and then having the other three inside each line.

Example: for this, each letter represents the ending word of a line:

a b c d e f (first stanza)  
f a e b d c (second stanza)  
c f d a b e (third stanza)  
e c b f a d (fourth stanza)  
d e a c f b (fifth stanza)  
b d f e c a (sixth stanza)  
a d (1st line of the 7th stanza, "a" must be in the line, but the line must end with "d")  
b e (2nd line of the 7th stanza, "b" must be in the line, but the line must end with "e")  
c f (3rd line of the 7th stanza, "c" must be in the line, but the line must end with "f")

The last stanza is under much dispute, and is often written differently, but the one we have shown is the most common. Also, a neat variation is to vary the words in the same way, only instead of it being the ending words, having it be the first words of each line!

Sestina by Elizabeth Bishop

September rain falls on the house.  
In the failing light, the old grandmother  
sits in the kitchen with the child  
beside the Little Marvel Stove,  
reading the jokes from the almanac,  
laughing and talking to hide her tears.

She thinks that her equinoctial tears  
and the rain that beats on the roof of the house  
were both foretold by the almanac,  
but only known to a grandmother.  
The iron kettle sings on the stove.  
She cuts some bread and says to the child,

It's time for tea now; but the child  
is watching the teakettle's small hard tears  
dance like mad on the hot black stove,  
the way the rain must dance on the house.

Tidying up, the old grandmother  
hangs up the clever almanac

on its string. Birdlike, the almanac  
hovers half open above the child,  
hovers above the old grandmother  
and her teacup full of dark brown tears.  
She shivers and says she thinks the house  
feels chilly, and puts more wood in the stove.

It was to be, says the Marvel Stove.  
I know what I know, says the almanac.  
With crayons the child draws a rigid house  
and a winding pathway. Then the child  
puts in a man with buttons like tears  
and shows it proudly to the grandmother.

But secretly, while the grandmother  
busies herself about the stove,  
the little moons fall down like tears  
from between the pages of the almanac  
into the flower bed the child  
has carefully placed in the front of the house.

Time to plant tears, says the almanac.  
The grandmother sings to the marvelous stove  
and the child draws another inscrutable house.