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Glossary Terms

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Acrostic

A poem in which the first letter of each line spells out a word, name, or phrase when read vertically. See Lewis Carroll's "A Boat beneath a Sunny Sky."

Alexandrine

In English, a 12-syllable iambic line adapted from French heroic verse. The last line of each stanza in Thomas Hardy's "The Convergence of the Twain" and Percy Bysshe Shelley's "To a Skylark" is an alexandrine.

Anagram

A word spelled out by rearranging the letters of another word; for example, "The teacher *gapes* at the mounds of exam *pages* lying before her."

Ars Poetica

A poem that explains the "art of poetry," or a meditation on poetry using the form and techniques of a poem. Horace's *Ars Poetica* is an early example, and the foundation for the tradition. While Horace writes of the importance of delighting and instructing audiences, modernist *ars poetica* poets argue that poems should be written for their own sake, as art for the sake of art. Archibald MacLeish's famous "Ars Poetica" sums up the argument: "A poem should not mean / But be." See also Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Criticism," William Wordsworth's *Prelude*, and Wallace Stevens's "Of Modern Poetry."

Aubade

A love poem or song welcoming or lamenting the arrival of the dawn. The form originated in medieval France. See John Donne's "The Sun Rising" and Louise Bogan's "Leave-Taking." Browse more [aubade](#) poems.

Ballad

A popular narrative song passed down orally. In the English tradition, it usually follows a form of rhymed (abcb) **quatrains** alternating four-stress and three-stress lines. Folk (or traditional) ballads are anonymous and recount tragic, comic, or heroic stories with emphasis on a central dramatic event; examples include "Barbara Allen" and "John Henry." Beginning in the Renaissance, poets have adapted the conventions of the folk ballad for their own original compositions. Examples of this

“literary” ballad form include John Keats’s “La Belle Dame sans Merci,” Thomas Hardy’s “During Wind and Rain,” and Edgar Allan Poe’s “Annabel Lee.” Browse more ballads.

Ballade

An Old French verse form that usually consists of three eight-line stanzas and a four-line **envoy**, with a rhyme scheme of ababbcbcbcb. The last line of the first stanza is repeated at the end of subsequent stanzas and the envoy. See Hilaire Belloc’s “Ballade of Modest Confession” and Algernon Charles Swinburne’s translation of François Villon’s “Ballade des Pendus” (Ballade of the Hanged).

Bucolic

See **pastoral poetry**.

Canto

A long subsection of an epic or long narrative poem, such as Dante Alighieri’s *Commedia* (*The Divine Comedy*), first employed in English by Edmund Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*. Other examples include Lord Byron’s *Don Juan* and Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*.

Canzone

Literally “song” in Italian, the canzone is a lyric poem originating in medieval Italy and France and usually consisting of hendecasyllabic lines with end-rhyme. The canzone influenced the development of the **sonnet**.

Carol

A hymn or poem often sung by a group, with an individual taking the changing stanzas and the group taking the burden or refrain. See Robert Southwell’s “The Burning Babe”. Many traditional Christmas songs are carols, such as “I Saw Three Ships” and “The Twelve Days of Christmas.”

Concrete poetry

Verse that emphasizes nonlinguistic elements in its meaning, such as a typeface that creates a visual image of the topic. Examples include George Herbert’s “Easter Wings” and “The Altar” and George Starbuck’s “Poem in the Shape of a Potted Christmas Tree”. Browse more concrete poems.

Couplet

A pair of successive rhyming lines, usually of the same length. A couplet is “closed” when the lines form a bounded grammatical unit like a sentence (see Dorothy Parker’s “Interview”: “The ladies men admire, I’ve heard, /Would shudder at a wicked word.”). The “heroic couplet” is written in iambic pentameter and features prominently in the work of 17th- and 18th-century didactic and satirical poets such as Alexander Pope: “Some have at first for wits, then poets pass’d, /Turn’d critics next, and proved plain fools at last.” Browse more couplet poems.

Curtal sonnet

See **Sonnet**.

Didactic poetry

Poetry that instructs, either in terms of morals or by providing knowledge of philosophy, religion, arts, science, or skills. Although some poets believe that all poetry is inherently instructional, didactic poetry separately refers to poems that contain a clear moral or message or purpose to convey to its readers. John Milton’s epic *Paradise Lost* and Alexander Pope’s *An Essay on Man* are famous examples. See also William Blake’s “A Divine Image,” Rudyard Kipling’s “If—,” and Alfred Lord Tennyson’s “In Memoriam.”

Dirge

A brief hymn or song of lamentation and grief; it was typically composed to be performed at a funeral. In lyric poetry, a dirge tends to be shorter and less meditative than an **elegy**. See Christina Rossetti's "A Dirge" and Sir Philip Sidney's "Ring Out Your Bells."

Doggerel

Bad verse traditionally characterized by clichés, clumsiness, and irregular meter. It is often unintentionally humorous. The "giftedly bad" William McGonagall was an accomplished doggerelist, as demonstrated in "The Tay Bridge Disaster":

It must have been an awful sight,
To witness in the dusky moonlight,
While the Storm Fiend did laugh, and angry did bray,
Along the Railway Bridge of the Silv'ry Tay,
Oh! ill-fated Bridge of the Silv'ry Tay,
I must now conclude my lay
By telling the world fearlessly without the least dismay,
That your central girders would not have given way,
At least many sensible men do say,
Had they been supported on each side with buttresses,
At least many sensible men confesses,
For the stronger we our houses do build,
The less chance we have of being killed.

Dramatic monologue

A poem in which an imagined speaker addresses a silent listener, usually not the reader. Examples include Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess," T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," and Ai's "Killing Floor." A lyric may also be addressed to someone, but it is short and songlike and may appear to address either the reader or the poet. Browse more **dramatic monologue poems**.

Eclogue

A brief, dramatic **pastoral** poem, set in an idyllic rural place but discussing urban, legal, political, or social issues. Bucolics and idylls, like eclogues, are pastoral poems, but in nondramatic form. See Edmund Spenser's "Shepherd's Calendar: April," Andrew Marvell's "Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Fawn," and John Crowe Ransom's "Eclogue."

Elegy

In traditional English poetry, it is often a melancholy poem that laments its subject's death but ends in consolation. Examples include John Milton's "Lycidas"; Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "In Memoriam"; and Walt Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." More recently, Peter Sacks has elegized his father in "Natal Command," and Mary Jo Bang has written "You Were You Are Elegy" and other poems for her son. In the 18th century the "elegiac stanza" emerged, though its use has not been exclusive to elegies. It is a **quatrain** with the rhyme scheme ABAB written in iambic **pentameter**. Browse more **elegies**.

Envoi (or Envoy)

The brief stanza that ends French poetic forms such as the **ballade** or **sestina**. It usually serves as a summation or a dedication to a particular person. See Hilaire Belloc's satirical "Ballade of Modest Confession."

Epic

A long narrative poem in which a heroic protagonist engages in an action of great mythic or historical significance. Notable

English epics include *Beowulf*, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (which follows the virtuous exploits of 12 knights in the service of the mythical King Arthur), and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which dramatizes Satan's fall from Heaven and humankind's subsequent alienation from God in the Garden of Eden. Browse more [epics](#).

Epigram

A pithy, often witty, poem. See Walter Savage Landor's "Dirce," Ben Jonson's "On Gut," or much of the work of J.V. Cunningham:

This *Humanist* whom no beliefs constrained
Grew so broad-minded he was scatter-brained.

Browse more [epigrams](#).

Epistle

A letter in verse, usually addressed to a person close to the writer. Its themes may be moral and philosophical, or intimate and sentimental. Alexander Pope favored the form; see his "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," in which the poet addresses a physician in his social circle. The epistle peaked in popularity in the 18th century, though Lord Byron and Robert Browning composed several in the next century; see Byron's "Epistle to Augusta." Less formal, more conversational versions of the epistle can be found in contemporary lyric poetry; see Hayden Carruth's "The Afterlife: Letter to Sam Hamill" or "Dear Mr. Fanelli" by Charles Bernstein. Browse more [epistles](#).

Epitaph

A short poem intended for (or imagined as) an inscription on a tombstone and often serving as a brief [elegy](#). See Robert Herrick's "Upon a Child That Died" and "Upon Ben Jonson"; Ben Jonson's "Epitaph on Elizabeth, L. H.,"; and "Epitaph for a Romantic Woman" by Louise Bogan.

Epithalamion

A lyric poem in praise of Hymen (the Greek god of marriage), an epithalamion often blesses a wedding and in modern times is often read at the wedding ceremony or reception. See Edmund Spenser's "Epithalamion." Browse more [epithalamions](#).

Fixed and unfixed forms

Poems that have a set number of lines, rhymes, and/or metrical arrangements per line. Browse all terms related to [forms](#), including [alcaics](#), [alexandrine](#), [aubade](#), [ballad](#), [ballade](#), [carol](#), [concrete poetry](#), [double dactyl](#), [dramatic monologue](#), [eclogue](#), [elegy](#), [epic](#), [epistle](#), [epithalamion](#), [free verse](#), [haiku](#), [heroic couplet](#), [limerick](#), [madrigal](#), [mock epic](#), [ode](#), [ottava rima](#), [pastoral](#), [quatrain](#), [renga](#), [rondeau](#), [rondel](#), [sestina](#), [sonnet](#), [Spenserian stanza](#), [tanka](#), [tercet](#), [terza rima](#), and [villanelle](#).

Found poem

A prose text or texts reshaped by a poet into quasi-metrical lines. Fragments of found poetry may appear within an original poem as well. Portions of Ezra Pound's *Cantos* are found poetry, culled from historical letters and government documents. Charles Olson created his poem "There Was a Youth whose Name Was Thomas Granger" using a report from William Bradford's *History of Plymouth Plantation*.

Fourteener

A metrical line of 14 syllables (usually seven [iambicfeet](#)). A relatively long line, it can be found in narrative poetry from the Middle Ages through the 16th century. Fourteener couplets broken into quatrains are known as [common measure](#) or [ballad meter](#). See also Poulter's measure.

Free verse

Nonmetrical, nonrhyming lines that closely follow the natural rhythms of speech. A regular pattern of sound or rhythm may emerge in free-verse lines, but the poet does not adhere to a metrical plan in their composition. **Matthew Arnold** and **Walt Whitman** explored the possibilities of nonmetrical poetry in the 19th century. Since the early 20th century, the majority of published lyric poetry has been written in free verse. See the work of **William Carlos Williams**, **T.S. Eliot**, **Ezra Pound**, and **H.D.** Browse more [free-verse poems](#).

Genre

A class or category of texts with similarities in form, style, or subject matter. The definition of a genre changes over time, and a text often interacts with multiple genres. A text's relationship to a particular genre—whether it defies or supports a genre's set of expectations—is often of interest when conducting literary analysis. Four major genres of literature include poetry, drama, nonfiction, and fiction. Poetry can be divided into further genres, such as epic, lyric, narrative, satirical, or prose poetry. For more examples of genres, browse poems by type.

Georgic

A poem or book dealing with agriculture or rural topics, which commonly glorifies outdoor labor and simple country life. Often takes the form of a didactic or instructive poem intended to give instructions related to a skill or art. The Roman poet **Virgil** famously wrote a collection of poems entitled *Georgics*, which has influenced poets since. Read a translated excerpt from *Virgil's Georgics* [Book III](#) or [Book IV](#).

Ghazal

(Pronunciation: "guzzle") Originally an Arabic verse form dealing with loss and romantic love, medieval Persian poets embraced the ghazal, eventually making it their own. Consisting of syntactically and grammatically complete couplets, the form also has an intricate rhyme scheme. Each couplet ends on the same word or phrase (the *radif*), and is preceded by the couplet's rhyming word (the *qafia*, which appears twice in the first couplet). The last couplet includes a proper name, often of the poet's. In the Persian tradition, each couplet was of the same meter and length, and the subject matter included both erotic longing and religious belief or mysticism. English-language poets who have composed in the form include **Adrienne Rich**, **John Hollander**, and **Agha Shahid Ali**; see Ali's "Tonight" and **Patricia Smith's** "Hip-Hop Ghazal."

Browse more [ghazal poems](#).

Gnomic verse

Poems laced with proverbs, aphorisms, or maxims. The term was first applied to Greek poets in the 6th century BCE and was practiced in medieval Germany and England. See excerpts from **the Exeter Book**. **Robert Creeley** explored the genre in his contemporary "Gnomic Verses."

Haiku (or hokku)

A Japanese verse form of three unrhyming lines in five, seven, and five syllables. It creates a single, memorable image, as in these lines by **Kobayashi Issa**, translated by **Jane Hirshfield**:

On a branch
floating downriver
a cricket, singing.

(In translating from Japanese to English, Hirshfield compresses the number of syllables.)

See also "Three Haiku, Two Tanka" by **Philip Appleman** and **Robert Hass's** "After the Gentle Poet Kobayashi Issa." The Imagist poets of the early 20th century, including **Ezra Pound** and **H.D.**, showed appreciation for the form's linguistic and sensory

economy; Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" embodies the spirit of haiku. Browse more haiku.

Heroic couplet

See couplet.

Horatian ode

See ode.

Hymn

A poem praising God or the divine, often sung. In English, the most popular hymns were written between the 17th and 19th centuries. See Isaac Watts's "Our God, Our Help," Charles Wesley's "My God! I Know, I Feel Thee Mine," and "Thou Hidden Love of God" by John Wesley.

Italian sonnet

See Sonnet.

Lament

Any poem expressing deep grief, usually at the death of a loved one or some other loss. Related to elegy and the dirge. See "A Lament" by Percy Bysshe Shelley; Thom Gunn's "Lament"; and Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Lament."

Landays

A form of folk poetry from Afghanistan. Meant to be recited or sung aloud, and frequently anonymous, the form is a couplet comprised of 22 syllables. The first line has 9 syllables and the second line 13 syllables. Landays end on "ma" or "na" sounds and treat themes such as love, grief, homeland, war, and separation. See Eliza Griswold's extensive reporting on the form in the June 2013 issue of *Poetry*, in which she explains how the form was created by and for the more than 20 million Pashtun women who span the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Light verse

Whimsical poems taking forms such as limericks, nonsense poems, and double dactyls. See Edward Lear's "The Owl and the Pussy-Cat" and Lewis Carroll's "The Walrus and the Carpenter." Other masters of light verse include Dorothy Parker, G.K. Chesterton, John Hollander, and Wendy Cope.

Limerick

A fixed light-verse form of five generally anapestic lines rhyming AABBA. Edward Lear, who popularized the form, fused the third and fourth lines into a single line with internal rhyme. Limericks are traditionally bawdy or just irreverent; see "A Young Lady of Lynn" or Lear's "There was an Old Man with a Beard." Browse more limericks.

Lyric

Originally a composition meant for musical accompaniment. The term refers to a short poem in which the poet, the poet's persona, or another speaker expresses personal feelings. See Robert Herrick's "To Anthea, who May Command Him Anything," John Clare's "I Hid My Love," Louise Bogan's "Song for the Last Act," or Louise Glück's "Vita Nova."

Madrigal

A song or short lyric poem intended for multiple singers. Originating in 14th-century Italy, it became popular in England in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. It has no fixed metrical requirements. See "Rosalind's Madrigal" by Thomas Lodge.

Mock epic

A poem that plays with the conventions of the **epic** to comment on a topic satirically. In “Mac Flecknoe,” John Dryden wittily flaunts his mastery of the epic genre to cut down a literary rival. Alexander Pope’s “The Rape of the Lock” recasts a petty high-society scandal as a mythological battle for the virtue of an innocent.

Occasional poem

A poem written to describe or comment on a particular event and often written for a public reading. Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s “The Charge of the Light Brigade” commemorates a disastrous battle in the Crimean War. George Starbuck wrote “Of Late” after reading a newspaper account of a Vietnam War protester’s suicide. Elizabeth Alexander’s “Praise Song for the Day” was written for the inauguration of President Barack Obama. See also **elegy**, **epithalamion**, and **ode**.

Octave

An eight-line stanza or poem. See **ottava rima** and **triolet**. The first eight lines of an Italian or Petrarchan **sonnet** are also called an octave.

Ode

A formal, often ceremonious lyric poem that addresses and often celebrates a person, place, thing, or idea. Its stanza forms vary. The *Greek or Pindaric* (Pindar, ca. 552–442 B.C.E.) ode was a public poem, usually set to music, that celebrated athletic victories. (See Stephen Burt’s article “And the Winner Is . . . Pindar!”) English odes written in the Pindaric tradition include Thomas Gray’s “The Progress of Poesy: A Pindaric Ode” and William Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Reflections of Early Childhood.” Horatian odes, after the Latin poet Horace (65–8 B.C.E.), were written in quatrains in a more philosophical, contemplative manner; see Andrew Marvell’s “Horatian Ode upon Cromwell’s Return from Ireland.” The Sapphic ode consists of quatrains, three 11-syllable lines, and a final five-syllable line, unrhyming but with a strict meter. See Algernon Charles Swinburne’s “Sapphics.”

The odes of the English Romantic poets vary in stanza form. They often address an intense emotion at the onset of a personal crisis (see Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Dejection: An Ode,”) or celebrate an object or image that leads to revelation (see John Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” “Ode to a Nightingale,” and “To Autumn”). Browse more odes.

Ottava rima

Originally an Italian stanza of eight 11-syllable lines, with a rhyme scheme of ABABABCC. Sir Thomas Wyatt introduced the form in English, and Lord Byron adapted it to a 10-syllable line for his mock-epic *Don Juan*. W.B. Yeats used it for “Among School Children” and “Sailing to Byzantium.” Browse more **ottava rima** poems.

Palinode

An ode or song that retracts or recants what the poet wrote in a previous poem. For instance, Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* ends with a retraction, in which he apologizes for the work’s “worldly vanitees” and sinful contents.

Panegyric

A poem of effusive praise. Its origins are Greek, and it is closely related to the eulogy and the **ode**. See Ben Jonson’s “To the Memory of My Beloved the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare” or Anne Bradstreet’s “In Honor of That High and Mighty Princess, Queen Elizabeth.”

Pantoum

A Malaysian verse form adapted by French poets and occasionally imitated in English. It comprises a series of quatrains, with the second and fourth lines of each quatrain repeated as the first and third lines of the next. The second and fourth lines of the final stanza repeat the first and third lines of the first stanza. See A.E. Stallings’s “Another Lullaby for Insomniacs.” Browse more

pantoums.

Pastoral

Verse in the tradition of Theocritus (3 BCE), who wrote idealized accounts of shepherds and their loves living simple, virtuous lives in Arcadia, a mountainous region of Greece. Poets writing in English drew on the pastoral tradition by retreating from the trappings of modernity to the imagined virtues and romance of rural life, as in Edmund Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calendar*, Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love," and Sir Walter Raleigh's response, "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd." The pastoral poem faded after the European Industrial Revolution of the 18th century, but its themes persist in poems that romanticize rural life or reappraise the natural world; see Leonie Adams's "Country Summer," Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill," or Allen Ginsberg's "Wales Visitation." Browse more pastoral poems.

Pattern poetry

See Concrete poetry.

Pindaric ode

See Ode.

Prose poem

A prose composition that, while not broken into verse lines, demonstrates other traits such as symbols, metaphors, and other figures of speech common to poetry. See Amy Lowell's "Bath," "Metals Metals" by Russell Edson, "Information" by David Ignatow, and Harryette Mullen's "[Kills bugs dead.]" Browse more prose poems.

Quatrain

A four-line stanza, rhyming

-ABAC or ABCB (known as *unbounded* or *ballad quatrain*), as in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

-AABB (a double couplet); see A.E. Housman's "To an Athlete Dying Young."

-ABAB (known as *interlaced*, *alternate*, or *heroic*), as in Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" or "Sadie and Maud" by Gwendolyn Brooks.

-ABBA (known as *envelope* or *enclosed*), as in Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "In Memoriam" or John Ciardi's "Most Like an Arch This Marriage."

-AABA, the stanza of Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."

Browse poems with quatrains.

Refrain

A phrase or line repeated at intervals within a poem, especially at the end of a stanza. See the refrain "jump back, honey, jump back" in Paul Lawrence Dunbar's "A Negro Love Song" or "return and return again" in James Laughlin's "O Best of All Nights, Return and Return Again." Browse poems with a refrain.

Renga

A Japanese form composed of a series of half-tanka written by different poets. The opening stanza is the basis of the modern haiku form.

Rhyme royal (rime royale)

A stanza of seven 10-syllable lines, rhyming ABABBCC, popularized by Geoffrey Chaucer and termed "royal" because his imitator, James I of Scotland, employed it in his own verse. In addition to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, see Sir Thomas Wyatt's "They flee from me" and William Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence."

Romance

French in origin, a genre of long narrative poetry about medieval courtly culture and secret love. It triumphed in English with tales of chivalry such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale" and *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Rondeau

Originating in France, a mainly octosyllabic poem consisting of between 10 and 15 lines and three stanzas. It has only two rhymes, with the opening words used twice as an unrhyming refrain at the end of the second and third stanzas. The 10-line version rhymes ABBAABc ABBAc (where the lower-case "c" stands for the refrain). The 15-line version often rhymes AABBA AABc AABAc. Geoffrey Chaucer's "Now welcome, summer" at the close of *The Parlement of Fowls* is an example of a 13-line rondeau.

A *rondeau redoublé* consists of six quatrains using two rhymes. The first quatrain consists of four refrain lines that are used, in sequence, as the last lines of the next four quatrains, and a phrase from the first refrain is repeated as a tail at the end of the final stanza. See Dorothy Parker's "Roudeau Redoublé (and Scarcely Worth the Trouble at That)."

Rondel (roundel)

A poetic form of 11 to 14 lines consisting of two rhymes and the repetition of the first two lines in the middle of the poem and at its end. Algernon Charles Swinburne's "The Roundel" is 11 lines in two stanzas.

Sapphic verse

See ode.

Sestet

A six-line stanza, or the final six lines of a 14-line Italian or Petrarchan sonnet.

Sestina

A complex French verse form, usually unrhymed, consisting of six stanzas of six lines each and a three-line envoy. The end words of the first stanza are repeated in a different order as end words in each of the subsequent five stanzas; the closing envoy contains all six words, two per line, placed in the middle and at the end of the three lines. The patterns of word repetition are as follows, with each number representing the final word of a line, and each row of numbers representing a stanza:

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1 2 3 4 5 6
6 1 5 2 4 3
3 6 4 1 2 5
5 3 2 6 1 4
4 5 1 3 6 2
2 4 6 5 3 1
(6 2) (1 4) (5 3)
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See Algernon Charles Swinburne's "The Complaint of Lisa," John Ashbery's "Farm Implements and Rutabagas in a Landscape," and David Ferry's "The Guest Ellen at the Supper for Street People." Browse more sestinas.

Shakespearean sonnet

The variation of the sonnet form that Shakespeare used—comprised of three quatrains and a concluding couplet, rhyming *abab cdcd efef gg*—is called the English or Shakespearean sonnet form, although others had used it before him. This different sonnet structure allows for more space to be devoted to the buildup of a subject or problem than the Italian/Petrarchan form, and is followed by just two lines to conclude or resolve the poem in a rhyming couplet. Learn more about sonnet forms [here](#).

Sijo

A Korean verse form related to *haiku* and *tanka* and comprised of three lines of 14-16 syllables each, for a total of 44-46 syllables. Each line contains a pause near the middle, similar to a *caesura*, though the break need not be metrical. The first half of the line contains six to nine syllables; the second half should contain no fewer than five. Originally intended as songs, *sijo* can treat romantic, metaphysical, or spiritual themes. Whatever the subject, the first line introduces an idea or story, the second supplies a “turn,” and the third provides closure. Modern *sijo* are sometimes printed in six lines.

Slam

A competitive poetry performance in which selected audience members score performers, and winners are determined by total points. Slam is a composite genre that combines elements of poetry, theater, performance, and storytelling. The genre’s origins can be traced to Chicago in the early 1980s. Since then, groups of volunteers have organized slams in venues across the world. The first National Poetry Slam was held in 1990, and has become an annual event in which teams from cities across the United States compete at events in a host city. For more on poetry slams, see Jeremy Richards’s series “Performing the Academy”. See also poets Tyehimba Jess, Bob Holman, and Patricia Smith.

Sonnet

A 14-line poem with a variable rhyme scheme originating in Italy and brought to England by Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, earl of Surrey in the 16th century. Literally a “little song,” the sonnet traditionally reflects upon a single sentiment, with a clarification or “turn” of thought in its concluding lines. There are many different types of sonnets.

The *Petrarchan sonnet*, perfected by the Italian poet Petrarch, divides the 14 lines into two sections: an eight-line stanza (octave) rhyming ABBAABBA, and a six-line stanza (sestet) rhyming CDCDCD or CDEEDE. John Milton’s “When I Consider How my Light Is Spent” and Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “How Do I Love Thee” employ this form. The *Italian sonnet* is an English variation on the traditional Petrarchan version. The octave’s rhyme scheme is preserved, but the sestet rhymes CDDCEE. See Thomas Wyatt’s “Whoso List to Hunt, I Know Where Is an Hind” and John Donne’s “If Poisonous Minerals, and If That Tree.” Wyatt and Surrey developed the *English (or Shakespearean) sonnet*, which condenses the 14 lines into one stanza of three quatrains and a concluding couplet, with a rhyme scheme of ABABCDCEDEFEGG (though poets have frequently varied this scheme; see Wilfred Owen’s “Anthem for Doomed Youth”). George Herbert’s “Love (II),” Claude McKay’s “America,” and Molly Peacock’s “Altruism” are English sonnets.

These three types have given rise to many variations, including:

-The *caudate sonnet*, which adds codas or tails to the 14-line poem. See Gerard Manley Hopkins’s “That Nature Is a Heraclitean Fire.”

-The *curtal sonnet*, a shortened version devised by Gerard Manley Hopkins that maintains the proportions of the Italian form, substituting two six-stress *tercets* for two quatrains in the octave (rhyming ABC ABC), and four and a half lines for the sestet (rhyming DEBDE), also six-stress except for the final three-stress line. See his poem “Pied Beauty.”

-The *sonnet redoublé*, also known as a *crown of sonnets*, is composed of 15 sonnets that are linked by the repetition of the final line of one sonnet as the initial line of the next, and the final line of that sonnet as the initial line of the previous; the last sonnet consists of all the repeated lines of the previous 14 sonnets, in the same order in which they appeared. Marilyn Nelson’s *A Wreath for Emmett Till* is a contemporary example.

-A *sonnet sequence* is a group of sonnets sharing the same subject matter and sometimes a dramatic situation and persona. See George Meredith’s *Modern Love* sequence, Sir Philip Sidney’s *Astrophel and Stella*, Rupert Brooke’s *1914* sequence, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Sonnets from the Portuguese*.

-The Spenserian sonnet is a 14-line poem developed by Edmund Spenser in his *Amoretti*, that varies the English form by

interlocking the three quatrains (ABAB BCBC CDCD EE).

-The *stretched sonnet* is extended to 16 or more lines, such as those in George Meredith's sequence *Modern Love*.

-A *submerged sonnet* is tucked into a longer poetic work; see lines 235-48 of T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land."

Browse more **sonnets**. You can also read the educational essays "Learning the Sonnet" and "The Sonnet as a Silver Marrow Spoon."

Spenserian stanza

The unit of Edmund Spenser's long poem *The Faerie Queene*, consisting of eight iambic-pentameter lines and a final alexandrine, with a rhyme scheme of ABABBCBCC. Later uses of this stanza form include John Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes," Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Adonais," and Alfred Lord Tennyson's "The Lotos-Eaters."

Stanza

A grouping of lines separated from others in a poem. In modern **free verse**, the stanza, like a prose paragraph, can be used to mark a shift in mood, time, or thought.

Syllabic verse

Poetry whose **meter** is determined by the total number of **syllables** per line, rather than the number of **stresses**. Marianne Moore's poetry is mostly syllabic. Other examples include Thomas Nashe's "Adieu, farewell earth's bliss" and Dylan Thomas's "Poem in October." Browse more poems in syllabic verse.

Tanka

A Japanese form of five lines with 5, 7, 5, 7, and 7 syllables—31 in all. See Philip Appleman's "Three Haiku, Two Tanka." See also *renga*.

Tercet

A poetic unit of three lines, rhymed or unrhymed. Thomas Hardy's "The Convergence of the Twain" rhymes AAA BBB; Ben Jonson's "On Spies" is a three-line poem rhyming AAA; and Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" is written in *terza rima* form. Examples of poems in unrhymed tercets include Wallace Stevens's "The Snow Man" and David Wagoner's "For a Student Sleeping in a Poetry Workshop."

Browse more poems with **tercets**.

Terza rima

An Italian stanzaic form, used most notably by Dante Alighieri in *Commedia* (*The Divine Comedy*), consisting of tercets with interwoven rhymes (ABA BCB DED EFE, and so on). A concluding couplet rhymes with the penultimate line of the last tercet. See Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," Derek Walcott's "The Bounty," and *Omeros*, and Jacqueline Osherow's "Autumn Psalm."

Browse more poems in **terza rima**.

Triolet

An eight-line stanza having just two rhymes and repeating the first line as the fourth and seventh lines, and the second line as the eighth. See Sandra McPherson's "Triolet" or "Triolets in the Argolid" by Rachel Hadas.

Verse

As a mass noun, poetry in general; as a regular noun, a line of poetry. Typically used to refer to poetry that possesses more formal qualities.

Verse paragraph

A group of verse lines that make up a single rhetorical unit. In longer poems, the first line is often indented, like a paragraph in prose. The long narrative passages of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* are verse paragraphs. The titled sections of Robert Pinsky's "Essay on Psychiatrists" demarcate shifts in focus and argument much as prose paragraphs would. A shorter lyric poem, even when broken into stanzas, could be considered a single verse paragraph, insofar as it expresses a unified mood or thought; see Gail Mazur's "Evening."

Villanelle

A French verse form consisting of five three-line stanzas and a final quatrain, with the first and third lines of the first stanza repeating alternately in the following stanzas. These two refrain lines form the final couplet in the quatrain. See "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" by Dylan Thomas, Elizabeth Bishop's "One Art," and Edwin Arlington Robinson's "The House on the Hill."

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