

TYPES OF POETRY TO EXPLORE

Abecedarian: The first letter of each line or stanza follows sequentially through the alphabet.

Acrostic: The first letter of each line spells out a word, name, or phrase when read vertically.

Blackout or Erasure Poetry: A form of found poetry in which a poet blacks out or obscures portions of an existing text, creating a new work from what remains.

Blank Verse: Nonrhyming iambic pentameter, also called heroic verse. The 10-syllable line is considered the closest to English speech patterns, and it is the predominant rhythm of English dramatic and epic poetry.

Ekphrasis: An ekphrastic poem is a description of a scene or, more commonly, a work of art. The poem imagines and describes what is going on in the painting, sculpture or scene. The word ekphrasis means description in Greek.

Elegy: A melancholy poem that laments a death but ends in consolation.

Enjambment: The poetic device of running a sentence or phrase from one line to the next.

Epic: A long narrative poem in which the hero engages in an action of great mythic or historical significance.

Free Verse: Following the natural rhythms of speech, free verse is nonrhyming and nonmetric. Most of the published lyric poetry has been written in free verse since the early 20th century.

Ghazal: Pronounced “guzzle.” Originally an Arabic verse form invoking melancholy, love, longing, and metaphysical question. Consisting of syntactically and grammatically complete couplets, the form also has an intricate rhyme scheme. The ghazal is composed of a minimum of five couplets—and typically no more than 15—that are structurally, thematically, and emotionally autonomous. Each line of the poem must be of the same length.

Haiku: A short form of poetry adapted from Japanese tradition, usually based on observations of the natural world and written in the present tense about a present moment in just 17 syllables. A haiku has three lines of 5-7-5 syllables.

Limerick: Often nonsensical and sometimes even lewd, limericks are composed of five lines or five-line stanzas with a rhyme scheme of AABBA. They're often funny and the bouncy rhythm makes them easy to remember.

Lyric: A short poem, often song-like, that expresses the speaker's personal emotions and feelings.

Ode: A formal, often ceremonious lyric poem that addresses and often celebrates a person, place, thing, or idea. Its stanza forms vary.

Pantoum. This verse form from Malaysia consists of four stanzas, with four sentences in each stanza. It can be about anything. The fun thing about the pantoum is that it uses repetition, so if you want to reemphasize some very memorable detail in the piece, you can do so. The second and fourth lines of each quatrain are 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.

Prose Poem: Prose that is not broken into verse lines but has characteristics common to poetry, such as metaphors and symbols.

Rondeau: 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 (the “c” stands for the refrain). The 15-line version often rhymes AABBA AABc AABAc. The rondeau originated in France.

Rondel: 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.

Sestina: A challenging and complex French verse form, usually unrhymed, 39 lines consisting of six stanzas of six lines each and a three-line envoi (a short stanza at the end of the poem). 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 envoi contains all six words, two per line, placed in the middle and at the end of the three lines.

Sonnet: The sonnet is a 14-line poem traditionally written in iambic pentameter, employing one of several rhyme schemes, and adhering to a tightly structured thematic organization. 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 various sonnet forms – the English or Shakespearean sonnet form, and the Italian/Petrarchan form.

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. The theme might be romantic, metaphysical, or spiritual. 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, with origins in Chicago in the 1980s, that combines poetry, theater, performance, and storytelling. Selected audience members score performers, and winners are determined by total points. The National Poetry Slam, which started in 1990, has become an annual event in which teams from cities across the United States compete at events in a host city.

Spoken Word: Intended for performance, with its roots in oral tradition, spoken word poetry can also be published on the page. Spoken word can contain elements of rap, hip-hop, storytelling, theater, and jazz, rock, blues, and folk music. Spoken word poems frequently refer to issues of social justice, politics, race, and community – and are characterized by rhyme, repetition, improvisation, and word play.

Tanka: A Japanese form of five lines with 5, 7, 5, 7, and 7 syllables — for a total of 31.

Tercet: A poetic unit of three lines, rhymed or unrhymed.

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.

Sources:

- Poetry Foundation: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn>
- Poets.org: <https://poets.org/>