

Poem

The basic building-block of *prose* (writing that isn't poetry) is the sentence. But poetry has something else -- the poetic line. Poets decide how long each line is going to be and where it will break off. That's why poetry often has a shape like this:

*Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying:
And this same flower that smiles to-day
To-morrow will be dying.*

That's the beginning of a poem by Robert Herrick. No matter where it is printed, the first line always ends with the word "may" and the second line with the word "a-flying" because the poet has written it this way. If you print a piece of prose such as a short story, the length of the lines will depend on the font size, the paper size, margins, etc. But in poetry, the line is part of the work of art you have created. The length of the lines and the line breaks are important choices that will affect many aspects of the reader's experience:

- The sound of the poem - When people read your poem out loud, or in their heads, they will pause slightly at the end of each line.
- The speed of reading - Shortening or lengthening the lines can speed up or slow down the way people read.
- How the poem looks on the page - Does the poem look light, delicate, with a lot of white space around the lines? Or are the lines packed solidly together?
- Emphasis - Words at the end of a line seem more important than words in the middle.

Poem structure - types of lines

If you are writing a poem in a standard form such as a sonnet, your choices about line length are somewhat restricted by the rules of the form. But you still have to decide how to fit the ideas and sentences of your poem over the lines. When you fit natural stopping points in a sentence to the end of your line, the reader takes a little pause. When a sentence or phrase continues from one line to the next, the reader feels pulled along. If your line break interrupts a sentence or idea in a surprising place, the effect can be startling, suspenseful, or can highlight a certain phrase or double-meaning.

Poem structure - stanzas

In prose, ideas are usually grouped together in paragraphs. In poems, lines are often grouped together into what are called *stanzas*. Like paragraphs, stanzas are often used to organize ideas.

For example, here are the two final stanzas of the Robert Herrick's poem. In the first of these stanzas, he is explaining that being young is great, but life just gets worse and worse as you get older. In the second one, he is saying: "So get married before you're too old and have lost your chance."

*That age is best which is the first,
When youth and blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times still succeed the former.
Then be not coy, but use your time,
And while ye may, go marry:
For having lost but once your prime,
You may for ever tarry.*

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Why rhyme

There are many reasons why you might choose to use rhyme:

- To give pleasure. Rhyme, done well, is pleasing to the ear. It adds a musical element to the poem, and creates a feeling of "rightness," of pieces fitting together. It also makes a poem easier to memorize, since the rhyme echoes in the reader's mind afterward, like a melody.
- To deepen meaning. Rhyming two or more words draws attention to them and connects them in the reader's mind.

To strengthen form. In many traditional forms, a regular pattern of rhymes are at the ends of the lines. This means that even if the poem is being read out loud, listeners can easily hear where the lines end, can hear the shape of the poem.

Marks are awarded as follows:

1. Creative use of appropriate poetic form – **4 marks**
2. Complete with 4 or more stanzas, with 4 or more lines each – **4 marks**
3. Precise, vivid vocabulary, painting a clear picture – **4 marks**
4. Effective use of figurative language to reinforce the theme – **4 marks**
5. Grammar, spelling & punctuation – **4 marks**
6. Understanding of assignment – **4 marks**
7. Effective and creative use of illustration to enhance the meaning of the poem – **4 marks**

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Form	Creatively uses an appropriate poetic form. Complete with more than four stanzas with four lines each.	Effectively uses an appropriate poetic form. Complete with four stanzas of four lines each.	May use an appropriate poetic form. Fewer than four stanzas of four lines each	Uses an inappropriate poetic form. To few stanzas or stanza length is incorrect.
Word Usage	Student's use of vocabulary is precise, vivid, and paints a strong clear and complete picture in the reader's mind.	Student's use of vocabulary is routine and workable	Student's use of vocabulary is more telling than showing.	Student's use of vocabulary is very basic.
Poetic Techniques (elements)	Effectively uses poetic techniques such as figurative language to reinforce the theme.	Uses poetic techniques such as figurative language to reinforce the theme.	Uses some poetic Techniques such as figurative language to reinforce the theme.	Uses few poetic Techniques such as figurative language.
Language Conventions (spelling, grammar, punctuation)	Has grade-level appropriate spelling, grammar, and punctuation; contains few, if any, errors that do not interfere with the reader's understanding.	Has mainly grade level appropriate spelling, grammar, and punctuation; contains some errors that do not interfere with the reader's understanding.	May contain many errors in spelling, grammar, and/or punctuation that may interfere with the reader's understanding.	May contain frequent and numerous errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation that interferes with the reader's understanding.
Effort	Student's work demonstrates a complete understanding of the assignment and goes beyond the requirements.	Student's work demonstrates an understanding of the assignment.	Student's work demonstrates some understanding of the assignment.	Student's work lacks understanding of the assignment.
Illustration	Effective and creative use of an illustration enhances the poem's meaning.	Uses an illustration to enhance the poem's meaning.	Uses an illustration that may add to the poem's meaning.	Lacks an illustration.