

Poetry Stuff You Need to Know

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AP & Honors English 12
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Persona—the speaker in a poem

Lyric Poem—a short poem expressing the personal mood, feeling, opinion, or thoughts of a single speaker. It does not tell a story, but sometimes the reader can infer a storyline.

Narrative Poem—a poem that tells a story. Narrative poems are the oldest form of poetry.

Couplet—two consecutive rhyming lines

Closed Couplet—couplet that can stand alone grammatically and make sense.

Open Couplet—couplet that needs other lines to complete a thought.

Heroic Couplet—couplet in iambic pentameter

Quatrain—a four-line stanza

Rhythm—the pattern of stressed (accented) and unstressed (unaccented) syllables

/ = stressed; u = unstressed

Below is a list of common types of rhythm in English poetry. The noun form of the name is in parentheses. The example following each rhythm pattern below is a word or phrase using that particular pattern.

Iambic (Iamb) = u / example: because

Trochaic (Trochee) = / u example: Boston

Anapestic (Anapest) = u u / example: to the brave

Dactylic (Dactyl) = / u u example: Albany

Spondaic (Spondee) = // example: bad news

Foot—unit of rhythm in a line of poetry. Names for the number of feet use Greek prefixes for numbers.

Dimeter = 2 feet **Trimeter** = 3 feet

Tetrameter = 4 feet **Pentameter** = 5 feet

Hexameter = 6 feet **Heptameter** = 7 feet

Meter—the pattern of rhythm and the number of feet in a line. The meter of the poem is the meter of the majority of the lines.

Sonnet—form developed in 14th century Italy by Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch) and introduced into English literature in the early 16th century by Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey who first translated Italian sonnets into English. Later, they used the form in their own poetry.

Sonnets have these things in common:

- lyric poetry
- usually rely on logic or reason
- 14 lines
- iambic pentameter

Italian (Petrarchan) Sonnet

- Octave (8-line stanza) with *abba abba* rhyme scheme
- Sestet (6-line stanza) with *cde cde* or *cdcdcd* or some combination of 2 or 3 sounds not in the octave
- Problem presented in the octave.
- Solution or comment offered in the sestet.
- Usually a transition or “turn” between octave and sestet

English (Shakespearian) Sonnet

- *abab cdcd efef gg* rhyme scheme
- Rhyme scheme creates three quatrains and a heroic couplet.
- Quatrains explore variations of the same theme.
- Heroic couplet contains a summation or conclusion.
- “Turn occurs between lines 12 and 13.

Spenserian Sonnet

- *ababbcbccdcdee* rhyme scheme uses linking rhyme between quatrains
- Other aspects are similar to English sonnet.

Sonnet Conventions—typical expectations about the content of a sonnet:

- Male persona in love with a female.
- Female is on a pedestal.
- Female is typical renaissance beauty—silky blond hair, fair white skin, flashing eyes, red lips, etc.

Sonnet Sequence—series of sonnets by the same poet. Usually the sonnets are numbered, not named. The first line of the poem is therefore used as the name. The sonnets are connected by theme. Sometimes, a storyline is implied from the sequence of poems.