

# POETIC FORMS

When analyzing poetry, you may encounter different **Poetic Forms**. The term “Poetic Forms” refers to the overall structure of a poem. Some forms have a very rigid structure, requiring a specific rhyme scheme, meter, and number of stanzas. Other poetic forms are defined by the themes they explore. Knowing a poem’s form will help you follow its overall structure and understand it better!

The Sonnet is perhaps the most famous Poetic Form, likely because of William Shakespeare’s 154 Sonnets!

## TYPES OF POETIC FORMS

Below is a list of common poetic forms:

- **Ballad:** a narrative song that is commonly constructed with rhyming quatrain stanzas  
*Examples:* “*La Belle Dame sans Merci*” by John Keats  
“*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- **Blank Verse:** a poem that follows a specific meter but does not rhyme  
*Examples:* “*Paradise Lost*” by John Milton  
“*Aurora Leigh*” by Elizabeth Barrett Browning
- **Elegy:** a poem that reflects upon the themes of death and mourning  
*Examples:* “*Because I Could Not Stop for Death*” by Emily Dickinson  
“*In Memory of W.B. Yeats*” by W.H. Auden
- **Epic:** a lengthy narrative work that describes heroic journeys and extraordinary feats by historic or mythical figures  
*Examples:* “*The Odyssey*” by Homer  
“*The Divine Comedy*” by Dante Alighieri
- **Free Verse:** a poem with no specific form, meter, or rhyme scheme  
*Examples:* “*Those Winter Sundays*” by Robert Hayden  
“*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*” by T. S. Eliot
- **Haiku:** a Japanese poetic form that commonly focuses on the theme of nature, containing three lines and 17 syllables divided into a five/seven/five syllable count  
*Example:* “*An old silent pond...*  
*A frog jumps into the pond,*  
*splash! Silence again.*”  
by Matsuo Bashō

- **Limerick:** a short, comical poem that contains only five lines with an AABBA rhyme scheme  
*Example: "There was an Old Man with a beard,  
Who said, 'It is just as I feared!  
Two Owls and a Hen,  
Four Larks and a Wren,  
Have all built their nests in my beard!'"*  
*from A Book of Nonsense by Edward Lear*
- **Lyric Poetry:** a broad category of poetry including song-like works that express emotions  
*Examples: "If I Could Tell You" by W. H. Auden  
"Sonnet 18" by William Shakespeare*
- **Narrative Poetry:** poems that tell a story  
*Examples: "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe  
"The Charge of the Light Brigade" by Alfred Tennyson*
- **Ode:** a poem that addresses a person, object, or event  
*Example: "Ode to the West Wind" by Percy Bysshe Shelley  
"Ode to Autumn" by John Keats*
- **Pastoral Poetry:** a category of poetry that focuses on the natural world, rural life, and landscapes  
*Examples: "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" by Christopher Marlowe  
"Country Summer" by Leonie Adams*
- **Rhymed Poetry:** poems that contain a specific rhyme scheme  
*Examples: "Sympathy" by Paul Laurence Dunbar  
"Midstairs" by Virginia Hamilton Adair*
- **Soliloquy:** a monologue in which a speaker expresses his/her inner thoughts  
*Examples: "Soliloquy of a Turkey" by Paul Laurence Dunbar  
"To Be or Not to Be" from Hamlet by William Shakespeare*
- **Sonnet:** a strictly structured 14-line poem traditionally written in iambic pentameter and containing one of several rhyme schemes  
*Examples: "Death Be Not Proud" by John Donne  
"Sonnet 29" by William Shakespeare*
- **Villanelle:** a 19-line poem containing five three-line stanzas ("tercets") and a final four-line stanza ("quatrain"), as well as two repeating rhymes and two refrains  
*Examples: "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" by Dylan Thomas  
"Villanelle of Spring Bells" by Keith Douglas*

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