

## Elements of Poetry

Poetry can be broken down in to basic elements or “building blocks.” Here are just a few of those elements and their meanings.

**Structural:** (See examples on “Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night”)

Line: A single line of poetry, not to be confused with a sentence.

Stanza: A collection of lines within a poem, broken by an empty line space.

Rhythm: An established pattern of stressed and unstressed sounds within a poem. Not all poems have an established rhythm pattern. The ones that don’t are said to be written in *free verse*.

Rhyme Scheme: A repeating pattern of similar sounds at the end of each line of poetry. Not all poems have an established rhyme scheme.

## Figurative Language:

Metaphor: A comparison between two unlike things, one of which is usually an idea, emotion, or feeling. *Similes* are metaphors that use like or as. *Personification* is when the poet gives non-living objects human (or living) characteristics.

Allusion: A direct or passing reference to something outside the poem. *Ex.* another poem, novel, song, movie, the Bible, classical myth, etc.

Alliteration: Repeating the first consonant in two or more words in a row. (Peter Piper picked a pack of pickle peppers)

Onomatopoeia: A word that is modeled on what it sounds like. (pop, crash, smack, bang, etc.)

## Forms of Poetry:

Shakespearian Sonnet: English version of an Italian poetic form consisting of 14 lines. Almost always about love. The rhyme scheme for a Shakespearean Sonnet always follows the same *ababcdcdefeg* pattern, where the final two lines (called a couplet) are where the poet establishes his or her opinion or conclusion on the topic of the sonnet.

Villanelle: A form of poetry consisting of six stanzas, the first five of which have three lines (called a triplet), and the last stanza having four lines (called a quatrain). The first and third lines of a villanelle are repeated alternately throughout the poem as the last lines of each following stanza, and then again as the last two lines of the final stanza. The rhyme scheme for a traditional villanelle is always *aba aba aba aba aba abaa*.

Haiku: Originally a Japanese form of poetry, haiku are always written in English as three lines consisting of five syllables, seven syllables, and five syllables again. Traditional haiku always make at least a passing mention of nature, however, this rule does not apply to haiku written outside of Japan.

Limerick: An inherently “silly” poetic form, usually humorous, sometimes nonsensical, oftentimes dirty or offensive. The limerick always contains the same rhyme scheme of *aabba*.

Narrative: A poem that tells a story. The narrative does not adhere to specific structural guidelines, and oftentimes incorporates rhyming patterns that make it easy to memorize and recite without the aid of paper.

### **Other Elements:**

Meaning: The author’s intent of a poem. The answer to the question: “*Why did the poet write this?*”

Tone: Unspoken “feeling” of a poem. (ironic, sarcastic, solemn, humorous, serious, etc.)