

Parts of a poem: the elements of poetry with a definition and an example each

Structure

Part	Definition	Example
title	the poem's name; often the first clue or the irony	Ozymandias
line	a single row of words, broken where the poet chooses	Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
stanza	a group of lines set apart by a space; the poem's paragraph	couplet 2, tercet 3, quatrain 4, quintain 5, sestet 6, septet 7, octave 8 lines
verse	a line, a stanza (in a song) or poetry itself	'the second verse'; 'written in verse'
refrain	a line repeated at intervals	Quoth the Raven, 'Nevermore'
enjambment	a sentence running past the line end without a pause	I wandered lonely as a cloud / That floats on high
end-stopped line	a line ending with a pause (punctuation)	The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
caesura	a pause within a line	To be, or not to be: that is the question
turn (volta)	where the argument or feeling shifts	line 9 of a Petrarchan sonnet; the final couplet of a Shakespearean one

Sound

rhyme	matching end sounds from the last stressed vowel	night / light
rhyme scheme	the pattern of end rhymes in letters	AABB, ABAB, ABCB; sonnet ABAB CDCD EFEF GG
rhythm	the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables	every poem has rhythm; only some have meter
meter	a regular, countable rhythm measured in feet	iambic pentameter
foot	one stressed syllable with its unstressed partners	iamb da-DUM (beLOW); trochee DUM-da (Tiger); anapaest da-da-DUM; dactyl DUM-da-da (MERrily); spondee DUM-DUM
line length	feet per line: mono 1, di 2, tri 3, tetra 4, penta 5, hexa 6	'Tyger, tyger, burning bright' is trochaic tetrameter
alliteration / assonance / onomatopoeia	repeated first consonants / vowel sounds / sound-words	the furrow followed free; the rain in Spain; buzz

Meaning

speaker	the voice of the poem, not necessarily the poet	the duke in 'My Last Duchess' is not Browning
imagery	language for the senses	the gravel crunched; a velvet darkness
figurative language	simile, metaphor, personification, symbolism...	Juliet is the sun
tone	the speaker's attitude, heard in the word choice	bitter, tender, mocking
mood	the feeling created in the reader	eerie, calm, mournful
theme	the idea explored and what the poem says about it	not 'death' but 'art outlasts the powerful'

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sciencewithshobha.com/blog/parts-of-a-poem-the-elements-of-poetry-line-stanza-meter-rhyme-scheme-speaker-theme-and-the-forms-with-a-labelled-example-and-a-printable-sheet/ · 1-on-1 online physics and chemistry, free 30-minute first class.

The forms, a labelled example, the five-step method, and practice

Form	Rules
sonnet	14 lines of iambic pentameter; Shakespearean ABAB CDCD EFEF GG; Petrarchan an octave and a sestet
haiku	three lines of 5, 7, 5 syllables; nature, a moment
limerick	five lines AABBA, comic, lines 3 and 4 shorter
ballad	a story in quatrains, usually ABCB, often a refrain
ode	formal praise or celebration
elegy	a poem of mourning
free verse	no fixed meter or rhyme; the line breaks do the work
blank verse	unrhymed iambic pentameter (Shakespeare's plays, Milton)
acrostic	the first letters spell a word
villanelle	19 lines, five tercets and a quatrain, two refrains ('Do not go gentle')
narrative / lyric	tells a story / expresses a feeling in one voice
concrete (shape)	the words make a picture of the subject

Labelled: Emily Dickinson, 'Hope is the thing with feathers' (1861), first stanza

"Hope" is the thing with feathers - / That perches in the soul - / And sings the tune without the words - / And never stops - at all -

stanza	a quatrain; the poem has three
rhyme scheme	ABCB: soul / all is a slant rhyme; feathers and words do not rhyme
meter	roughly iambic tetrameter and trimeter alternating (hymn metre)
figurative language	an extended metaphor: hope is a bird in the soul
imagery	feathers, perching, singing
speaker / tone / mood	an unnamed reflecting voice / tender, certain / quiet comfort
caesura	the dashes pause mid-line: 'And never stops - at all -'
theme	hope is natural, constant and asks nothing in return

The five-step method

- [] Read it twice, once aloud
- [] Say what happens: subject, speaker, situation, in two sentences
- [] Map the structure: stanzas, line lengths, rhyme scheme, meter, the turn
- [] Find three devices that do real work and say what each does
- [] State the theme as a sentence with a verb and show how steps 3 and 4 produce it

Practice

- Lines in a quatrain, a couplet, a sestet, an octave?
- The rhyme scheme of a limerick?
- Name the foot da-DUM; name DUM-da-da.
- Feet in a pentameter line? What is iambic pentameter?
- Tone against mood?
- Enjambment and its opposite?
- The mid-line pause?
- Three forms with one rule each.
- Who is the speaker?
- Syllables per line in a haiku?
- Which two words rhyme in the Dickinson stanza, and what kind of rhyme?
- Write a theme sentence for a poem about a soldier's letter home.

Answers

- 1) 4, 2, 6, 8 2) AABBA 3) iamb; dactyl 4) five; five iambs 5) speaker's attitude / reader's feeling 6) running past the line end without a pause / end-stopped 7) caesura 8) sonnet 14 lines; haiku 5-7-5; limerick AABBA 9) the voice in the poem, not always the poet 10) 5, 7, 5 11) soul, all; slant 12) e.g. 'Ordinary words carry more love than grand ones when the writer may not return'