



A SHAKESPEAREAN SONNET

The sonnet was first invented in Italy during the 13th century and was a favourite of Shakespeare's in the form now named after him. You can follow the layout in the example shown below, and here are the details.

- ✓ The overall pattern of the sonnet is a poem of 14 lines of 10 syllables each - count them!
- ✓ The sonnet is divided into THREE stanzas or verses of four lines each [a quatrain] and a closing stanza of two lines [a couplet.]
- ✓ The rhyme scheme is ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. That means in stanza 1 the end words in the 1st and 3rd line rhyme with each other [name them A.] The end words in the 2nd and 4th lines also rhyme with each other [name them B.] So your rhyme pattern is ABAB.
- ✓ The same pattern is followed in stanza 2 - CDCD.
- ✓ The same pattern is followed in stanza 3 -EFEF.
- ✓ The closing couplet also ends with words that rhyme together - GG.

Here's how it works in **Sonnet 18** by **William Shakespeare**:

THE RHYME SCHEME

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?	A
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.	B
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,	A
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.	B
Some time too hot the eye of heaven shines,	C
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;	D
And every fair from fair sometime declines,	C
By chance or nature's changing course, untrimmed;	D
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,	E
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest,	F
Nor shall death brag thou wanderest in his shade,	E
When in eternal lines to Time thou growest.	F
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,	G
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.	G

This is one of Shakespeare's best-known sonnets. Read it aloud two or three times, to get a sense of its rhythm and rhyme. Please note you don't need to write your own sonnet in 16th century English. Use everyday language to share with us the content of your poem, whatever it is you want to comment on or bring to our attention.

THE MODERN UNRHYMED SONNET

Here is an example:

Home Cooking

my mother's basin, white porcelain	1
farmhouse butter, colour of summer	2
two shakes of sugar, crystalline	3
fresh-laid eggs, one brown, one speckled	4
dried fruit and peel, the zest of lemon	5
sweet trickle of manuka honey	6
my grandmother's knife lifting, folding	7
white clouds of flour, self-raising, sifted	8
hand-held beater, steel hoops rotating	9
the new-bought cake tin greased and waiting	10
our wood-burning range standing by	11
dishes in sink, and a cup of tea	12
glasses on and the old clock ticking	13
newspaper folded beside the cake	14

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So, the rules...

1. Like this poem, yours will be 14 lines.
2. It is unrhymed.
3. The beat of the lines* can be 9, 10, 11 or 12 it's your choice. The beat of this poem is 9 beats to the line.
4. But, whatever the beat of your first line, all the other lines must match it.

**The 'beat of the line' can also be referred to as metre, the metrical beat or, if you want to show off to your friends, scansion.*

HINTS

- It is easier to write a poem on something concrete (tangible, visible, open to all five senses) than to keep to the abstract (thoughts, angst, universal themes too often explored, emotions.)
- Keep to what you know and make it knowable to your readers or audience.
- Coleridge defined prose (anything that is not poetry) as 'good words in good order.' He defined poetry as 'best words in best order.' Think about what you want to say and you will find how best to say it.
- The subject is entirely yours to choose, whether it be an observation, an idea or an emotion that you want to express. 'To thine own self be true...'



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A NOTE ON ENTERING YOUR SONNET FOR THE COMPETITION

Whatever form of sonnet you choose to write, whether Shakespearean or sonnet, please send it to info.redhenbooks@gmail.com as a Word document. It's the words that matter, so no decoration, please. No fancy fonts.

Add your name and school email so we can let you know your entry has been received. The closing date is April 16th. Winners will be announced on Saturday 22nd April 6pm at a Prize-Giving Ceremony in the Village Hall, Village on 17th. You're invited to attend with family and friends.