

Sonnets Made (Sort of) Simple

The word sonnet comes from the Italian *sonetto*, which means *a little sound or song*.
A sonnet is a fourteen line poem with a distinctive rhyme scheme and a metrical pattern.

There are several kinds of sonnets but the most common is the **Shakespearean Sonnet**.
William Shakespeare wrote 154 of them and that doesn't include the ones in his plays!

Stanza: like a verse - it is a group of lines with the same metrical pattern

Couplet: a two-line stanza.

Quatrain: a four-line stanza

Heroic Couplet: a special couplet that is written in iambic pentameter, with rhyming line endings.

Shakespearean sonnets are written in **iambic pentameter** and are divided into **three quatrains** and a **heroic couplet**. Each stanza has its own rhyme scheme.

1 st quatrain	ABAB
2 nd quatrain	CDCD
3 rd quatrain	EFEF
Heroic couplet	GG

iambic Pentameter: the term *iambic* means a stress pattern that sounds like a heartbeat where every second syllable is stressed (da-DUM). Try saying this out loud with the stress on the words in bold:

Thou **know'st** the **mask** of **night** is **on** my **face**,
Else **would** a **maiden** **blush** **bepaint** my **cheek**

Pentameter is the number of pairs (called "feet") of unstressed and stressed syllables. "Penta" is the prefix for five, so pentameter means there are five pairs = ten syllables in all.

See if you can pick out the rhyme patterns, iambic pentameter, quatrains and heroic couplet in this sonnet:

Sonnet 18

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

by William Shakespeare