



Lesson 5: Poetry, Prose, and Drama

The writing you have seen so far in this workbook is called prose. **Prose** is writing that has lines stretching from one end of the page to the other. Stories, novels, and articles are kinds of prose writing. There are two other types of writing: poetry and drama. In this lesson, you will learn about the differences between the three types of writing.

Poetry

Poetry is a special kind of writing. Unlike prose, the words send a message to the reader in a musical sort of way. Poems come in many forms. The following tips will tell you about the elements of poetry.



TIP 1: Poems are made up of lines and stanzas.

A **line** is a row of words. In prose, sometimes a sentence is a line. Other times a sentence is split into more than one line. Sentences in poems can be in one line or split across a few lines. Prose is broken into paragraphs. Each paragraph has a main idea and details that support it. Some poems are broken into stanzas. A **stanza** is a group of lines. The lines are often grouped together by how the lines rhyme. Often each stanza has the same number of lines. A blank line appears between stanzas.



TIP 2: Some poems have end words that rhyme.

Poems are different from prose because sometimes lines rhyme. Words that **rhyme** have the same end sound. Many poems use rhyming words at the end of the lines. Most rhyming words end with the same vowel sound and often with the same final consonant. Here are some examples of rhyming words:

feet / sheet rap / cap goat / coat

- Write a word that rhymes with each of the following.

cat _____ house _____

tree _____ show _____

pool _____ shoe _____

Usually, each stanza of a poem repeats the same rhyme pattern. Mother Goose poems are good examples of poems with end rhymes.

Read this part of a poem. Think about which words rhyme.

from
My Shadow

by Robert Louis Stevenson

I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me,
And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.
He is very, very like me from the heels up to the head;
And I see him jump before me, when I jump into bed.

The funniest thing about him is the way he likes to grow—
Not at all like proper children, which is always very slow;
For he sometimes shoots up taller like an India-rubber ball,
And he sometimes gets so little that there's none of him at all.

2. How many sentences are used in the first stanza?
 - A. 1
 - B. 2
 - C. 3
 - D. 4
3. What is the rhyme pattern of “My Shadow”?
 - A. Every line rhymes.
 - B. Every third line rhymes.
 - C. Every other line rhymes.
 - D. Every pair of lines rhyme.
4. Which word rhymes with *head*?
 - A. me
 - B. see
 - C. bed
 - D. can



TIP 3: Many poems have a musical rhythm.

Think of your favorite pop music song. Does it make you want to dance to the beat? If so, the song has rhythm. In poetry, **rhythm** means that the sounds of words create a pattern.

How can words create a pattern? Some sounds in each word are stressed, or said more strongly. Each sound is called a syllable. For example, the word *wonder* has two syllables: won / der. The won syllable is stressed. It is said more loudly than the der.

To make rhythm, poets choose words based on which syllables are stressed. They may choose words that sound like this: TUM-ta. Here, the first syllable is stressed. Or they may use words that sound like this: ta-TUM. Here, the second syllable is stressed. A poet could use one of these patterns to make a line with rhythm:

ta-TUM ta-TUM ta-TUM ta-TUM

Now, let's use some real words to show rhythm.

The **moonlit night** was **warm** and **bright**.

Can you hear the pattern of stressed and soft syllables? Now read the poem below. The words of the poem are marked to show the stressed syllables. Those syllables are in **bold** type. Notice that each line has four stressed syllables.

Listen for the rhythm as you read this poem quietly to yourself.

The Woodpecker

by Elizabeth Madox Roberts

The **woodpecker** **pecked** out a **little** round **hole**
 And **made** him a **house** in the **telephone pole**.
 One **day** when I **watched** he **poked** out his **head**,
 And he **had** on a **hood** and a **collar** of **red**.
 When **streams** of **rain** pour **out** of the **sky**,
 And the **sparkles** of **lightning** go **flashing** **by**,
 And the **big**, **big** **wheels** of **thunder** **roll**,
 He can **snuggle** **back** in the **telephone pole**.

Well-written prose has rhythm, too. What is different, though, is that the rhythm does not just come from the sound of the words. Authors of prose create rhythm by including different types of sentences in a paragraph. A mixture of shorter and longer sentences creates a rhythm. The rhythm that words and sentences make helps create emotion for the reader.



TIP 4: Poets often repeat words, phrases, lines, or whole stanzas.

To repeat is to do something over. Poetry often uses repeated words. Repeating helps create rhythm in some poems. It may also help show the important ideas and make a poem easier to remember. Look at these examples from nursery rhymes.

Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker’s man.

Row, row, row your boat . . .

Hickory, dickory, dock,
The mouse ran up the clock;
The clock struck one,
The mouse ran down;
Hickory, dickory, dock.

Read the poem and answer the question that follows.

Tired Tim

by Walter de la Mare

Poor tired Tim! It’s sad for him.
He lags the long bright morning through,
Ever so tired of nothing to do;
He moons and mopes the livelong day,
Nothing to think about, nothing to say;
Up to bed with his candle to creep,
Too tired to yawn, too tired to sleep:
Poor tired Tim! It’s sad for him.

5. Which line is repeated in the poem?
- A. He lags the long bright morning through,
 - B. Ever so tired of nothing to do;
 - C. He moons and mopes the livelong day,
 - D. Poor tired Tim! It’s sad for him.

It’s a poem! It’s a story! It’s—a narrative poem!

Narrative poems are a little more like stories than other poems are. They have beginnings, middles, and ends. For example, “The Woodpecker” tells a story, doesn’t it? A woodpecker makes a house for himself and snuggles in his home when it rains. But “The Woodpecker” is still very much a poem, too. It has rhythm, and it is told using stanzas instead of paragraphs.



TIP 5: Poets often use alliteration, assonance, and onomatopoeia.

Alliteration is the use of words that begin with the same consonant sound. Alliteration helps give writing a special musical sound. Here are some examples of alliteration at work:

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

She sells seashells by the seashore.

Prose writers sometimes use alliteration, but not as often as writers of poetry do. Here's an example of alliteration from the *Wizard of Oz*.

“Which road leads to the Wicked Witch of the West?” asked Dorothy.

“There is no road,” answered the Guardian of the Gates. “No one ever wishes to go that way.”

Assonance is the use of words that have the same vowel sound. Here are some examples:

Joe hoped he could joke about his broken bone.

In June, the duke bought two new flutes and a blue tuba.

Though prose might sometimes contain assonance, it is more often a feature of poetry.

Onomatopoeia is using words that sound like what they mean. Here are some examples:

moo hiss buzz meow plop sizzle

Poets often use many of these words together to help readers more fully imagine the sounds.

The splash, the gush, the whisper of water
and the whistling whoosh of hissing winds,
splattering, battering the leaves and rooftops—
the rumble and grumble as thunder begins.

Prose writers also use onomatopoeia, but not usually so heavily. Compare this example to the rainstorm example:

Outside, Elena could hear the first whispers of rain drizzling on the distant trees. Soon the water began to splash in puddles and the wind began to rush. Finally, dull rumbles warned of the cloudburst to come.

Read the poem below, and answer the questions that follow.

Shade and Shadow

by Mike Acton

I heard a cricket creaking
As I stood in silence peeking
Down a long and narrow pathway to the village through the trees.
Then I saw a wee bug flashing
As its little wings went thrashing
And its greenish flame winked off and on a dozen times at me.

I heard an owl calling
(As the evening dew was falling)
From the black and brittle branches of an ancient, brooding tree.
The moon made shade and shadow
Through the oaks, and though I had no
Cause to stop, I paused to hear the night winds sighing over me.

And I noted, slowly poking
Down the lane, a chorus croaking
As a hundred frogs together sang along the silver stream.
Through the trees bright stars were winking,
And I paused in silence thinking
Life is full of greater beauty than the sweetest of our dreams.

6. Which of the following lines from the poem is the best example of alliteration?
- A. Then I saw a wee bug flashing
 - B. And its greenish flame winked off and on a dozen times at me.
 - C. From the black and brittle branches of an ancient, brooding tree.
 - D. Life is full of greater beauty than the sweetest of our dreams.

7. Which of the following lines from the poem is the best example of assonance?
- A. I heard an owl calling
 - B. (As the evening dew was falling)
 - C. And I noted, slowly poking
 - D. Through the trees bright stars were winking,
8. Which of the following lines from the poem has an example of onomatopoeia?
- A. I heard a cricket creaking
 - B. The moon made shade and shadow
 - C. Through the oaks, and though I had no
 - D. And I paused in silence thinking
9. Write two more examples of alliteration from the poem.



TIP 6: Some poems are written in free verse.

Free verse is poetry that does not have a set pattern of rhythm or rhyme. It depends on the natural rhythm of the language to make its music. This doesn't mean that free verse won't *ever* have end rhyme. Sometimes it will. Sometimes parts of a free-verse poem will have a set rhythm, too. But there will be no pattern of rhyme or rhythm through the whole poem.

Look at the poem on page 64. The poet doesn't make the lines rhyme. He doesn't use a set rhythm or lines of the same length. Still, the poem paints clear pictures in our minds. It makes its own special music. The poet has chosen the words and placed them on the page to create his own effect.

Read the poem and answer the questions that follow.

Theme in Yellow

by Carl Sandburg

I spot the hills
 With yellow balls in autumn.
 I light the prairie cornfields
 Orange and tawny gold clusters
 And I am called pumpkins.
 On the last of October
 When dusk is fallen
 Children join hands
 And circle round me
 Singing ghost songs
 And love to the harvest moon;
 I am a jack-o'-lantern
 With terrible teeth
 And the children know
 I am fooling.



10. Place a checkmark next to each line that has only four syllables.
11. Circle any end-rhyme words. If there are no end rhymes, write “None” on the line below.
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TIP 7: A pattern of rhythm is called meter.

You have seen how a poet uses words to create rhythm. **Meter** is a pattern of rhythm that repeats throughout the poem. Each use of the pattern is called a **foot**. A foot may take many forms:

ta-TUM (one unstressed syllable, one stressed syllable)

TUM-ta (one stressed syllable, one unstressed syllable)

ta-ta-TUM (two unstressed syllables, one stressed syllable)

TUM-ta-ta (one stressed syllable, two unstressed syllables)

And so on. Often, a poem will include four or five feet in a line. Look at the following example.

In a **house** in the **woods** on a **bright**, sunny **day**,
seven **mice** made a **kite** and then **flew** it away.

12. How many feet are used in each line?
- A. 1
 - B. 2
 - C. 3
 - D. 4

Meter is not used in prose. Sentences and paragraphs, like free verse, may have their own rhythms. But no pattern controls the rhythm of an entire story.



TIP 8: Read prose and poems aloud with feeling.

When you are asked to read prose and poetry aloud, follow the rhythm of the words. Speak carefully so you do not trip over words. Speak slowly enough so that your words do not run together. But you should also speak with energy. Don't slow down to a crawl unless the story or poem calls for it. Last, understand the feeling of what you are reading. Put that feeling into your voice.

Drama

Drama is a kind of story that is meant to be performed by actors. It includes plays, movies, and TV shows. **Plays** are dramas acted out in front of a live audience. Drama is written in the form of a script. A **script** tells actors what to say and do, but it does not include many details because the audience will not read it.

Playwrights are writers of plays. Their job is not the same as the job of fiction writers. Most prose writers include lots of information about their characters. They tell what the characters look like, how they dress, and so on. They also have to explain the settings of their stories, such as the time of day and the place. A playwright doesn't have to tell about these things. The audience can see the characters and settings for themselves.

Drama is very different from poetry. Writers of poetry use words to create pictures in readers' minds. Drama uses spoken words, scenery, and objects to show audiences what happens in a story.



TIP 9: A play is divided into acts and scenes.

Plays are often broken into acts and scenes. A **scene** is made up of all the action that occurs in a given place and time. If the place or time changes, a new scene begins. The change of scenes is usually shown by the stage lights going dark. An **act** is a group of scenes. Plays may include one act or several.

Prose writers often use chapters to split up scenes or sections of a story. They do not label scenes, but blend one into the next. Poetry is much shorter than drama and prose, and its parts are often broken into stanzas.



TIP 10: Plays do not explain as much as stories.

As you have learned, scripts do not include many details. The audience members can see the characters and the set for themselves. Also, prose writers can tell readers how characters feel and think. Playwrights cannot do this. Instead, all of these things must be shown by what the actors do and say.

Playwrights usually explain what the set should look like. The director uses this information to build the set. The information is often simple and leaves many choices up to the director.

- 13. Give two reasons that plays explain characters and settings less than stories do.

More Drama Terms

cast – the characters in a play and the actors who play them

director – the person who is in charge of how the actors perform, how the set is built, and so on

props – objects the actors use in the play, such as newspapers, dishes, or swords

set – the stage and scenery used in a play

stage – a raised floor on which actors move and speak

theater – a building with a stage and seats for the audience

**TIP 11: The dialogue and actions in a play are very important.**

Remember, plays don't use details the way prose does. The characters' dialogue and actions tell the audience about the characters. It also helps the audience follow the plot.

**TIP 12: Stage directions give information about the actors and the set.**

Stage directions tell how and where the actors should move on the stage. They also tell how the set should look. Playwrights use stage directions to give information about things such as lighting and set changes. They also use stage directions to tell how an actor should say a certain line. These directions are usually placed inside parentheses () and printed in *italic* type.

Here is a script for the first scene of a play about the great hero Hercules.

Hercules and the Apples of Zeus

a Greek myth

adapted for the stage by Red Gomez

CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE PROFESSOR, a narrator

HERCULES, a mythical Greek hero

ATLAS, Titan giant who carries the world on his back

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

SETTING: A bare stage, except for a speaker's stand from which THE PROFESSOR speaks. A spotlight shines on THE PROFESSOR. Stage lights come up showing HERCULES on his journey, carrying a long walking stick.

PROFESSOR: Hercules was perhaps the greatest hero in Greek mythology. He was sentenced by the god Apollo to serve a king for twelve years.

As part of that sentence, Hercules had to perform twelve superhuman feats. His journey and suffering earned him everlasting fame. After eight years, his eleventh dangerous challenge was to steal golden apples from the garden of Zeus. To do this, he needed help from Atlas, a strong Titan giant. Here we see Hercules beginning his journey.

(Stage lights come up. HERCULES moves about the stage slowly, as if on guard. He comes upon ATLAS, who is stooped over and carries a huge globe on his shoulders.)

HERCULES: Atlas, I will carry your load if you will do me a favor.

ATLAS: Anything, Hercules, if you will carry my heavy burden. I would be most thankful.

HERCULES: Can you bring me Zeus's golden apples? I must gather them if I am to survive.

ATLAS: I will gladly help you, Hercules.

(HERCULES takes the globe, and ATLAS disappears into darkness.)

HERCULES: Such a burden bears heavy on the soul as well as on the back. How has Atlas carried this load all these years?

(Stage lights dim to darkness and come back up. Enter ATLAS, carrying the apples.)

ATLAS: These were easy to get, compared to carrying the world on my back. Tell you what, Hercules; I will take these apples to those who threaten you.

HERCULES: Do that, Atlas. But first, can you hold my burden as I change positions? I am afraid the weight affects my legs as well as my back.

(ATLAS puts the apples down and takes the globe. HERCULES picks up the apples.)

HERCULES: Sorry, Atlas. I will be back another time. I will not forget the favor you have done me. *(HERCULES exits running.)*

(Stage lights dim, except for a spotlight on THE PROFESSOR.)

PROFESSOR: Hercules had one more feat to perform before he went down in the record books as the greatest hero in Greek mythology. And that, my friends, will be the subject of our next class.

(Curtain)

14. In the script, what do the stage directions usually tell?
- A. which character is speaking
 - B. the words a character speaks
 - C. how a character should act
 - D. the main setting of the scene

You have learned that there are important differences between prose, poetry, and drama. Writers of prose give readers information using sentences and paragraphs. Poets use words in lines and stanzas to paint pictures in a reader's mind. Drama is written to be performed. It uses dialogue and stage directions. Look for the unique elements in the texts you read. It will help you determine which type of text you are reading.