

# Limerick

## Definition of Limerick

Limerick is a comic [verse](#), containing five anapestic (unstressed/unstressed/stressed) lines, in which the first, second, and fifth lines are longer, [rhyme](#) together, and follow three metrical feet. The third and fourth lines rhyme together, are shorter, and follow two metrical feet. However, sometimes it may vary, and amphibrachic (unstressed/stressed/unstressed) form can replace anapestic. In fact, it is a bawdy, humorous, or nonsensical verse written in the form of five anapests, with an *aabba* [rhyme scheme](#). Since it has a special structure and format, it is called fixed or closed form of poetry.

## Limerick and Villanelle

Though both of these are types of poem having fixed structures, both are different in their forms. [Villanelle](#) consists of 19 lines with refraining rhyming sounds appearing in the first and the third lines, while the final [quatrain](#) has a closing [couplet](#). A limerick has five lines, having anapestic form with the first, second, and fifth lines rhyming together, but the third and fourth lines are different and rhyme together.

## Examples of limerick in Literature

We can find the use of limericks in eighteenth century verse. They are associated with Edward Lear, who first published this verse form in his book *A Book of Nonsense in the year 1846*. Later, this form became popular, and many poets, including Alfred Lord Tennyson, Shakespeare, Rudyard Kipling, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Ogden Nash, H. G. Wells, W. H. Auden, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Lewis Carroll, tried their hands in this form of poetry. Here we have a few examples of limerick from literature:

---

**Example #1: *To Miss Vera Beringer* (By Lewis Carroll)**

---

“There was a young lady of station  
‘I love man’ was her sole exclamation;  
But when men cried: ‘You flatter,’  
She replied, ‘Oh! no matter  
Isle of Man is the true explanation.’”

This limerick contains five lines with a rhyme scheme of *aabba*. Here we can notice the first, second, and fifth lines rhyme together, with three feet; whereas the third and fourth lines contain two feet and rhyme together.

---

**Example #2: *There was an Old Man with a Beard* (By Edward Lear)**

---

“There was an Old Man with a beard,  
Who said, ‘It is just as I feared!  
Two Owls and a Hen,  
Four Larks and a Wren,  
Have all built their nests in my beard!’”

Edward Lear was considered to be the father of limericks. This is one of the very good examples of limerick poems, following its typical format with the first, second, and fifth lines rhyming together, and longer in length; while the remaining two are shorter, and give a faster read. Lear has referred to this form as *nonsense*.

---

**Example #3: *There was a small boy of Quebec* (By Rudyard Kipling)**

---

“There was a small boy of Quebec  
Who was buried in snow to his neck  
When they said, ‘Are you friz?’  
He replied, ‘Yes, I is —  
But we don’t call this cold in Quebec.’”

Notice Kipling has penned a good limerick with irrelevant zaniness and

curious and special mood in this poem.

---

#### **Example #4: *Othello* (By William Shakespeare)**

---

“And let me the canakin clink, clink;  
And let me the canakin clink  
A soldier’s a man;  
A life’s but a span;  
Why, then, let a soldier drink.”

It is quite interesting that the earliest written limericks were linked with drinking. We can guess that people would have drinks and sang bawdy, funny songs or poems. Similarly, William Shakespeare has employed this form in a drinking song of Stephano to create nonsensical and humorous effects.

---

#### **Example #5: *A Man Hired by John Smith & Co* (By Mark Twain)**

---

“A man hired by John Smith and Co.  
Loudly declared that he’d tho.  
Men that he saw  
Dumping dirt near his door  
The drivers, therefore, didn’t do.”

As we know, Mark Twain is also popular for writing limericks. Here, he has used a funny and whimsical limerick poem, with a concluding punch line.

### **Function of Limerick**

Poets use limericks as literary or poetic forms to convey and create funny and humorous images. The purpose of using this form is to replace everyday expression with unusual alternative to express emotion and a particular mood by adding eccentricity and weirdness. We can find its usage in literature to describe [humor](#) or light subject matter, as the first four lines create a joke, and it ends on a punch line. It also is used frequently in nursery rhymes to make kids love reading.

