

Quatrain

Definition of Quatrain

A quatrain is a [verse](#) with four lines, or even a full poem containing four lines, having an independent and separate [theme](#). Often one line consists of alternating [rhyme](#), existing in a variety of forms. We can trace back quatrains in poetic traditions of various ancient civilizations, such as China, Ancient Rome, and Ancient Greece; and they continue to appear in the twenty-first century.

During the Dark Ages in Europe, the Middle East, and Iran, polymath poets like Omar Khayyam popularized this type of poetry. It gained popularity with the name of Rubai in Iran, and has a possible [rhyme scheme](#) of aabb, aaaa and abab.

Types of Quatrain

In formal poetry, rhyme scheme and [meter](#) define different types of quatrain. There are many types of quatrain, but the most common types include:

- [Ballad Stanza](#)** – Its rhyme scheme is abab with iambic tetrameter.
- Envelope Stanza** – Its rhyme scheme is abba with iambic tetrameter.
- Goethe Stanza** – Its rhyme scheme is abab but no meter.
- Italian Quatrain** – Its rhyme scheme is abba with iambic [pentameter](#).
- Hymnal Quatrain** – This multi stanza contains three alternating rhymes with iambic trimeter and iambic tetrameter. Rhyme scheme is a4 b3 c4 b3.
- Elegiac Stanza** – This uses abab rhyme scheme with [iambic pentameter](#).
- Memoriam Stanza** – This uses abba rhyme scheme with iambic tetrameter.

Examples of Quatrain in Literature

Example #1: *Stopping by Woods On a Snowy Evening* (By Robert Frost)

“He gives his harness bells a shake
To [ask](#) if there’s some mistake.
The only other sound’s the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.”

This poem contains four quatrains with different rhyme schemes. This stanza rhymes as *aaba*, in which the first and second lines rhyme with the last line. Frost has used iambic tetrameter, eight syllables in each line with regular [rhythm](#), presenting a perfect example of *Rubaiyat* stanza, which also consists of *aaba* rhyme scheme with four lines.

Example #2: *Hope is the Thing with Feathers* (By Emily Dickinson)

“Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all...”

This entire poem is written in iambic [trimeter](#) pattern, and has three quatrains. However, it often adds a fourth stress at the end of the lines, such as in the fourth line of this stanza. This stanza loosely rhymes with rhythmical flow in *abab* pattern.

Example #3: *A Red, Red Rose* (By Robert Burns)

“O, my luve’s like a red, red rose,
That’s newly sprung in June:
O, my luve’s like the melodie
That’s sweetly played in tune.”

These lines embody an example of Hymnal Stanza, in which we see the poet having written in alternating quatrain with iambs. The first and third

lines follow iambic tetrameter, while the second and fourth lines follow iambic trimeter, using the rhyme scheme of *abcb*. This alternating meter makes the poem more voiced and pronounced.

Example #4: *Look Before You Leap* (By W. H. Auden)

“The worried efforts of the busy heap,
The dirt, the imprecision, and the beer
Produce a few smart wisecracks every year;
Laugh if you can, but you will have to leap.”

This is an example of the envelope stanza, in which the quatrain follows the rhyme scheme of *abba*, with iambic tetrameter. In this type of quatrain, the first and fourth lines enclose the second and third lines.

Example #5: *Elegy Written in Country Courtyard* (By Thomas Gray)

“The tolls curfew the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o’er the lea,
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.”

This quatrain is presenting an example of elegiac stanza, written in iambic pentameter with rhyme scheme *abab*. It is also referred as “heroic stanza,” as its rhyme is similar to a heroic [couplet](#).

Example #6: *In Memoriam A. H. H* (By Alfred Lord Tennyson)

“So word by word, and line by line,
The dead man touch’d me from the past,
And all at once it seem’d at last
The living soul was flash’d on mine.”

This example of memoriam stanza with rhyme scheme of *abba* follows the iambic tetrameter pattern (each line contains four iambs)

Function of Quatrain

Quatrain is a very popular stanza, and important poetic form in English literature. It determines a specific [style](#) of expression, and shapes the structure of a poem. The rhyming lines of a quatrain give it a regular rhythm. In addition, it gives language a fine arrangement by using accents on syllables and adding variations of rhyme scheme. A quatrain uses speech in a regular pattern, and converts a normal text into a dramatic form. Besides, it creates a rhythmic sense in literary works.