

Refrain

Definition of Refrain

Refrain is a [verse](#), a line, a set, or a group of lines that appears at the end of [stanza](#), or appears where a poem divides into different sections. It originated in France, where it is popular as, *refraindre*, which means “to repeat.” Refrain is a poetic device that repeats, at regular intervals, in different stanzas. However, sometimes, this [repetition](#) may involve only minor changes in its wording. It also contributes to the [rhyme](#) of a poem and emphasizes an idea through repetition.

Difference Between Refrain, Repetition and Villanelle

Refrain is a type of repetition, but it is somewhat different from repetition. Refrain is repetition of usually a line, a phrase, two or three lines, or even words in a poem. Repetition, on the other hand, involves repetition of words, phrases, syllables, or even sounds in a full piece. Another difference is that a refrain in a poem may appear at the end of a stanza; however, this recurrence of words and phrases in repetition may occur in any line of stanza. [Villanelle](#), on the contrary, is a poetic form consisting of nineteen lines that uses refrain in its first and third lines.

Short Examples of Refrain in Poetry

It is magical, yes, this life that I live
Each day it gives something
Something it gives each day.
It is magical, absolutely magical the life that I live.
Once I heard an Angel singing,
When the morning was springing
Peace Mercy Pity,
Is the way world releases,
Once I heard an Angel singing.

Writing
Starting, end
Lyrical sounds
Effervescent vowels go up
Writing starting, end.
God will surely show me the way
When distressing pain drag me down,
And I have nothing to say,
I simply cling to this song and pray,
God will surely show me the way
When there seems no way.
On a crowded hill surrounding a mill,
Across a shallow stream, nearer they seem,
They will be waiting.
On a quiet hill near the whining mill,
They will be waiting.
Thank you God for such a bright day
The sweet sunshine smiles every way.
O Cauldron, don't distress
For those who put you in trouble,
Under the sky, below the heather;
Whose bones and blood, now dry and dust,
O Cauldron, don't distress.
In the heat of gleaming sunlight
I'm filled with joy
As my thoughts are streaming,
Everything is unfolding, revealing.
I'm flushed with an [illusion](#)
That dispels confusion
Of everything is unfolding, revealing.
Under the shades of tranquility,
Take a moment of medication
Set [aside](#) briefly that compels,
Absorb solace
Under the shades of tranquility.
Why are they here?
Where have they come from?
What's the purpose behind?
Why are they here?
Is it possible
That nuisance,
Should stop converting right into wrong?
Is it possible?
The tides rise. the tides fall

The travelers rush towards the town
The tides rise, the tides fall.
Can't stop my thoughts,
No matter how hard I try,
Can't block them out.
My thoughts are racing
Can't block them out.
I do see the glory of morning,
Such a lovely beauty of flowers please me,
I do see the glory of morning.

Examples of Refrain in Literature

Example #1: *One Art* (By Elizabeth Bishop)

“The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster...
Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
The art of losing isn't hard to master
though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster.”

In this example, the poet has repeatedly used the refraining line “The art of losing isn't hard to master” throughout the poem. This refraining line is creating [rhythm](#) as well as emphasizing the idea. Notice that this line, though, varies slightly in the final stanza, yet is still considered to be a refrain.

Example #2: *Annabel Lee* (By Edgar Allan Poe)

“It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know ...

I was a child and *she* was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea,

But we loved with a love that was more than love —
I and my Annabel Lee ...”

The poet is using refraining line “In a kingdom by the sea.” This appears in the second line of each stanza, and recurs in the final line of the third stanza, drawing readers’ attention, and contributing to its [meter](#) and rhythm.

Example #3: *Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night* (By Dylan Thomas)

“Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light...

“And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”

This is very a famous poem using two refrains; one comes in the first line, as “Do not go gentle into that good night”; while second comes in the third line of each stanza. These refrains make the poem catchy and easy to remember.

Example #4: *Stopping by Woods On a Snowy Evening* (By Emily Dickinson)

“The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.”

Frost has used refrain in only the last stanza that he repeats twice as “And miles to go before I sleep.” It gives rhythm to the poem and lay emphasis on this idea of doing many things before dying.

“The shades of night were falling fast...
A banner with the strange device,
Excelsior!

There in the twilight cold and gray,
Lifeless, but beautiful, he lay...
A [voice](#) fell like a falling star,
Excelsior!”

The poet makes use of refrain with “Excelsior” throughout the entire poem, creating rhythm and drawing the attention of readers.

Example #6: *The Properly Scholarly Attitude* (By Adelaide Crapsey)

“The poet pursues his beautiful [theme](#);
The preacher his golden beatitude; ...
Of the properly scholarly [attitude](#)—
The highly desirable, the very advisable,
The hardly acquirable, properly scholarly attitude.”

In the above given poem, Crapsey uses refrain “properly scholarly attitude” to highlight the theme of being a poet having proper scholarly attitude.

Example #7: *O Captain! My Captain!* (By Walt Whitman)

“O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up — for you the flag is flung — for you the bugle trills...”

The poet uses refrain throughout this poem to emphasize elegiac theme. See the repetition of the words “captain,” “rise up,” and “for you” in just these two lines. This theme continues throughout.

Function of Refrain

Refrain is purely a poetic device, and the most important function that a

line or phrase recurs in a poem, or a piece of literature, it becomes noticeable to the readers. By using refrain, poets can make their ideas memorable, and draw the attention of the readers toward a certain idea. This is done by using a single line recurrently throughout a poetic work, allowing readers to take a pause each time they come upon such repetition.