

Tercet

Definition of Tercet

A tercet is a three-lined [verse](#), or a group, or unit of three lines. These three lines are often rhymed together, or they [rhyme](#) with another triplet. It has a flow of words as rolling waves. Creating rhythmic flow in in just three lines, however, is quite a challenging job.

Types of Tercet

[Haiku](#)

Haiku is a Japanese type of tercet. It is a three-line poem based usually on nature, and follows five-seven-five syllable counts. It means the first line contains five, the second seven, and the third line five syllables.

Triplet

A triplet has three rhymed lines in each [stanza](#). Its [rhyme scheme](#) is AAA.

Enclosed or Sicilian Tercet

An enclosed or Sicilian tercet uses a rhyme scheme of ABA. In simple words, the first and third lines rhyme together and enclose a rhyming middle line. This tercet adds the challenge of using iambic [pentameter](#). It means each line uses ten syllables with emphasis on each second syllable.

[Villanelle](#)

Another type of triplet which uses five tercets and one [quatrain](#). It follows the rhyme scheme as: A1 b A2 / a b A1 / a b A2 / a b A1 / a b A2 / a b A1 A2.

Terza Rima

Terza rima is one of the most challenging types of tercet. It usually follows [iambic pentameter](#) with rhyme scheme of ABA BCB CDC. This is a complicated rhyme scheme that binds stanzas together in which the second line in each stanza rhyme with the next tercet.

Examples of Tercet in Literature

Example #1: *The Old Pond* (By Matsuo Bashu, translated by William J. Higginso)

“An old silent pond...
A frog jumps into the pond,
splash! Silence again.”

This haiku poem contains three lines with no rhyming pattern. The focus of the poem is on a natural scene. There are five-syllables in the first line, seven in the second, and five in the third line.

Example #2: *A Toccata of Galuppi's* (By Robert Browning)

“Oh, Galuppi, Baldassaro, this is very sad to find!
I can hardly misconceive you; it would prove me deaf and blind;
But although I give you credit, 'tis with such a heavy mind!”

This is the first triplet that is using AAA rhyme scheme. In this triplet, the [speaker](#) listens to a nostalgic musical piece. The rhyming of words *bind*, *blind*, and *mind* creates music similar to the [theme](#) of the poem.

Example #3: *Upon Julia's Clothes* (By Robert Herrick)

“Whenas in silks my Julia goes,
Then, then, methinks, how sweetly flows
The liquefaction of her clothes...”

See the rhyming words “goes”, “flows”, “clothes.” These rhyming words strengthen smooth flow of ideas. This rhyme scheme is perfect for triplet because it follows AAA scheme.

Example #4: *The Waking* (By Theodore Roethke)

"I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.
I learn by going where I have to go.

We think by feeling. What is there to know?
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Of those so close beside me, which are you?
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,
And learn by going where I have to go..."

This is an example of villanelle with a rhyme scheme of tercet ABA. Each line is following strong iambic pentameter. They are shown through underlined lines with stressed/unstressed syllabic patterns.

Example #5: *Ode to the West Wind* (By Percy Bysshe Shelley)

"O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow..."

This is a perfect example of terza rima tercet with the interlocking pattern of rhyme scheme ABA BCB CDC. This pattern continues throughout the poem.

Function of Tercet

A tercet gives a smooth, flowing reading experience due to its rhyme scheme. It evokes both physical and cerebral response in their senses. It is commonly found in historical poetry. Contemporary poets, too, use slant rhymes, broken rhymes, and [free verse](#) in tercets. The use of iambic pentameter adds to the [rhythm](#) and flow of the poems. Moreover, subtle

variation through iambic pentameter produces emotional impacts on readers, which is the major objectives of these short poems.