

Stanza

Definition of Stanza

In poetry, a stanza is a division of four or more lines having a fixed length, [meter](#), or rhyming scheme.

Stanzas in poetry are similar to paragraphs in [prose](#). Both stanzas and paragraphs include connected thoughts, and are set off by a space. The number of lines varies in different kinds of stanzas, but it is uncommon for a stanza to have more than twelve lines. The pattern of a stanza is determined by the number of *feet* in each line, and by its *metrical* or *rhyming* scheme.

Stanza Examples in English Poetry

On the basis of a fixed number of lines and rhyming scheme, traditional English language poems have the following kinds of stanzas:

[Couplet](#)

[Tercet](#)

[Quatrain](#)

Quintain

[Sestet](#)

Let us make ourselves familiar with the above mentioned kinds of stanzas:

Couplet

A couplet consists of two rhyming lines having the same meter. Consider the following couplet stanza examples:

Example #1: *Essay on Criticism* (By Alexander Pope)

“True wit is nature to advantage dress’d;
What oft was thought, but ne’er so well express’d.”

Example #2: *Sonnet II* (By Edna St. Vincent Millay)

“Whether or not we find what we are seeking
is idle, biologically speaking.”

Example #4: *To Science* (By Edgar Allan Poe)

A rhyming pair of lines in iambic [pentameter](#) is known as a “heroic couplet.” Initiated by Chaucer, heroic couplets are commonly used in epics and [narrative](#) poetry. Among the well known examples of stanza, we find Edgar Allan Poe’s [sonnet](#) *To Science*:

“Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
We know her woof, her texture; she is given”

Tercet

A tercet comprises three lines following a same rhyming scheme **a a a**, or have a rhyming pattern **a b a**. Sir Thomas Wyatt introduced tercet in the 16th century.

Example #1: *Second Satire* (By Thomas Wyatt)

Read the following tercets from Wyatt’s poem *Second* [Satire](#) with a rhyming scheme **a b a**:

“My mother’s maids, when they did sew and spin,
They sang sometimes a song of the field mouse,
That for because their livelihood was but so thin.

Would needs go seek her townish sister’s house.

The stormy blasts her cave so sore did souse...”

Example #2: *The Eagle* (By Alfred Lord Tennyson)

The famous Romantic poet, Alfred Lord Tennyson employed tercets in his poem *The Eagle* with a rhyming scheme **a a a**:

“He clasps the crag with crooked hands:
Close to the sun it lonely lands,
Ringed with the azure world, it stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.”

Quatrain

Quatrain is a form of stanza popularized by a Persian poet, Omar Khayyam, who called it a Rubai. It has common rhyming schemes **a a a a**, **a a b b**, **a b a b**.

Example #1: *The Eagle* (By Alfred Lord Tennyson)

“Come, fill the Cup, and in the fire of Spring
Your Winter garment of Repentance fling:
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To flutter—and the Bird is on the Wing.”

Example #2: *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (By Thomas Gray)

“The curfew tolls 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.”

A quintain, also referred to as “cinquain,” is a stanza of five lines, which may be rhymed or unrhymed, and has a typical stress pattern. Its invention is attributed to Adelaide Crapsey.

Example #1: *November Night* (By Adelaide Crapsey)

“Listen...
With faint dry sound,
Like steps of passing ghosts,
The leaves, frost-crisp’d, break from the trees
And fall.”

Sestet

Sestet is a kind of stanza that consists of six lines. It is the second division of Italian or sonnets of Petrarch, following an [octave](#) or the first division comprising eight lines. In a sonnet, a sestet marks a change of emotional state of a poet as they tend to be more [subjective](#) in the second part of the sonnet.

Example #1: *The Better Part* (By Mathew Arnold)

“So answerest thou; but why not rather say:
‘Hath man no second life? – Pitch this one high!
Sits there no judge in Heaven, our sin to see? –
More strictly, then, the inward judge obey!
Was Christ a man like us? Ah! Let us try
If we then, too, can be such men as he!’”

The poet answers the rude inquirer passionately as soon as the sestet commences.

Short Examples of Stanza in Sentences

As I behold the beautiful sunrise
It is like seeing a lovely surprise.
A fox and an ant and three dogs

The fox slipped and fell on ant
“Oh no!” said the ant, “there’s a fox on me!”
Oh old man, play one,
Play knick and knack with your thumb,
With knack, knack, and paddy whack,
Come and give the cat a bone.
White birds on the shore:
A broken hoarding banging
On the door.
Raindrops on my page
Cold breeze blows my paper away
Oops! I need it!
I once met a fairy who lived on a star.
From a stranger prospective I had to move far.
I asked her once why she lived on a star
She frowned and replied, how weird you are.
Hope knows vision
Where faith sheds light
Dare find your way
To move every day.
Red petals
Fluttering in the wind
Cherry blossoms.

Examples of Stanza in Literature

Example #1: *We Real Cool* (By Gwendolyn Brooks)

“We real cool. We
Left school. We
Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We
Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We
Jazz June. We
Die soon.”

See every line in this excerpt ends with the word “we.” Here, the poet has used a lot of [enjambment](#). Beginning a sentence in one line, and keeping it moving to the next line, is known as “enjambment,” and the poem is

Example #2: *Acquainted with the Night* (By Robert Frost)

“I have been one acquainted with the night.
I have walked out in rain — and back in rain.
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.
I have passed by the watchman on his beat
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.”

Here, Frost has used three-line stanzas, also known as “tercets.” These stanzas have used a chain [rhyme](#) scheme as **aba**, **bcb**, **cdc**, and so on. In the first stanza, the [speaker](#) tells that he walks a lot at night, and in the second stanza he feels sad and passed by a watchman, whom he avoids.

Example #3: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (By S. T. Coleridge)

“The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.”

The poet has used quatrain (four-line stanza) in the given example. It is one of the most popular forms known as “[ballad](#) stanza,” which uses a [rhyme scheme](#) of **abxb**, in which the third line does not rhyme. This is called “common meter.”

Example #4: *Ozymandias* (By Percy Bysshe Shelley)

“And on the pedestal these words appear:
‘My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!’
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”

In this given example, Shelley has used [iambic pentameter](#) in the second part of his sonnet. This part brings a major shift in poem's direction by using "volta," in which the speaker reveals the inscription that reveals Ozymandias. The rhyme scheme of sestet is flexible. This rhymes as CDCDCD and CDECDE.

Function of Stanza

Stanza divides a poem in such a way that does not harm its balance, but rather adds to the beauty, and to the symmetry of a poem. Moreover, it allows poets to shift their moods, and present different subject matters in their poems.