

# Poetry Forms — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into practice. You will scan real lines into feet, chart and repair rhyme schemes, draft a sonnet and a villanelle from named refrains and a placed volta, relineate free verse three ways, and sketch a concrete poem whose shape means. The templates give you reusable trackers for scansion, rhyme, the villanelle frame, and your form-to-feeling decisions.

## Meter, Rhythm, and Scansion

Hear stress, mark it on the page, name the meter, and keep a metered line alive with deliberate variation.

### Exercise: Scan Five Lines by Hand

Pick five lines of metered verse you admire (any source). Read each aloud at a normal pace, mark stressed syllables with a slash and unstressed with an x, then name the dominant foot and the line length. Do not perform the lines; let your speaking voice decide the stress.

- Which content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives) carried the stress, and which function words stayed light?  
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- What foot dominates each line, and how many feet does it have (name the full meter)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Where did the real spoken rhythm pull against the regular pattern?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Exercise: Write Four Lines, One Per Meter

Compose one line of your own in each of four meters: iambic pentameter, trochaic tetrameter, anapestic trimeter, and dactylic dimeter. Keep the content simple; the goal is to feel each beat in your own words. Scan each line afterward to confirm it does what you intended.

- Which meter felt most natural to write in, and which fought you?  
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- Did any line drift into a different meter than you intended when you scanned it?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Which subject or mood seemed to suit each meter's beat?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Worksheet: Substitution Audit Sheet

Take one metered draft of your own, scan it, and log every place you departed from the base meter. For each departure, decide whether it earns its keep by landing emphasis on a word that deserves it, or whether it is a mistake to fix.

Line number

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Base meter of the poem

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Type of variation (trochaic first foot / spondee / feminine ending / caesura / other)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Word(s) the variation emphasizes

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Deserved emphasis or accidental break? (keep / fix)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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Revision if fixing

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### Checklist: Scansion Readiness Check

- [ ] I can mark any line into stressed and unstressed syllables by ear.
- [ ] I can name the five common feet by their keywords.
- [ ] I can name a meter by its dominant foot plus its number of feet.
- [ ] My metered lines keep a pulse a reader could tap while still sounding spoken.
- [ ] Every metrical variation in my draft lands on a word that deserves emphasis.

## Rhyme and Sound

Chart rhyme schemes, rhyme on strong words without forcing syntax, and bind poems with sound beyond end rhyme.

### Exercise: Chart Three Rhyme Schemes

Choose three short rhymed poems (a hymn, a nursery rhyme, and a sonnet work well). Write the last word of each line down a margin and assign letters, giving the same letter to lines that share a rhyme sound. Note whether each rhyme is perfect, slant, or eye rhyme.

- What scheme did each poem use (couplet, alternating, enclosed, or other)?

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- Where did the poet use slant rhyme instead of a perfect match, and to what effect?

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- Did you catch any eye rhymes that look like rhymes but are not heard as ones?

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### Exercise: Repair a Forced Rhyme

Write a deliberately bad rhymed couplet with inverted syntax or a filler word, then repair it. Rhyme on the most important word, accept a slant rhyme if the perfect rhymes are clichés, and rebuild the second line as a natural English sentence with no filler.

- What was the true last important word the line should rhyme on?

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- Did a slant rhyme free you from a worn pairing like moon-June-spoon?

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- Does the repaired couplet survive the prose test when rewritten as one plain sentence?

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### Worksheet: Sound-Binding Pass

Take one poem of yours, rhymed or not, and mark every repeated sound with a colored pen: alliteration, assonance, and consonance, not just end rhyme. Find one flat, unbound passage and strengthen it by changing a word to share a vowel or consonant with its neighbors.

Poem title

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Alliteration found (initial consonants repeated)

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Assonance found (interior vowels repeated)

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Consonance found (consonants repeated, often at word ends)

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Flattest unbound passage

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Revised word and the sound it now shares

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### Checklist: Honest Rhyme Check

- Every rhyme falls on a word the poem actually cares about.
- No line uses inverted syntax just to reach the rhyme.
- No word exists only to fill meter or reach a sound.
- Slant rhyme is used where perfect rhymes would be clichés.
- Each rhymed pair passes the prose test as natural English.

## Fixed Forms: The Sonnet and the Villanelle

Build a sonnet around a placed volta and a villanelle around two strong refrains, then match form to feeling.

### Exercise: Draft a Sonnet, Turn First

Write a fourteen-line sonnet in iambic pentameter. Choose the English or Italian family, place the volta (the final couplet for English, line 9 for Italian), and draft the turn first so the whole poem aims at it. Lay the rhyme scheme over the draft last.

- What small two-sided argument does the poem make (setup, then turn)?

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- Where is the volta, and does the thought genuinely pivot there?

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- Did building the turn first change how you wrote the setup?

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### Worksheet: Villanelle Refrain Builder

Before drafting nineteen lines, build the two refrains and the rhyme sounds. Write refrain A1 (line 1) and refrain A2 (line 3) so each is strong and slightly flexible, able to mean more across six appearances. Pick the a-rhyme and b-rhyme sounds, then list a few rhyming words for each.

Refrain A1 (first line)

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Refrain A2 (third line)

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a-rhyme sound and 4 to 6 candidate words

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b-rhyme sound and 4 to 6 candidate words

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How each refrain can shift meaning as the poem proceeds

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Subject that justifies the form's circling repetition

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### Exercise: Match Form to Feeling

Take three poem ideas of your own. For each, write one sentence naming what the poem fundamentally does (its verb: circles, turns, fixates, escapes), then choose the form whose behavior matches that verb and justify the pairing.

- What is each poem's core verb, stated in a single sentence?

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- Which form (sonnet, villanelle, pantoum, sestina, or free verse) matches that verb?

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- How would the form's mechanical behavior add a second layer of meaning?

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## Checklist: Fixed-Form Readiness Check

- [ ] My sonnet is fourteen lines of iambic pentameter with a recognizable rhyme scheme.
- [ ] The sonnet's volta falls in the right place and the thought truly turns there.
- [ ] My villanelle's two refrains are strong enough to deepen on repetition.
- [ ] The villanelle follows the standard a-b-a tercets and a-b-a-a quatrain on two rhymes.
- [ ] Each chosen form matches what its poem is doing rather than being picked to impress.

## Free Verse, Concrete Poetry, and the Line

Build free verse from the line, break lines on purpose, and make a concrete poem whose shape carries meaning.

### Exercise: The Chopped-Prose Test

Take a free-verse draft and write it out as a single prose paragraph. Read it. If nothing is lost, the line breaks were arbitrary; relineate so the breaks do real work. If the paragraph loses its rhythm, emphasis, and surprise, your lineation was already earning its place.

- What did the poem lose, if anything, when flattened into prose?

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- Which line breaks were carrying pace, emphasis, or surprise?

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- Which breaks turned out to be arbitrary and need rethinking?

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### Exercise: Relineate Three Ways

Take one free-verse poem and relineate it three times: break only at grammatical pauses (all end-stopped), then break to maximize enjambment, then a deliberate mix. Read each version aloud and decide which best serves the poem and why.

- How did pace and emphasis change between the three versions?

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- Which words gained weight by sitting at a line's edge or start?

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- Did any enjambment create a momentary double meaning the next line resolved?

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### Worksheet: Line-Break Decision Log

For one poem, log the most important line breaks. For each, record the word you left hanging at the line end, the word you landed at the next line's start, and whether you end-stopped for rest or enjambment for pull.

Line number

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Word left hanging at the line end

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Word landed at the start of the next line

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End-stop (rest) or enjambment (pull)?

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What the break is meant to do

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Keep or revise

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## Exercise: Sketch a Concrete Poem

Choose one idea where shape could add meaning (rain trickling down the page, a tower stacking into a narrow column, wings narrowing then widening like Herbert's *Easter Wings*). Draft the words and the layout together. Then apply the test: remove the shape and see whether the poem loses meaning.

- What is the idea, and how does the visual shape reinforce it?
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- Which tools did you use (shape, spacing, typography, placement)?
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- When you strip the layout away, what meaning disappears?
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## Your Action Plan

1. Build a personal scansion key: write the five feet with keywords and the counting words from monometer to hexameter on one card.
2. Scan five admired lines by hand and name the meter of each to train your ear and eye together.
3. Chart the rhyme scheme of three poems you love by lettering their end words, noting perfect versus slant rhyme.
4. Run one of your rhymed drafts through the prose test and repair any forced rhyme or filler.
5. Draft a sonnet by writing its volta first, then build the setup and resolution around the placed turn.
6. Write two strong, flexible refrains and build a full villanelle on the standard nineteen-line repetition map.
7. Take a free-verse draft and relineate it three ways, then keep the version whose breaks do the most work.
8. Fill the line-break decision log for your strongest free-verse poem and revise the weakest breaks.
9. Sketch one concrete poem where shape carries meaning, and apply the remove-the-shape test.
10. Assemble a small portfolio of one poem per form (sonnet, villanelle, free verse, concrete) and revise each against its checklist.









