

Writing a Villanelle

The French used the villanelle as a poetic form in the late 1500s and before that it was an old Italian folk song called a villanella.

The poem consists of:

- five tercets (3 line stanzas)
- a concluding quatrain (4 line stanza)
- contains an alternating refrain (in the first and third lines)
- rhyme scheme: only two repeated rhymes as listed. You may use a slant rhyme for the b rhyme; in a slant rhyme the words are similar but fail to make an exact matching sound. Example: *found* and *kind*, *grime* and *game*, *heart* and *star* or *heart* and *dark*.

Below is the villanelle rhyme pattern. Although there is no set number of syllables in each line, the chosen number is usually repeated. If you follow iambic pentameter in one line, it's repeated in all.

1. A1
2. b
3. A2

4. a
5. b
6. A1 (Line 1 repeated)

7. a
8. b
9. A2 (Line 3 repeated)

10. a
11. b
12. A1 (Line 1 repeated)

13. a
14. b
15. A2 (Line 3 repeated)

16. a
17. b
18. A1 (Line 1 repeated)
19. A2 (Line 3 repeated)

Suggestion:

You may model your villanelle after Dylan Thomas' "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" in which Thomas pleads to his father not to die. Consider writing a villanelle in which the speaker makes a request of the audience.

Other examples are Roethke's "[The Waking](#)," Robinson's "[The House on the Hill](#)" and Sylvia Plath's "[Mad Girl's Love Song](#)."