

---

Attempting this difficult French form of poetry can be challenging and fun. Here is the basis of the form.

---

1. Comprehend the form of this poetry. The villanelle has 19 lines, 5 stanzas of three lines and 1 stanza of four lines with two rhymes and two refrains. The 1st, then the 3rd lines alternate as the last lines of stanzas 2, 3, and 4, and then stanza 5 (the end) as a couplet. It is written in pentameter (5 feet). The structure is provided with this example by Edward Arlington Robinson:

2.

- |                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| ○ line 1 - a - 1st refrain-  | Since Persia fell at Marathon          |
| ○ line 2 - b                 | The yellow years have gathered fast    |
| ○ line 3- a- 2nd refrain-    | Long centuries have come and gone.     |
| ○                            |  |
| ○ line 4 - a -               | And yet(they say) the place will don   |
| ○ line 5 - b                 | A phantom fury of the past,            |
| ○ line 6 - a - 1st refrain-  | Since Persia fell at Marathon;         |
| ○                            |  |
| ○ line 7 - a                 | And as of old when Helicon             |
| ○ line 8 - b                 | Trembled and swayed with rapture vast  |
| ○ line 9-a -2nd refrain-     | (Long centuries have come and gone).   |
| ○                            |  |
| ○ line 10 - a                | The ancient plain, when nigh comes on, |
| ○ line 11 - b                | Shakes to a ghostly battle blast,      |
| ○ line 12 - a - 1st refrain- | Since Persia fell at Marathon          |
| ○                            |  |
| ○ line 13 - a                | But into soundless Acheron             |
| ○ line 14 - b                | The glory of Greek shame was cast:     |
| ○ line 15- a -2nd refrain-   | Long centuries have come and gone,     |
| ○                            |  |
| ○ line 16 - a                | The suns of hellas have all shone,     |
| ○ line 17 - b                | The first has fallen to the last;--    |
| ○ line 18-a - 1st refrain-   | Since Persia fell at Marathon,         |
| ○ line 19-a- 2nd refrain-    | Long centuries have come and gone.     |

3. Pay special attention to the placement of the refrain and the rhyme pattern formed by the last word of each line.
4. Choose the subject for your villanelle carefully. It is a form that repeats two lines multiple times. Ask yourself if your subject is one that can be handled with these limitations.
5. Once you've settled on an idea, work out the rhyme and compile two lists of words that rhyme.
6. Write the first and second refrain as two lines that follow a complete thought. For instance Dylan Thomas's two lines from his famous villanelle: "Do not go gentle into that goodnight/Rage, rage against the dying of a light."
7. Take those lines and place them in the framework given above. This will be the basis for the villanelle and look, and 42% of the poem is already complete.
8. Fill in the eleven remaining lines to make a cohesive poem.
9. Meter ALL the lines so they maintain a rhythm and are of the same length. They are in tetrameter
10. The poem must have 19 lines