

Words, Words, Words-Shakespeare Sonnet Writing Contest

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st.
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.



The above is Shakespeare's most famous sonnet, but what makes it a sonnet and what makes it particularly Shakespearean?

1. Number of lines

A Shakespearean sonnet will always have 14 lines.

2. Length of a line

Each line is written in iambic pentameter, which is a fancy way of saying 10 syllables. Ideally, there are 5 iambs, and an iamb is simply an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. (For a great example, read the last two lines of the sonnet above out loud.

So **long** as **men** can **breathe**, or **eyes** can **see**,
So **long** lives **this**, and **this** gives **life** to **thee**.)

3. Rhyming

The shorthand for Shakespearean rhyme scheme is ABAB CDCD EFEF GG.

That means the last word of the first line rhymes with the last word of third line. (Day and May) And then the last word of the second line rhymes with the last word of the fourth. (Temperate and Date) Then lines five and seven rhyme, and six and eight rhyme. Followed by lines nine and eleven rhyming, and ten and twelve rhyming. The sonnet is then polished off by two lines in a row (a couplet) that rhyme with each other.

4. What's it about?

Well, a lot of Shakespeare's sonnets are about love, but your sonnet can be about anything you want!

Feel free to write your sonnet on the back and turn it in at the Reference Desk.

