

To Rhyme or Not To Rhyme?

"Have you ever considered writing a poem that doesn't rhyme?"

If you read much of the poetry written today, traditional rhyming forms are seldom used. Why? Because having to find a word that rhymes often stops the poet from saying what she/he really wants to say.

Rhyming poetry is actually the most difficult kind of poetry to write - if you do it well. The rhyme is often very simple (moon/June/ dead/bread) or forced (smother/mother)... You end up writing lines that rhyme, not lines that add to our understanding of the poem. If you write your poem in free verse, you won't have to straight-jacket your lines and meaning into the rhyme scheme.

I think it's fine if people use rhyme because they want to, but if you're using it because you think you ought to, because you think poems are supposed to rhyme, then I urge you to try writing a poem next time that doesn't restrict itself to rhyme."

-Susan Musgrave (Canadian poet and WiER writer), from a posting to a student

In short, you do not *have to* rhyme! If you do chose to rhyme, it should be because:

1- you *want to* rhyme

2- you feel that the rhyming adds to your poem and the words you choose help express your meaning.

Rhyming Checklist (if you decide to rhyme, ask yourself these questions) :

___ Is my rhyme scheme consistent?

Use a consistent rhyme scheme (it does not have to rhyme every line (aa bb) or every other line (abab), but the format you chose should be consistent.

___ Have I spent time thinking about my words?

Use a rhyming dictionary or look up a word in a thesaurus. Pick a word that fits your poem and that expresses what you want; do not pick a word simply for rhyme's sake. You can always change the rhyme scheme later (here is a link to a free rhyming dictionary called "RhymeZone" at <http://www.rhymezone.com/>).

___ Do my rhyming words express my idea well?

Use words that express your ideas, but **do not always settle on the predictable** (like "love" with "above" (as in "you are the one I love/ you must be sent from above"). Susan Musgrave in her WiER podcast says rhyme should be "surprising." This does not mean, however, that you should rhyme words just to be surprising!

___ Does my writing sound natural?

Write naturally. Do not write awkward lines for the sake of rhyme

An example of a Well-Rhymed Poem:

“The Trees” by Philip Larken

The trees are coming into leaf
Like something almost being said;
The recent buds relax and spread,
Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Is it that they are born again
And we grow old? No, they die too,
Their yearly trick of looking new
Is written down in rings of grain.

Yet still the unresting castles thresh
In fullgrown thickness every May.
Last year is dead, they seem to say,
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.

Notice that in this poem:

- 1- The rhyme scheme is consistent (abba, cddc, effg).
- 2- The rhymes are unique (not cliché) and are chosen for their meaning (leaf / grief, thresh/ afresh); words are well chosen.
- 3- The rhyming words fit in with the rest of the poem and sound natural

Exercise A: Using a Rhyming Dictionary

Using a rhyming dictionary (either on-line or from the library), find “surprising” rhymes for each of the following words. See how many you can find!

Friend
Cute
House
Love
Star
Forget
Remember
Hand
Hold
Live
Wise
Sleep
Me
You
Tear
Face

Exercise B: Revising Rhyme

Choose one of your poems that you feel comfortable editing. If it rhymes, change some of your words using a rhyming dictionary, or think about whether it would be better not to rhyme. If it does not rhyme, try to rhyme part of it