



What is a Limerick?

Limericks are short, rhyming, funny poems with a bouncy rhythm that makes them easy to memorize. No one knows for sure where the name “limerick” comes from, but most people assume it is related to the county of Limerick, in Ireland. The first limericks came about in the early 1700s and are often preserved in folk songs but Edward Lear, a British poet, popularized the form. Lear published a collection of 117 limericks in 1846, entitled *A Book of Nonsense*.

The Rules of Limericks

Limericks, like all poetic forms, have a set of rules that you need to follow. The rules for a limerick are fairly simple:

- They are five lines long.
- Lines 1, 2, and 5 rhyme with one another.
- Lines 3 and 4 rhyme with each other.
- They have a distinctive rhythm
- They are usually funny.

Rhyming a Limerick

The rhyme scheme of a limerick is known as “AABBA.” This is because the last words in lines 1, 2, and 5 rhyme. Those are the “A’s” in the rhyme scheme. The “B’s” are the last words of lines 3 and 4. Example:

*There was a young lady from Cork,
Whose Pa made a fortune in pork.
He bought for his daughter,
A tutor who taught her,
To balance green peas on her fork.*

Notice that the words, “Cork,” “pork,” and “fork” all rhyme. Those are the “A” words in the “AABBA” rhyme scheme. Also notice that “daughter” and “her” (approximately) rhyme. Those are the “B” words in the rhyme scheme.

When you read or recite a limerick, the first two lines and the last line have three “beats” in them, while the third and fourth lines have two “beats.” In other words, the rhythm of a limerick looks like this:

*da DUM da da DUM da da DUM
da DUM da da DUM da da DUM*

da DUM da da DUM
da DUM da da DUM
da DUM da da DUM da da DUM

The rhythm doesn't have to exactly match this, but it needs to be close enough that it sounds the same when you read it.

Number of syllables

The first, second and fifth lines should have eight or nine syllables, while the third and fourth lines should have five or six.

Your Turn:

When you write your limerick, you can try to follow these steps:

1. Choose the name of a person or place and write the first line.
2. Look in a rhyming dictionary for words that rhyme with your person or place name.
3. Write line 2 and 5 to rhyme with the first line.
4. Now write lines 3 and 4 with a different rhyme.

When you are done writing, read your limerick out loud to see if it has the right rhythm; three "beats" on lines 1, 2, and 5, and two "beats" on lines 3 and 4, as shown above. If not, see if you can rewrite some words to get the rhythm right. Remember that most limericks are funny and trivial in nature. The last line of the limerick is special as it contains ***the joke or punch line***.