

## Explore Haiku

**Haiku** is a short poetic form that originated in Japan. Traditionally, it often focuses on one or two images that capture a mood or moment in a season, but it can cover any topic. When written in English, haikus consist of three unrhymed lines. There are usually

five syllables in the first line  
seven syllables in the second line  
five syllables in the last line  
seventeen syllables total

(The syllabication of haiku that were originally written in Japanese may vary in the English translation.)

### Read Some Haiku

The Poetry Foundation website offers [more information on haiku](#), as well as some examples.

Check out "[Haiku \[I count the morning\]](#)" by Sonia Sanchez.

Read [haiku](#) by Etheridge Knight.

Visit [this page](#) to see how various translators interpreted haiku by Basho, the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Japanese haiku master. There are multiple English versions given for each of eight Japanese originals, and you can see how word choice and punctuation affect the meaning.

**Note:** HMH is not responsible for the content of third-party websites.

### Write a Haiku

Follow these steps to write a haiku of your own.

1. Start by observing something closely, perhaps something you see every day in your room or outside your window. What mood arises as you look? What details help create that mood?
2. Write three lines about it. Don't worry about the syllable count at first. Capture what you see and feel.
3. Now count the syllables in each line. You'll probably want to read your lines aloud as you do so. Remember that a syllable is a word or part of a word that contains one vowel sound. Many people find it helps to use their fingers to keep track of how many syllables are in each line. Experiment with adding, subtracting, moving, and replacing words so that there are five syllables in the first line, seven in the second line, and five in the third line.

4. Keep revising so that each word contributes to form powerful images that will linger in the reader's mind and evoke a mood. Think back to the differences you noticed among the Basho translations. Even a shift in capitalization or punctuation can have a meaningful effect. Read the poem aloud to test the rhythm.
5. When you're pleased with your result, share your haiku.