

Writing Haiku

Although traditional haiku follow a 5-7-5 syllable pattern, contemporary haiku do not necessarily need to follow this pattern. The haiku you write will follow the spirit of traditional haiku, but you will not need to count syllables.

Here are the things you should keep in mind as you write your own haiku:

1. Haiku are traditionally 3 lines. Your haiku should range from 3-5 lines.
2. Haiku writers look to the natural world for their subjects and their imagery. Your haiku should also be focused on natural imagery.
3. The best haiku help readers focus closely on one element of nature: a flower, a turtle, a blue heron, etc. Haiku writers appeal to one or more of our 5 senses (seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching) through imagery. This imagery helps us to experience the beauty or significance of this element of nature.

You can use the mentor poems to help you write your own haiku. Consider the following mentor haiku and the suggest frames for writing your own:

One Flower

One flower
on the cliffside
nodding at the canyon
--Jack Kerouac

Title your haiku "One _____." Choose something in nature as the subject of your haiku and fill in the blank to create your title. Then use imagery to help us see, hear, taste, smell and/or feel this thing in your haiku. You might think about where this thing is, what it looks like, what surrounds it, or what it is doing ("on the cliffside/nodding at the canyon").

A Bat Flits

A bat flits
in moonlight
above the plum blossoms.
--Yosa Buson

Title your haiku "A _____ (something) _____ (does something)" Then use imagery to help us experience this thing as it does whatever you have identified in your title. You might think about when and where this is happening ("in moonlight/above the plum blossoms")

Deep within the stream
The huge fish lie motionless
Facing the current
--James W. Hackett

Start the first line of your haiku with "Deep within the _____". Choose something or somewhere to fill in the blank here. Then focus on something ("the huge fish") and what this thing(s) is doing ("facing the current").

Heaps of black cherries
glittering with drops of rain
in the evening sun
--Richard Wright

Start the first line of your haiku with "Heaps of _____" Choose something to fill in the blank. Then use imagery to help us experience this thing: what it looks like, sounds like, tastes, smells or feels like. You might think of something that is especially beautiful or delicious or fascinating.

Writing Haiku

Four Haiku

J. Patrick Lewis

January woods—
a snowy owl choosing one
syllable of wind

A spring peeper's song
How strange to hear the echo
of winter sleigh bells!

A
red-
tailed
hawk
stalls
in tall
heat
above
the
wheat
kingdom

Thanksgiving Day—
Indian corn whispering
in the pilgrim cold

Give your poem a title with a number: "_____ Haiku". If you are going to use the seasons for each haiku, you will probably use the same title that J. Patrick Lewis does here.