

About limericks

For the teacher

Limericks are short, humorous poems that consist of five lines. The rhyme and rhythm have a particular form.

Rhyme form: Lines 1, 2 and 5 must rhyme at the end. Lines 3 and 4 should also rhyme with each other but not with the other lines. This form is AABBA.

Rhythm form: This fits in with the rhyme form. Lines 1, 2 and 5 have three strong beats and lines 3 and 4 have only two strong beats.

Below is an example of a limerick.

An elephant slept in his bunk,
And in slumber his chest rose and sunk.
But he snored – how he snored!
All the other beasts roared –
So his wife tied a knot in his trunk.

Now let's look at the form of limerick.

An elephant slept in his bunk, (A)
And in slumber his chest rose and sunk. (A)
But he snored -- how he snored! (B)
All the other beasts roared – (B)
So his wife tied a knot in his trunk. (A)

Rhyme: bunk, sunk and trunk (A)
snored, roared (B)

Rhythm: The words underlined give the strong beats showing three strong beats in lines 1, 2 and 5 and two strong beats in lines 3 and 4.

The weak beats can be made up of more than one syllable or word. In this limerick the first weak beat (in line 1) is just one word – *An* but in line 2 the first weak beat is *And in*, and in line 3 it is *But he*.

Below is one of the limericks from the page of limericks you can enjoy with your learners.

A donkey once looked after sheep (A)
But one night they just wouldn't sleep (A)
A jackal came by (B)
All hungry and sly (B)
And donkey left him in a heap (A)

Rhyme: sheep, sleep and heap (A)
by sly (B)

Rhythm: In this limerick the weak beats are mostly just one syllable/word compared to the limerick above where the weak beats are mostly two short words.

Learners write their own limericks

1. Before writing their own limericks, learners should have read several limericks for enjoyment only.
2. Allow the learners an opportunity to analyse the structure of the poem by themselves. They should be able to pick out the rhyming pattern. You can help them with the rhythm by reading the strong beats loudly.
3. Give learners a few starting lines to choose from. They can do one about a donkey and then move on to other animals, for example:

There once was a donkey called Ned ...

There was a small goat called Sue ...

My grandfather once had a cow ...

A chicken once fell out of bed ...

4. Once the learners have their first line it is helpful to make lists of rhyming words that rhyme with the last word in the line. These rhyming words can be used to give ideas for the rest of the poem, for example:

Ned, bed, head, said, red, fed, dead

Sue, few, new, queue, too, two, you, clue, do, stew, blue

cow, now, sow, bow, wow, how, meow.