

A Collection Of Poems: We Learn To Write A Cinquain Poem

What is a Cinquain Poem?

Adelaide Crapsey was an American poet and the creator of the modern cinquain. A cinquain – which, by the way, is pronounced “sin-cane,” *not* “sin-kwane” – is a form of poetry that is very popular because of its simplicity, and is similar to Japanese poetic forms, such as haiku and tanka.

Cinquains are just five lines long, with only a few words on each line, making them easy to write. The first and last lines have just two syllables, while the middle lines have more, so they end up with a diamond-like shape, similar to the poetic form called the Diamante.

Though they are just five lines long, the best cinquains tell a small story. Instead of just having descriptive words, they may also have an action (something happening), a feeling caused by the action, and a conclusion or ending.

You can learn to write cinquains by following these few simple steps:

- 1 Decide what you would like to write about.
- 2 Brainstorm words and phrases that have to do with your idea.
- 3 Think about what story you want to tell.
- 4 Write your words and phrases in an order that tells your story, being sure to count the syllables as you go.

The Rules of a Cinquain

There are actually many different ways to write a cinquain, so let us have a look at how to write a traditional cinquain, as it was defined by the poet who invented it. These are the rules:

- 1 Cinquains are five lines long.
- 2 They have 2 syllables in the first line, 4 in the second, 6 in the third, 8 in the fourth line, and just 2 in the last line.
- 3 Cinquains do not need to rhyme, but you can include rhymes if you want to.

That's it. Just three simple rules. If you want to, you can even memorise the syllable count by remembering this five-digit number: 24682. Repeat after me: 24682, 24682, 24682. Now you've got it.

Getting Started

First, you need to select a topic. That is, you need to choose something to write your cinquain about. Here are a few easy places to get ideas:

- Write about your favourite thing
- Write about something you *don't* like
- Write about something you see around you
- Write about something that happens to you

Since I like ice cream, I think I'll write a cinquain about ice cream. This is convenient since the words "ice cream" have two syllables, so I can probably use this phrase as the first line of my cinquain. If your favourite thing is pizza, soccer, your cat, etc., you could also use "soccer," "pizza," or "my cat" as the first line of your cinquain.

Brainstorming ideas

Once you know what you are going to write about, you need to brainstorm ideas *about* your topic. Think of as many things as you can and write them down on a piece of paper. It's okay to write your ideas on one piece of paper and then write your poem on another piece of paper.

For example, I know several things about ice cream, so I've put them down here:

- It is cold.
- It is yummy.
- It is sweet.
- I like eating it.

These are just four ideas, but they are not yet a poem. To turn these ideas into a cinquain poem, we need to say them in a way that we have five lines with the right number of syllables on each line.

Counting Your Syllables

I recommend you count your syllables with your fingers as you write each line. If a line has too many syllables or not enough syllables, see if you can change some of the words to get the right number of syllables.

Once you get the syllable count right, make sure the poem says what you want it to say. You may need to go back and change it some more so that it tells the story you want it to.

Once your cinquain is finished, read it again, counting the syllables on your fingers to make sure you got everything right.

Ice Cream Cinquain

Here's a cinquain about ice cream, using the ideas that I brainstormed earlier:

Ice Cream

Ice Cream
Cold and yummy.
I love its sweet richness
as it finds its way into my
tummy.

You might notice a few things about this poem. It tells a little story. There is an action in which I eat the ice cream and it swallow it. There is a feeling expressed where I tell that I love it. And I even rhymed "yummy" with "tummy."

Messy Room Cinquain

Let's try another one. This time, let's write a cinquain about having a messy room. First, we need to brainstorm ideas. Here are a few I came up with:

- Dirty laundry
- Toys all over the place
- Mom says “clean it up”
- The hamper is overflowing
- I’d rather watch TV than clean my room
- I don’t mind my own mess

I don’t have to use *all* of these ideas, but writing more ideas than I am going to actually use give me lots to choose from when I start writing the poem.

Now that I’ve got my ideas, I’ll rearrange these into a five-line story with a 24682 syllable pattern, like this:

My Messy Room

My room
is such a mess.
Toys all over the place.
Mom says, “Clean up!” But I like it
like this.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

Now it’s your turn to try writing your own cinquain. Here are a few things to remember as you write:

- Cinquain poems can be written about *anything*
- They are five lines long
- The syllable pattern is 2, 4, 6, 8, 2
- Brainstorm ideas first
- Count the syllables on your fingers
- “Center” your poem on the page
- Rhyme if you want to
- Have fun!