**Sonnet Characteristics**

A sonnet is simply a poem written in a certain format. You can identify a sonnet if the poem has the following characteristics:

* **14 lines.** All sonnets have 14 lines which can be broken down into four sections called quatrains.
* **A strict rhyme scheme.** The rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet is ABAB / CDCD / EFEF / GG (note the four distinct sections in the rhyme scheme).
* **Written in iambic pentameter.** Sonnets are written in [iambic pentameter](http://shakespeare.about.com/od/shakespeareslanguage/a/i_pentameter.htm), a poetic meter with 10 beats per line made up of alternating unstressed and stressed syllables.

A sonnet can be broken down into four sections, three **quatrains** one **couplet**.

The three quatrains contain four lines each and use an alternating rhyme scheme. The couplet consists of just two lines that both rhyme.

Each quatrain should progress the poem as follows:

* **First quatrain:** This should establish the subject of the sonnet.   
  Number of lines: 4. Rhyme Scheme: ABAB
* **Second quatrain:** This should develop the sonnet’s theme.   
  Number of lines: 4. Rhyme Scheme: CDCD
* **Third quatrain:** This should round off the sonnet’s theme.   
  Number of lines: 4. Rhyme Scheme: EFEF
* **The couplet:** This should act as a conclusion to the sonnet.   
  Number of lines: 2. Rhyme Scheme: GG