



What is a Limerick

The Limericks of Sherlock Holmes by William S. Dorn

A limerick is a simple piece of poetry which has a fairly rigid format. The limerick rules are:

1. There must be 5 lines.
2. The 1st, 2nd, and 5th lines each must have 8 or 9 syllables.
3. If those 3 lines have 9 syllables, the stress must be on the 3rd, 6th, and 9th syllables, that is the meter must be:

da-da-DUM- Da-da-DUM- Da-da-DUM

This is often referred to as an anapestic meter. It has 3 'feet' (each Da-da-DUM is called a 'foot'). The line itself is called an anapestic trimeter line.

4. If those 3 lines have 8 syllables, the stress must be on the 2nd, 5th, and 8th syllables, that is the meter must be:

da-DUM-da-da-DUM-da-da-DUM

This is often referred to as an anapestic trimeter line with a catalectic 1st foot.

5. Regardless of the number of syllables in lines 1, 2, and 5, the last syllables in all three lines must rhyme.
6. The 3rd and 4th lines must each have 5 or 6 syllables.
7. If those two lines have 6 syllables, the stress in the 2 lines must be on the 3rd and 6th syllables, that is the meter must be:

da-da-DUM-da-da-DUM

8. If those 2 lines have 5 syllables, the stress in those 2 lines must be on the 2nd and 5th syllables, that is, the meter must be:

da-DUM-da-da-DUM

9. The last syllables in both lines must rhyme.
10. The most important rule, however, is: Have someone else read your limerick aloud. If it doesn't sound right, you need to re-write the limerick.

