



How to...

Write a limerick



Holly King-Mand

Holly King-Mand is a writer, presenter and campaigner for literacy (the ability to read and write) who has inspired

thousands of children. Holly loves funny poetry and has created this guide to writing your very own limerick.

Limericks are five-line poems that have been enjoyed by adults and children for centuries. They are usually light-hearted and silly. The origins of the limerick aren't clear, but it's thought the name comes from an 18th century Irish song. Limerick is also the name of a county and a city in Ireland. The first limericks in English appeared around 1820 and a writer called Edward Lear became famous for publishing collections of them.

Limericks are fun to write and read aloud. It's Saint Patrick's Day on 17 March – a religious day that celebrates the patron saint of Ireland and Irish culture. Why not mark the day by writing your own cheeky limerick, and entertain your family and friends?

Limericks can be as silly as you like.



Give it a rhyming shape

The structure, or shape, of a limerick is very specific. The first, second and fifth lines rhyme together (let's call that section A) and the third and fourth lines (section B) rhyme with each other too. Your second line should paint a picture of your character or set up a scene. For example, "Who often fell out of the bed", or, "Who loved to eat cheese in a shed". Try a few different versions to see what sounds best.



There was an old man of Dumbree,
Who taught little owls to drink tea;
For he said, "To eat mice,
Is not proper or nice,"
That amiable man of Dumbree.



Craft a musical rhythm

Limericks are known for their rhythm and are best spoken aloud. The A section has eight or nine syllables and three beats. The B section has five or six syllables, and two beats. A syllable is a sound in a word. "Cat" has one syllable. "Pillow" has two. "Syllable" has three. A beat is a syllable that is pronounced more strongly. Here is the first line of a limerick with the beats in bold: "There **was** a brown **cat** on the **pillow**."

Silly middle and funny ending

Lines three and four of your limerick should set up a silly story. Maybe your character "could not find a brush to clean out the hutch" or "went for a stroll and stepped on a mole". Keep it simple, unusual and full of nonsense. The final line of your poem should provide a twist or a laugh and bring your short story to a satisfying close. For example, "So he ended up eating the toad" or "and that was the end of his party".



Who or what is your star?

Pick a person or place to write your limerick about. They usually introduce a person. An Edward Lear limerick begins, "There was an old man with a beard", but yours could be about a clever girl or a shaggy dog. Limericks often include a name or where someone comes from. For example, "a goldfish called Fred". Or, "a funny young boy from Rome". The last word of the first line should be easy to rhyme with.

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