

Spanish versification: Rhyme

[Note: [Assonance](#) (*asonancia*), a type of rhyme which involves vowels but ignores consonants, will not be discussed here.]

Perfect rhyme (*rima perfecta* or *rima consonante*) in Spanish poetry is basically the same type of rhyme we are familiar with in English poetry and song, where the vowels as well as the consonants “rhyme” or sound identical for groups of words. Rhyme begins with the last stressed vowel of a line of poetry, and may consist of either one or two syllables, depending on whether or not the last stressed vowel is the final syllable in the line. In Spanish, two-syllable rhyme is called “feminine”; one-syllable rhyme is termed “masculine”. Rhyme with three syllables is possible, but extremely rare.

Masculine rhyme (*rima masculina*): This is one-syllable rhyme; that is, the rhyme words are stressed on the last syllable and thus the rhyme involves only the last vowel and any semi-vowel and/or consonant occurring thereafter. Examples of words which share the same masculine rhyme:

campeador

amor rhyme in **-or** (all 3 words end in the same sound, **-or**)

actor

Feminine rhyme (*rima femenina*): This is two-syllable rhyme, where the rhyme words are stressed on the next-to-last syllable and have the same sound starting with the primary vowel of the next-to-the-last syllable. Examples of words with the same feminine rhyme:

muertas

abiertas rhyme in **-ertas** (each word ends with the sound **-ertas**)

alertas

Note that in all of the above examples, the rhyme starts with the primary vowel of the last stressed syllable. Any consonants or semi-vowels before that primary vowel do not have to be identical; for example, *muertas* and *puertas* do rhyme, but they also rhyme with *abiertas*).

For the rhyme to be “perfect”, the sound must be identical, but the spelling does not have to be. For example, in Spanish the letter **h** is silent, so the words *búho* and *actúo* rhyme. On the other hand, since in most of Spain the letters **s** and **z** represent different sounds, the words *casa* and *caza* would not rhyme there.

Before we go on, you should remember that individual **lines** (*versos*) of poetry are typically divided up into **stanzas** (*estrofas*). The words “stanza” and “verse” are sometime used interchangeably in English as in the expression “Same song, second verse [i.e., stanza]”; however, in Spanish this is not the case: *verso* does not mean “stanza”.

Rhyme schemes. In the abstract, a poet can order the rhyme in a poem in any way he/she wants to, although many specific patterns or schemes exist. Rhyme schemes are normally indicated by letters of the alphabet. For Spanish poetry, we use upper case letters (**ABC...**) for long lines of poetry, that is over eight syllables in length (*versos de arte mayor*), and lower case letters (**abc...**) for shorter lines of poetry, that is eight syllables or less (*versos de arte menor*). Starting with the letter **A** or **a** for the first rhyme of a poem, we examine each word in the rhyming position and assign it a letter or symbol: 1) a previously used letter of the alphabet if the rhyme is one that has already been used in the poem or stanza in question, or 2) a new letter of the alphabet —the next unused letter available— if the rhyme hasn't been used yet, or 3) Ø if the rhyme is not used anywhere in the poem or stanza in question.

For example, this is a stanza from the poem “Vida retirada by Fray Luis de León” with both seven and 11 syllable lines (that is both lines of *arte menor* and *arte mayor*) and the rhyme scheme aBabB:

¡Oh campo, oh monte, oh río!	a the first letter of the alphabet because this rhyme, -ío , is the first rhyme; a lower case (not A) is used because it's a short line (7 syllables)
¡Oh secreto seguro deleitoso!	B a new letter is used because -oso is a new rhyme, and it is a capital letter (not b) because a long line (11 syllables) is involved
roto casi el navío,	a the rhyme -ío is the same as used in the first line above, and a lower case letter is used because it is a line of only 7 syllables
a vuestro almo reposo	b -oso is the same rhyme used in line two above, and we use a lower case letter because it is a line of only 7 syllables
huyo de aqueste mar tempestuoso.	B -oso repeats the rhyme used in lines 2 and 4, and a capital B indicates that the line is more than 8 syllables (11 syllables to be exact)

Here is another example, this time from a poem called “Canción del pirata” by José de Espronceda. The stanza is composed of eight four-syllable lines.

En las presas	Ø no subsequent line rhymes with this one
yo dividido	a
lo cogido	a these two lines share the same rhyme, -ido
por igual;	b a new rhyme (same as will appear in the last line in the stanza)
sólo quiero	Ø this line does not rhyme with any other
por riqueza	c
la belleza	c these two lines have the same rhyme (a new one), -eza
sin rival.	b this is the same rhyme as line number 4

Various rhyme structures are possible for a given poem. For example, in many poems each stanza will have the same rhyme scheme: that is, new rhymes may appear in each stanza, but each stanza follows the same pattern as the first one. At the other extreme we find many modern poems with no rhyme or merely isolated instances of rhyme with no real pattern. In between are a great number of possible structures, for example when a specific rhyme reoccurs in one part of each stanza as in the case where there is a refrain (*estribillo*), that is lines which are repeated at more or less regular intervals in a poem, usually at the end of stanzas. Consider the poem “No te tardes” by Juan del Encina:

¡No te tardes que me muero	a
carcelero,	a introductory part, three lines with the same rhyme, -ero
no te tardes que me muero!	a
Apresura tu venida	b
porque no pierda la vida	b first regular stanza; three lines with the same rhyme, followed by ...
que la fe no está perdida:	b
carcelero,	a a refrain (<i>estribillo</i>); the rhyme is of course the same as that of the
¡no te tardes que me muero!	a introduction
Sácame de esta cadena,	c
que recibo muy gran pena	c second stanza, consisting of three lines with the same (new) rhyme, -
pues tu tardar me condena,	c ena , followed by ...
carcelero,	a
¡no te tardes que me muero!	a the refrain (<i>estribillo</i>)

Practice

All of the selections given below use perfect rhyme. Determine the rhyme scheme for each, underlining the sounds involved and writing the rhyme scheme in the spaces provided. [Note: Not all of the selections are not given in their entirety; in many cases only isolated stanzas are quoted here.]

1. From the play *Laberinto de amor*, by Miguel de Cervantes.

La buena fama es parte de belleza,
y la virtud perfecta hermosura:
que, a do suele faltar, naturaleza
suple con gran ventaja la cordura;
y, entre personas de subida alteza,
amor hermoso a secas es locura.
En fin, quiero decir que no es hermosa,
siéndolo, la mujer no virtuosa.

2. From the play *La casa de los celos*, by Miguel de Cervantes.

Lejos estoy del camino
que a do está mi cielo guía,
pues este suelo no envía,
o luz clara, u olor divino.
Mas ya no tendré pereza
en buscar este sol bello,
pues me han de guiar a vello,
ya su luz, ya su belleza.

3. From the play *El cerco de Numancia*, by Miguel de Cervantes.

¿Estaba, por ventura, el pecho mío
de bárbara arrogancia y muertes lleno,
y de piedad justísima vacío?
¿Es de mi condición, por dicha, ajeno
usar benignidad con el rendido,
como conviene al vencedor que es bueno?
¡Mal, por cierto, tenían conocido
el valor en Numancia de mi pecho,
para vencer y perdonar nacido!

...

3. The first stanza of “Canción III”, by Garcilaso de la Vega.

Con un manso rüido
de agua corriente y clara,
cerca el Danubio una isla que pudiera
ser lugar escogido
para que descansara
quien, como yo estó agora, no estuviera;
do siempre primavera
parece en la verdura
sembrada de las flores;
hacen los ruiñeñores
renovar el placer o la tristura
con sus blandas querellas,
que nunca día ni noche cesan dellas.