

The tetractys is another type of unrhymed poem in which keeping to the syllable count is important. The structure is very simple:



Line 1 -- 1 syllable  
Line 2 -- 2 syllables  
Line 3 -- 3 syllables  
Line 4 -- 4 syllables  
Line 5 -- 10 syllables

To tell you the truth, I had never even heard of a tetractys until I stumbled on it while surfing the net. I found information on this odd little poem on <http://members.optushome.com.au>. It is a nice, compact way to express an idea and yet still challenging because you have to stick to the formula. Here are my attempts...

Hang  
grandma's  
needlework  
up on the wall.  
I'll remember her each time I see it.

Wet  
laundry  
hanging on  
the washing line  
billows in the breeze. I think of sailboats.



It was fun writing these, but I found there were times when the 20 given syllables were not enough to express my thoughts. Luckily, with tetractys there is a way to accommodate the poet who has a bit more to say. Simply add more stanzas -- in this case more groups of 5 lines. All you have to do then is flip the syllable count. For instance, if I wanted my poem to have two stanzas, their syllable count would be 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 10, 4, 3, 2, 1 -- or two tetractys stanzas with their syllable count reversed. Here is what it looks like in operation:

Green  
grasses  
in summer,  
soft as a bed.  
The warm air is a blanket on my skin.  
The rustle of breeze-blown leaves whispers, "Hush."  
Sunlight filtered  
through the trees --  
yellow-  
green.



There is no limit to the number of stanzas you can add. Here is one with 4 stanzas:

Shells --  
Empty  
On the sand.  
Each a treasure  
To put in my pocket along with stones  
And bits of green glass worn smooth by the waves.  
In wintertime  
I'll tip out  
Their jar  
And  
Feel  
Again  
Sand between  
My fingertips  
And I will close my eyes and think, perhaps,  
I can feel the sun on my face and hear  
The waves crashing --  
All this in  
Empty  
Shells.



## *Summer Memories*

The main benefit of tetractys is that, as a poet, you get the best of both worlds. The shorter lines, like those of haiku, can be very simple and beautiful. Yet you have that long, 10-syllable line in which to develop your ideas. You now also have the luxury of adding as many stanzas as you want. As you can see in the shell poem above, this alternating pattern of short and long lines creates a feeling of rise and fall that is in keeping with the movement of the waves. I don't mind telling you: I get really chuffed when a poem clicks together like that.

Now it is time for you to have a go. Start small at first. Write a few 5-line poems to get the feel of it and then add as many stanzas as you wish.