

Write Your Own Ode



Freedom to create.

The beauty of writing odes is that you're not constrained by a fixed stanza length, metrical scheme, or rhyme scheme. The key to success is stanza organization and the consistency of metrical and rhyme patterns.

Celebrate the form.

Your poem should be a celebration – of a person, an event, an achievement, a relationship, an animal, an ordinary object, or simply the day. Once you've selected a topic, choose which of the two classic structures with which you will work.

The Pindaric Ode – the public celebration form – uses a three-stanza structure repeated throughout the poem (strophe-antistrophe-epode), with the strophe and antistrophe using identical meter and rhyme patterns. Stanzas can be as short as four lines or as long as thirty; the goal is to present the celebration in a lyrically smooth manner that focuses on the content, not the structure.

The Horatian Ode- the easier of the two forms is the or the personal form. You can literally create your own stanza, meter, and rhyme pattern. You don't have to rotate between strophe-antistrophe-epode, as in the Pindaric Ode, but you must repeat the stanza structure you create for every succeeding stanza.

Consider length and mirroring.

When writing, be sure that your lines rhyme with at least one other line per stanza. Also, try to write a minimum of four stanzas. Short odes are exceedingly rare; the vast majority are at least five stanzas. Depending on how you rhyme, line lengths do not need to be consistent, but whatever length you choose for one stanza must be mirrored in successive stanzas.

Shelley's Horatian Ode.

Percy Bysshe Shelley opened his masterpiece, "Ode to the West Wind," which celebrates the crisp drying winds of autumn's harvest season, in this way:

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes! O thou
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow
Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odors plain and hill:
Wild Spirit which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh hear!

This is an Horatian Ode construct. Shelley developed a stanza length, rhyme scheme, and meter that he carried through this stanza and the four that followed. He ended each of the first three stanzas with the proclamation, "Oh hear!"

Tap into your emotion.

Shelley's content describes the coldness and harshness the west wind brings in its heralding of the dark winter months, but it also celebrates the wild spirit that accompanies the changing of seasons. He has chosen a subject of universal familiarity, driven to its most essential element – change – and sung his praises to the high heavens. Find a subject that brings out similar emotion in you, and give this magical brand of poetry a try!

Grading Rubric

- My ode is at least four or five stanzas long ___/5
- The metrical and rhyme patterns are consistent ___5
- It is a celebration of a person, event, object, etc. ___/10
- It is free of spelling and grammar mistakes ___/5
- My ode is artistically illustrated ___/10

Total ___/35