Sonnets and Iambic Pentameter

**Iambic Pentameter** – A form of poetry that has ten syllables to a line alternating unstressed then stressed.

Syllable stress: Syllables break our words up into sections which can be stressed, or unstressed. Which syllable is stressed, alters the pronunciation of the word. Try saying the following words aloud while stressing the first syllable.

Doc/tor  Fri/day  o/ver  pur/ple

Now, try it again putting the stress on the second syllable.

Doc/tor  Fri/day  o/ver  pur/ple

Which one sounds better? If you thought the first set sounded better you are correct. All of the above words should have their first syllable stressed.

Here are some more examples: The bold O will show you which syllable should be stressed in each word:

Monosyllabic O: bike, cat, black

Disyllabic O o: pro/blem, en/gine, yel/low

Disyllabic o O: be/side, di/vide, un/do

Trisyllabic O o o: dif/fi/cult, hos/pit/al, of/fi/ce

Trisyllabic o O o: de/tec/tive, pro/fess/or, re/dun/dant

Now, on to Sonnets…

**Sonnet** – A 14-line poem which sets up a problem and offers a solution.

**Shakespearean Sonnet** – The English sonnet has the most flexible pattern of all sonnets, consisting of 3 quatrains of alternating rhyme and a couplet:

a b a b
c d c d
e f e f
g g
Each quatrain develops a specific idea, but one closely related to the ideas in the other quatrains

Ex: Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
   Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
   Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
   And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
   Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
   And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
   And every fair from fair sometime declines,
   By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed;
   But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
   Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
   Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest
   in his shade,
   When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st.
   So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
   So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

**Petrarchan Sonnet** – The Italian sonnet is divided into two sections by two different groups of rhyming sounds. The first 8 lines is called the *octave* and rhymes:

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a b b a a b b a
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The remaining 6 lines is called the *sestet* and can have either two or three rhyming sounds, arranged in a variety of ways:

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c d c d c d
c d d c d c
c d e c d e
c d e c e d
c d c e d c
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_A change from one rhyme group to another signifies a change in subject matter._ This change occurs at the beginning of L9 in the Italian sonnet and is called the *volta*, or "turn"; the turn is an essential element of the sonnet form, perhaps _the_ essential element. It is at the *volta* that the second idea is introduced.

Ex: "A Game Of Chess" by Gwen Harwood(1920-1995)
To John Brodie

Nightfall: the town's chromatic nocturne wakes
dark brilliance on the river; colours drift
and tremble as enormous shadows lift
Orion to his place. The heart remarks
that peace torn in the blaze of day. Inside
your room are music, warmth and wine, the board
with chessmen set for play. The harpsichord
begins a fugue; delight is multiplied.

A game: the heart's impossible ideal--
to choose among a host of paths, and know
that if the kingdom crumbles one can yield
and have the choice again. Abstract and real
joined in their trance of thought; two players show
the calm of gods above a troubled field.

For examples of poems that show the rhyme scheme and iambic pentameter, visit:
http://www.cranberrydesigns.com/poetry/sonnet/examples.htm