

## Composing English Jueju: A Primer Jonathan Stalling (updated March 15, 2022)

The primary difference between the English jueju and the original Chinese form is that Classical Chinese is mostly monosyllabic, or one syllable per word. The word for “moon,” for example, is a single character (月) with a single syllable (*yuè*). When you read a jueju, you always find a set number of characters per line (either five or seven) and a set number of lines (always four), which align perfectly in a grid because every character takes only one space. Likewise, when you hear a jueju, you always hear the same number of syllables as there are characters.

枫桥夜泊 – 张继 fēng qiáo yè bó – Zhang Ji

### Chinese Characters

月落	乌啼	霜满天
江枫	渔火	对愁眠
姑苏	城外	寒山寺
夜半	钟声	到客船

### Transliterated Chinese

Yuè luò	wū tí	shuāng mǎn tiān
Jiāng fēng	yú huǒ	duì chóu mián
Gū sū	chéng wài	hán shān sì
Yè bàn	zhōng shēng	dào kè chuán

### Night Docking at Maple Bridge by Zhang Ji (translated into monosyllabic English)

Moon sets	crow caws	frost coats sky
Sweet gums	boat lights	wake I lie
Out side	Su Zhou	Han Shan Shrine
From boat	bronze bell	sounds close by

Translating into single-syllable words is difficult since one must seek ways of expressing ideas that may not exist in monosyllabic English (maple tree for instance becomes “sweet gum,” as this is a local variety of maple tree likely referenced in this jueju).

But this is not a problem when we are composing our own English jueju.

## How to Compose English Jueju

The best way to learn how to write English Jueju Poetry is to follow the list of suggestions below:

1. Watch the following instructional video (this video is older and will be replaced in 2022):

1. Watch the following instructional video (this video is older and will be replaced in 2022).  
<https://youtu.be/Wx96IH5w8TQ>
2. Use the Poetry Puzzle Boards or blank boards (find these at the end of this primer)
3. Use <https://www.rhymezone.com> to locate rhyming monosyllable words. Rhymezone organizes rhymes by syllables, so this tool gives you a full list of rhyming monosyllables.
4. Follow the compositional rules for either unregulated (old-style) or regulated English (new style) jueju (provided below).

### Basic Rules for Jueju Poetry — Level One, Unregulated Jueju — “Old Style” Rules:

1. Use only single syllable English words:
2. Compose four lines using either five words or seven words each (all lines must have the same number of words).
3. Use words associated with your senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste). Try to avoid using too many “particles” (a, the, but, of, in, as) since these will disturb the poetic rhythm. They are best used in the third line, which can often be more speech like than the others.
4. Combine your words into two- or three-word units.

For five-syllable jueju, each line should start with a two-word unit and end with a three-word unit:

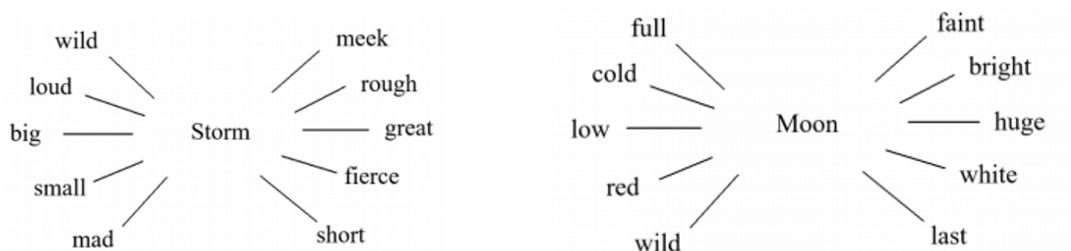
white + stones / cold + stream + flows  
White Stones|Cold Stream Flows

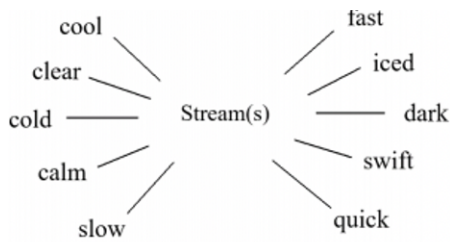
For a seven-word jueju, add an additional two-word unit:

(white + stones) / (soft + breeze) / (cold + stream + flows)  
White Stones|Soft Breeze|Cold Stream Flows

Words within a unit should connect more strongly than words between units. (“white” connects to “stones” more than “stones” connects with “soft”.)

The source code or building blocks of the jueju in both Chinese and English are not single words, but are these two- and three-word units. Think about how to create the most powerful two- and three-word unit by creating your own “vocabulary stars” like the following:





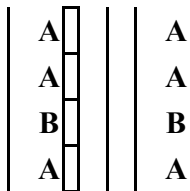
(These are noun-adjective units, but you can make vocabulary stars for noun + verb units, too, such as “moon” surrounded by *sets, glows, wanes, hangs, falls, wakes, sleeps, rests, sours, flies, sinks, fades*, and so on.)

Now create three-word units. These can take many forms:

- |                             |                       |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| adj + noun + verb           | gold + leaves + fall  |
| adj + adj + nouns           | cold + brown + leaves |
| prepositions + adj + noun   | in + our + dreams     |
| noun + verb + adv           | streams + flow + past |
| verb + prepositions + nouns | flow + past + hills   |

**5. Use the rhyme-scheme AABA.** “A” words rhyme with each other, “B” words do not rhyme.

For instance, the “A” words could be “bays,” “rays,” and “haze,” while the “B” word could be “night” or any other word that does not rhyme with the A words.



Choose your rhyme words carefully. Some rhyme groups are robust, with many choices:

**Gaze**

Full moon rays	Time to grow	youth will fade
Dark gray haze	Streams will flow	straight sharp blade
Dry rust blaze	Lost in flow	long black braid
Hair that grays	Winds will blow	old dreams fade
Love that strays	Moon hung low	faith long frayed
Long lost days	Time heals woe	white bloom glade
star light plays	Star faint glow	young hair grayed
Life's long maze	One last crow	milk green jade
(death's short maze)	What dreams show	song long played
Salt sea sprays	What we know	prayers long prayed
How life weighs	Life moves slow	cool dark shade
Lost heart prays	Debts we owe	sharp cold spade
Greif that stays	East streams flow	soft breeze swayed
Lost sheep graze	Weights we tow	cool stream wade
	Crisp White snow	
	Just let go	

But other rhyme groups simply do not have enough poetic monosyllabic words to be viable.

**6. Follow the four-part thematic progression.** All Jueju follow a four-fold pattern which introduces a line of natural imagery in the first line (起), followed by a second line of natural imagery which deepens and extends this scene of nature (承). The third line turns to a human

feeling, idea, or concept (转), while the fourth line concludes, synthesizing nature and human feeling by revealing their interconnectedness (合).

- a. The first line introduces a natural scene, such as a morning, evening, or afternoon in spring, summer, fall, or winter, in mountains, farms and fields, beaches, or wild grasslands:

light frost / soft breeze / cold stream flows

- b. The second line dives more deeply into or extends the scene:

Wet dock / late sun / shore grass blows

- c. The third line introduces an emotion, a human element, or a turn of one kind or another often revealing an inner feeling or feelings toward the world in general:

aged hands / cut bait / casts clear line

- d. The fourth line concludes the poem, bringing it to an ending, a landing:

Sun fades / soft gold / wide mind slows

The final result looks like this:

white	stones	soft	breeze	cold	stream	flows
wet	dock	birds	sing	shore	grass	blows
aged	hands	cut	bait	casts	clear	line
sun	fades	soft	gold	wide	mind	slows

In short, the four thematic levels of a jueju are broken into two distinct parts: the first two form a couplet that concentrates on introducing and deepening a natural scene while the second couplet introduces a human concept/theme/emotion. The third “turning” line can take the form of a question:

“who will meet me on the path”

“what does time leave in its wake”

Or a request:

“close eyes, breathe in, rest your mind”

Then the fourth line can answer the question or show what happens when one follows the request.

### Jing and Qing: Emotional Resonance, Unifying Nature and Feeling

There are two main genres of jueju: Regulated (new style) and Unregulated (old style). An old-style poem does not have to follow the strict rules for prosody (or sound patterns) discussed in the Advanced Section further below, but all jueju should in some way reveal how a natural scene (*jing* 境) resonates with human feeling (*qing* 情). We will use an example of the less-strict unregulated style to demonstrate this principle.

Begin with an objective description of nature like this couplet:

Cold wind            slips through            tall bent reeds  
Dry blooms            fall on                        brown cracked leaves

Now “tune” it to a stronger emotion like this:

**Shrill** wind                    slips through                    **cold** bent reeds  
**Old** blooms                    **fall to**                    **dull** cracked leaves

By substituting more objective descriptors with more emotionally charged modifiers, the couplet is primed to resonate with a negative human emotion. Now we can add the third and fourth line to amplify this emotional tenor:

Shrill wind                    slips through                    cold bent reeds  
Old blooms                    fall to                    dull crack leaves  
How long                    can we                    hold our breath  
Or dream                    of years                    blown like weeds

Or we can tune the nature couplet to a happier emotion:

**Brisk** wind                    slips through                    **deep green** reeds  
Flung blooms                    **spin** to                    **gold spun** leaves

And then finish it as follows:

**Brisk** wind                    slips through                    **deep** green reeds  
**Flung** blooms                    **spin** to                    **gold spun** leaves  
How long                    can we                    save this breath?  
Warm winds                    still blow                    our winged seeds.

The key is to emphasize the emotional resonance of the poem by choosing descriptors that resonate with the ideas introduced in poem as a whole. For instance, this poem is about loneliness:

Friends part                    **clouds float**                    fields **feel bare**  
Hands wave                    **doors close**                    food to share  
When you                    meet friends                    on the path  
Tell them                    I have                    room to spare

You are now ready to write your own unregulated jueju!

A few tips to keep in mind as you proceed:

1. Use a blank board to get words on the page:

Moon + Light / Star + Haze / Cool + Calm + breeze

In  
tr  
o moon light star haze cool calm breeze ®

E  
xt  
en  
d ®

Sh  
ift ®

Cl  
os  
e ®

2. In the first two lines, use images connected to nature, whether imagined or recollected. In the remaining two lines, connect those images to a human feeling or emotion.
3. Use only monosyllabic words.
4. Make your lines rhyme in an AABA pattern whether you are writing five-word monosyllabic lines or seven-word monosyllabic lines.
5. Check [www.rhymezone.com](http://www.rhymezone.com) for ideas.
6. Follow the thematic progression of lines (intro, deepen, turn, close). Your poem may change radically several times before you are done.

### **Instructional Videos**

What Makes A Classical Chinese Poem Poetic: <https://youtu.be/R6z1NABkmEE>

Introducing the English Jueju: <https://youtu.be/Wx96IH5w8TQ>

### **Going to the Next Level: Regulated Verse:**

A regulated verse imagines that words are as “real” as the things they name and thus have material properties similar to natural objects. A word has two kinds of properties, a meaning property and a sound property. Regulated verse organizes both properties based on the idea of “counter-balance” and “harmony.” A regulated verse poet learns how to balance one word’s meaning and sound against another to create a perfectly balanced poem. It is believed that such a poem can help bring a person’s life, family, or even a nation into balance, which is perhaps one reason why it was included as an essential skill tested by the Chinese Imperial Examination system for much of its 1,500-year history!

**So let’s get started: First, you must remember to still follow the rules 1-6 but then also follow the next set of rules too.**

7. **Parallelism (of Meaning):** Parallelism of meaning refers to the rule that requires poets to counterbalance the meaning of two- and three-word units in a couplet (two lines of a jueju) as they relate to those above or below them.

#### **How to create parallelism of meaning:**

- a. First, one must make sure that parallel units follow the same sequence in terms of their parts of speech.

For example: if you have an adjective followed by noun in your first line’s two-word unit (as in “dark sky”) then your second line’s first two-word unit should also have an adjective followed by a noun.

- b. Nouns and or verbs should belong to similar categories of things or actions; however, their modifiers (adjectives, adverbs) can and often should be deployed to create a sense of counterbalance by way of emphasizing a contrast between them.

For example, the unit “dark sky” in line one can be counterbalanced with “faint stars” to emphasize their sympathetic resonance or counterbalanced with “bright moon” to emphasize a contrast. In both cases, however, the units follow the same “adjective + noun” pattern and both contain celestial nouns. The similarity of “faint” and “dark,” again, amplifies a similarity, while “bright” strongly contrasts with “dark” to create a sense of oppositional/contrastive counterbalance.

Now repeat this for the next two-word unit (if you are writing seven-word jueju) and then again in the final three-word unit. But remember that you will need to end the first two lines with words that share a rhyme. Because this final word position of the second line has two different constraints upon it (rhyme and parallelism), it is often one of the most difficult words to decide upon.

Example:

<b>snow (noun)</b>	<b>falls (verb)</b>	<b>new (adj)</b>	<b>white (adj)</b>	<b>moon (rhyming “ping” noun)</b>
<b>ice (noun)</b>	<b>quilts (verb)</b>	<b>fresh (adj)</b>	<b>pale</b>	<b>bloom (rhyming “ping” noun)</b>
-	-	-	-	-
<b>spring</b>	<b>pears</b>	<b>born</b>	<b>too</b>	<b>soon (rhyming “ping” word, but need not be a noun)</b>

The counterbalanced parallelism in the first two lines reveals a natural world in harmony with itself. The third line (missing here since it is not a part of the example), is not parallel but instead must introduce the poem’s core concept or idea, often the expression of a human emotion that resonates with and through the natural scene in the first couplet. Please refer to the section that describes common third-line techniques earlier in the handbook. In the fourth line of this poem, I may want to unify the poem by reflecting on the feeling that sometimes we may want things to happen too quickly, like spring, and that rushing things can lead to undesirable consequences. The counterbalance of word meanings thus reflects the deep structure of Chinese cosmology: correlation, balance, and cyclical birth/decay, yin/yang. For more about parallelism, see the video below. **Please note that the English jueju form now only requires two counterbalanced lines rather than three as discussed in the video.**

**Instructional Video -- Introducing Parallelism of Meaning:** <https://youtu.be/S317j2jc2aw>

**Rule 8: Parallelism of Sound**

As I have already mentioned, regulated verse (new style jueju) organizes word meanings into forms of “counter-balance” and “harmony.” Above we learned how to do this with the meaning of words in the first two lines of a “new style” or “regulated” Jueju, so now it is time to learn how to do the same for the sounds words make so that we can perfectly balance our word units in terms of their sound as well. To write regulated Jueju following the parallelism rules for sound, one must, however, learn to hear the difference between full (nine) and clipped (so) monosyllabic English vowel sounds. There are

difference between full (*ping*) and clipped (*ze*) monosyllabic English vowel sounds. There are objective, standard, and coherent rules so with a little practice, this distinction will be easy to make. In this lesson we are not going to go into the way these rules worked in Classical Chinese, but instead focus on how they work in English monosyllables.

**A. Rule # 1: Follow one of several set patterns of “ping” vs “ze” words** (patterns are listed below).

Before Learning the patterns, however, it is important to learn how to distinguish ping from ze words:

English monosyllables that end in the following sounds (not simply the letters, though the letters and the sounds usually coincide) are “clipped” or “ze” words:

p, t, k, s, f, ch, sh, and unvoiced /th/

So, for example, these sounds can be found in words that end in the sounds: iPe, iTe, iKe, iSe, iCH, iSH, iTh, iFe as in:

Pipe, kite, bike, ice, ditch, wish, with, or life.

If a word ends in a ze sound, then it says a ze sound even if you add an “s” or “d,” like: cat=cats, lap=laps, bath=baths. If you add an “s” to a ping word, on the other hand, it will stay a ping word.

The same is true of adding a “d,” so /laugh/ is ze and /laughed/ remains ze because this “d” is not pronounced as a /d/, but is instead is pronounced /t/, so it remains “ze.”

Just remember: once a ze, always a ze. Once a Ping, always a Ping.

More ze word examples: **bleak feet beach, leap, leash, geese, wreathe, leaf**

Geese, leash, squeak, beach, sheep, leap, wheat, wreathe, thief.

Ping word endings include all word endings not included in the ze list. Since there are more ping endings than ze endings, I suggest starting by simply memorizing the ze endings and marking all others as ping.

**Wen Dao Rule #4 : “Parallel and Antithetical” Sound**

Long Vowel Sounds			Short Vowel Sounds		
sky	flaw	who	lap	tat	tack
bay	lab	dad	lass	laugh	latch
lag	jazz	rave		path	
lathe	age				

Long vowel sounds are words that end in a vowel or voiced consonant and are called “ping”

Short vowels sounds on the other hand end in unvoiced consonants and are called “ze.”



In this handbook, I will not explain this rule further, but for those interested in learning more, you can explore this phonological rule by looking up “allophonic lengthening,” which refers to the way unvoiced consonants at the end of monosyllabic words

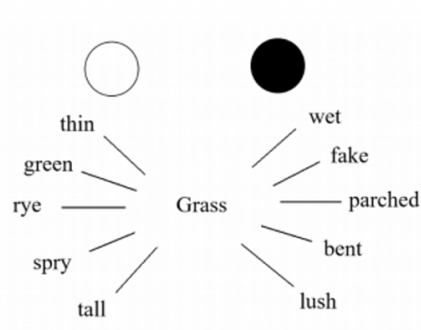
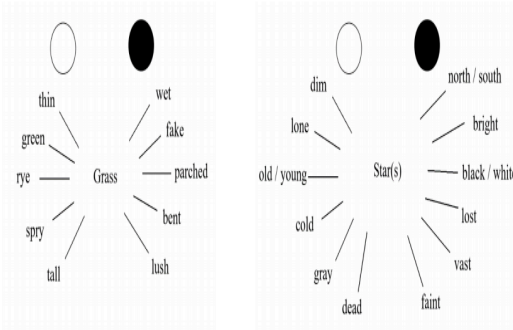
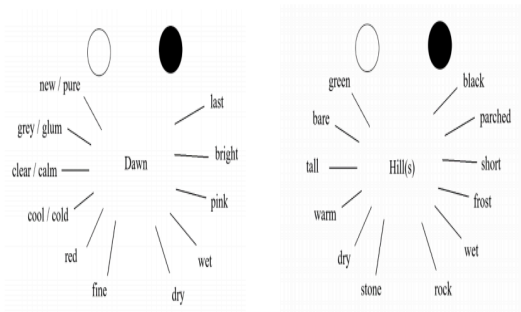
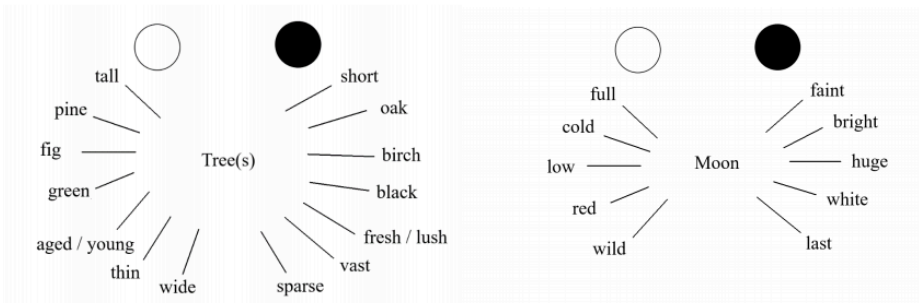
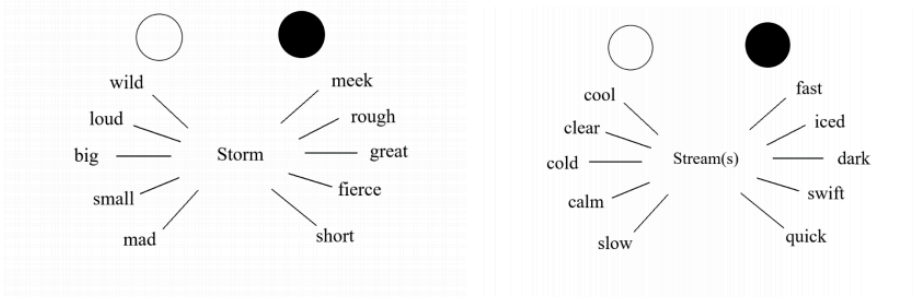


longer shorter

Once one can hear the difference, one can bring the English language into a balance of yin and yang vowels just as the Ancient Chinese poets did in Classical Chinese. Included are word banks of English monosyllable words broken into yin and yang vowel sounds.

involved consonants at the end of monosyllable words “clip” or “shorten” their vowel sound by nearly 50 percent. After you have learned how to differentiate these sounds, I recommend that you recreate “two-word unit stars,” but this time differentiating words

between ping and ze sounds.  
Here are some examples:



Here are some examples of three-word units and rhymes organized by different vowel patterns:

Time to grow    ●●●●    Gaze  
Streams will flow    ●●●●

Streams will flow	●●●●	Full moon rays	●●●●
Lost in flow	●●●●	Dark gray haze	●●●●
Winds will blow	●●●●	Dry rust blaze	●●●●
Moon hung low	●●●●	Hair that grays	●●●●
Time heals woe	●●●●	Love that strays	●●●●
Star faint glow	●●●●	Long lost days	●●●●
One last crow	●●●●	star light plays	●●●●
What dreams show	●●●●	Life's long maze	●●●●
What we know	●●●●	(death's short maze)	●●●●
Life moves slow	●●●●	Salt sea sprays	●●●●
Debts we owe	●●●●	How life weighs	●●●●
East streams flow	●●●●	Lost heart prays	●●●●
Weights we tow	●●●●	Greif that stays	●●●●
Crisp White snow	●●●●	Lost sheep graze	●●●●
Just let go	●●●●		

**In regulated jueju, all rhyming words must be ping.**

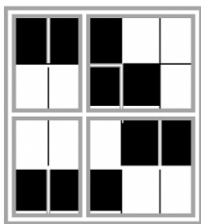
This is a very important rule and cannot be violated. Unregulated jueju can use both ping and ze words.

OK, let's take a look at a regulated jueju ping/ze pattern. White squares (or circles) represent ping words and black squares (or circles) represent ze words.

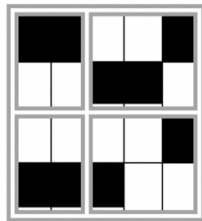
There are four patterns of five-word line jueju and four patterns of seven-line jueju:

## Regulated Jueju Ping-Ze Patterns:

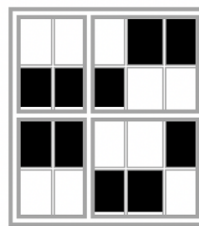
Wujue (top) Qijue (bottom)  
ze start rhyming First line



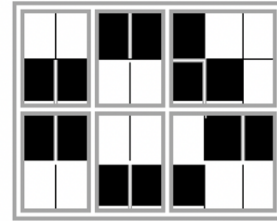
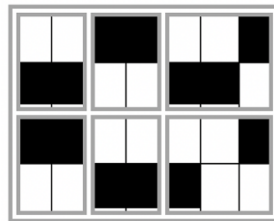
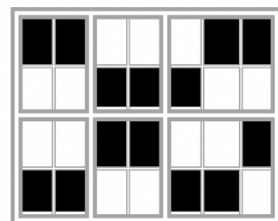
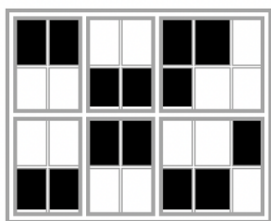
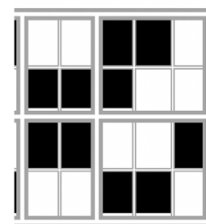
Wujue (top) Qijue (bottom)  
ze start non-Rhyming first line



Wujue (top) Qijue (bottom)  
ping start Non-rhyming first line



Wujue (top) Qijue (bottom)  
ping start rhyming First line

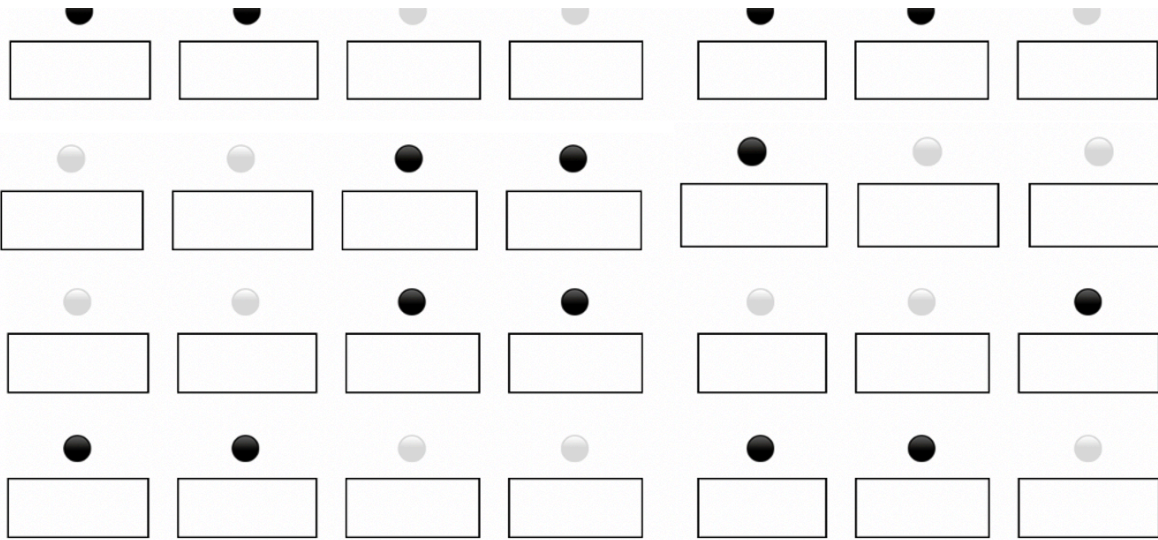


I have included a puzzle board and a blank board with ping/ze marks for your convenience below:

This example patten is called a “ze start, seven word, first line rhyming jueju”.

Ze Start:





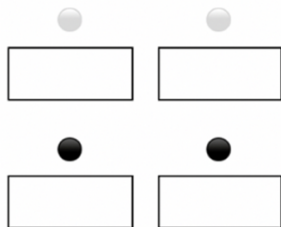
Black squares represent a clipped/ze word



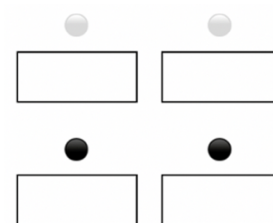
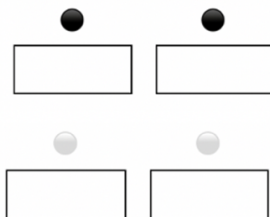
white square represents a full/ping word



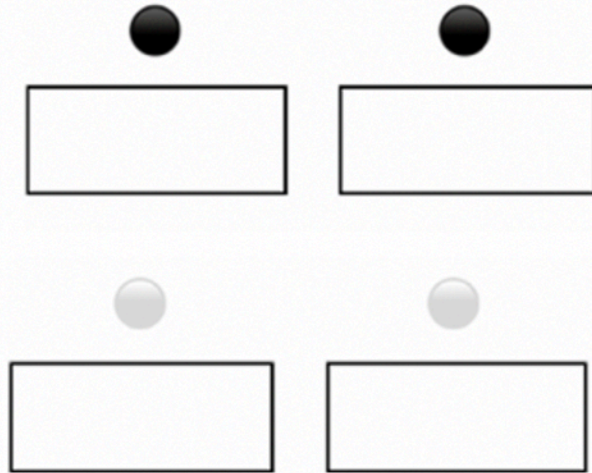
In the idealized form any time you have a two-ze word unit in a line, it should be counterbalanced next by a two-ping word unit. And in a couplet (the first two lines and the last two lines), these should also be counterbalanced from below, so that a two-ze word unit above should be counterbalanced by a two-ping word unit below.



**SOFT HILLS**  
vs  
**SHARP PEAKS**



or

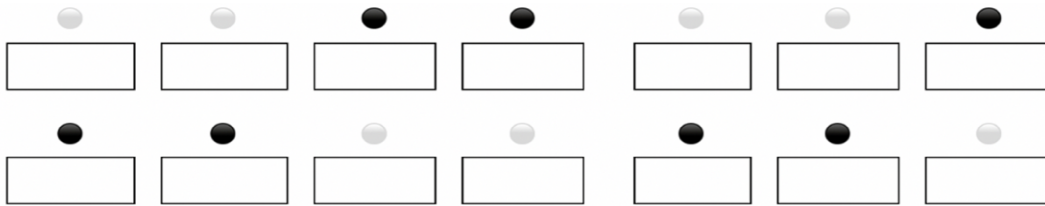


# SHARP PEAKS VS SOFT HILLS

The same is the case for the three-word units. The rhyming (AABA) jueju that starts with a ze two-word unit should have the following counterbalanced three-word units:

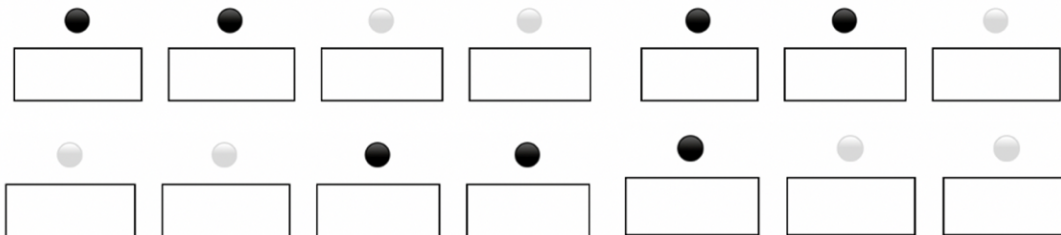
	<p>soft dreams flow slow thoughts drift</p>
	<p>slow thoughts drift soft dreams flow</p>
	<p>thoughts drift slow soft dreams flow</p>
	<p>dreams flow quick thoughts drift slow</p>

So, the first couplet is a perfect counterbalanced pattern as long as we think about these patterns in terms of two- and three-word units.



<b>MILD</b> ○	<b>BREEZE</b> ○	<b>THICK</b> ●	<b>WHEAT</b> ●	<b>DUSK</b> ●	<b>SPREADS</b> ○	<b>GOLD</b> ○
<b>SWIFT</b> ●	<b>BROOK</b> ●	<b>THIN</b> ○	<b>REEDS</b> ○	<b>DARK</b> ●	<b>SETS</b> ●	<b>COLD</b> ○

The second couplet reverses the patterns of the first.



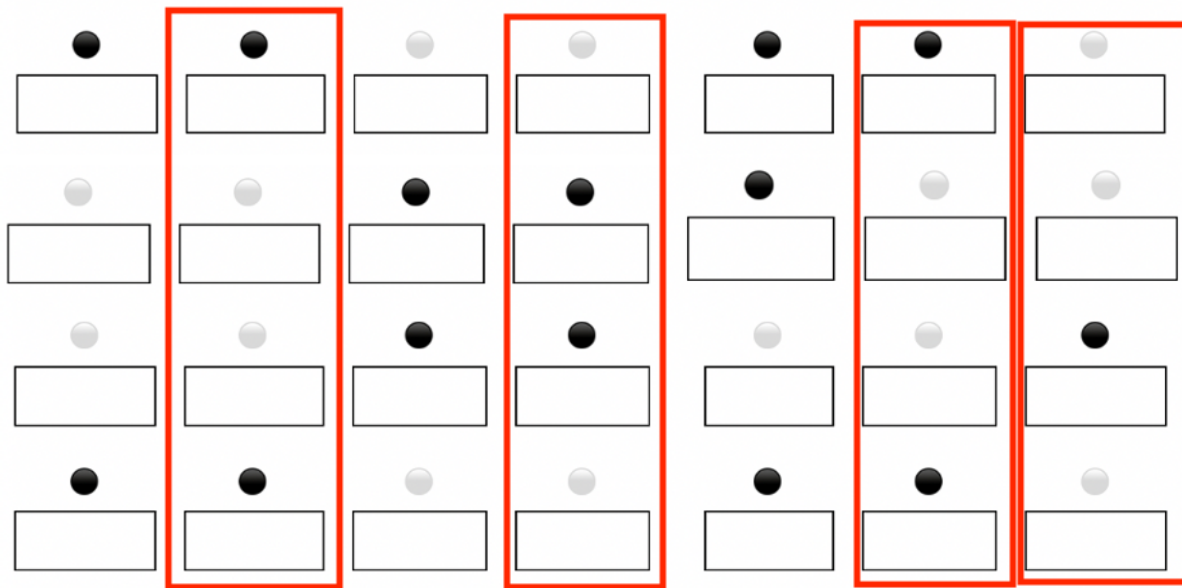
<b>LOOK</b> ●	<b>UP</b> ●	<b>CALM</b> ○	<b>MIND</b> ○	<b>FEEL</b> ○	<b>THOUGHTS</b> ●	<b>DRIFT</b> ●
<b>WHO</b> ○	<b>KNOWS</b> ○	<b>JUST</b> ●	<b>WHAT</b> ●	<b>NIGHT</b> ●	<b>DREAMS</b> ○	<b>HOLD</b> ○

### Note on Reducing Difficulty

There is a saying in Classical Chinese which helps reduce the difficulty of composing regulated verse: it goes something like this:

2, 4, 6, and rhymes are important, but 1, 3, 5 can be flexible.

The ping/ze markers in these 12 “free positions” can be considered “recommendations.” If we think of it this way, we can use the following simplified board. Then you only need to lock in the ping/ze sounds within the red boxes. 12 free positions and 16 regulated positions.



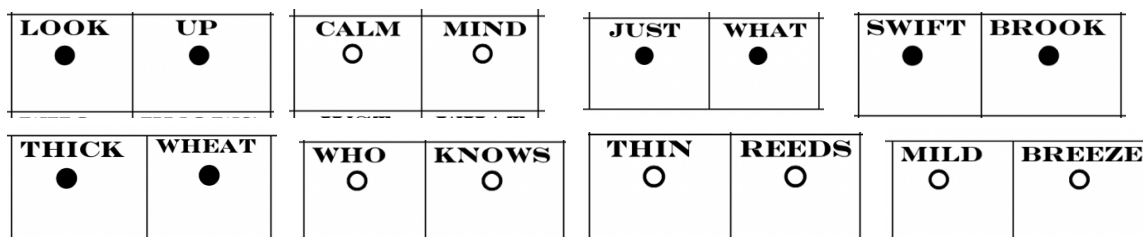
For more on the ping-ze counterbalance see the instructional video – Introduction Parallelism of Sound: <https://youtu.be/swflre-PNPc>

**GAME BOARD AND GAME/WORD TILES**

INTRO	<b>MILD</b> ○	<b>BREEZE</b> ○	<b>THICK</b> ●	<b>WHEAT</b> ●	<b>DUSK</b> ●	<b>SPREADS</b> ○	<b>GOLD</b> ○
EXTEND	<b>SWIFT</b> ●	<b>BROOK</b> ●	<b>THIN</b> ○	<b>REEDS</b> ○	<b>DARK</b> ●	<b>SETS</b> ●	<b>COLD</b> ○
TURN	<b>LOOK</b> ●	<b>UP</b> ●	<b>CALM</b> ○	<b>MIND</b> ○	<b>FEEL</b> ○	<b>THOUGHTS</b> ●	<b>DRIFT</b> ●
CONCLUDE	<b>WHO</b> ○	<b>KNOWS</b> ○	<b>JUST</b> ●	<b>WHAT</b> ●	<b>NIGHT</b> ●	<b>DREAMS</b> ○	<b>HOLD</b> ○

Game pieces include the following two- and three-word units. Arrange these into a ze-start jueju (with an AABA Rhyme scheme).

Two-word units.



Three-word units:

<b>DUSK</b> ●	<b>SPREADS</b> ○	<b>GOLD</b> ○
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<b>FEEL</b> ○	<b>THOUGHTS</b> ●	<b>DRIFT</b> ●
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<b>NIGHT</b> ●	<b>DREAMS</b> ○	<b>HOLD</b> ○
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<b>DARK</b> ●	<b>SETS</b> ●	<b>COLD</b> ○
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Blank Board: “Ping Start five-word jueju, AABA Rhyme scheme.” (red columns are required, others are suggestions).

Ze Start:

●	●	○	○	●	●	○
○	○	●	●	●	○	○
○	○	●	●	○	○	●
●	●	○	○	●	●	○

Blank board: “Ze Start seven-word jueju, AABA Rhyme scheme.” (red columns are required, others are suggestions). Printed on side for more room.

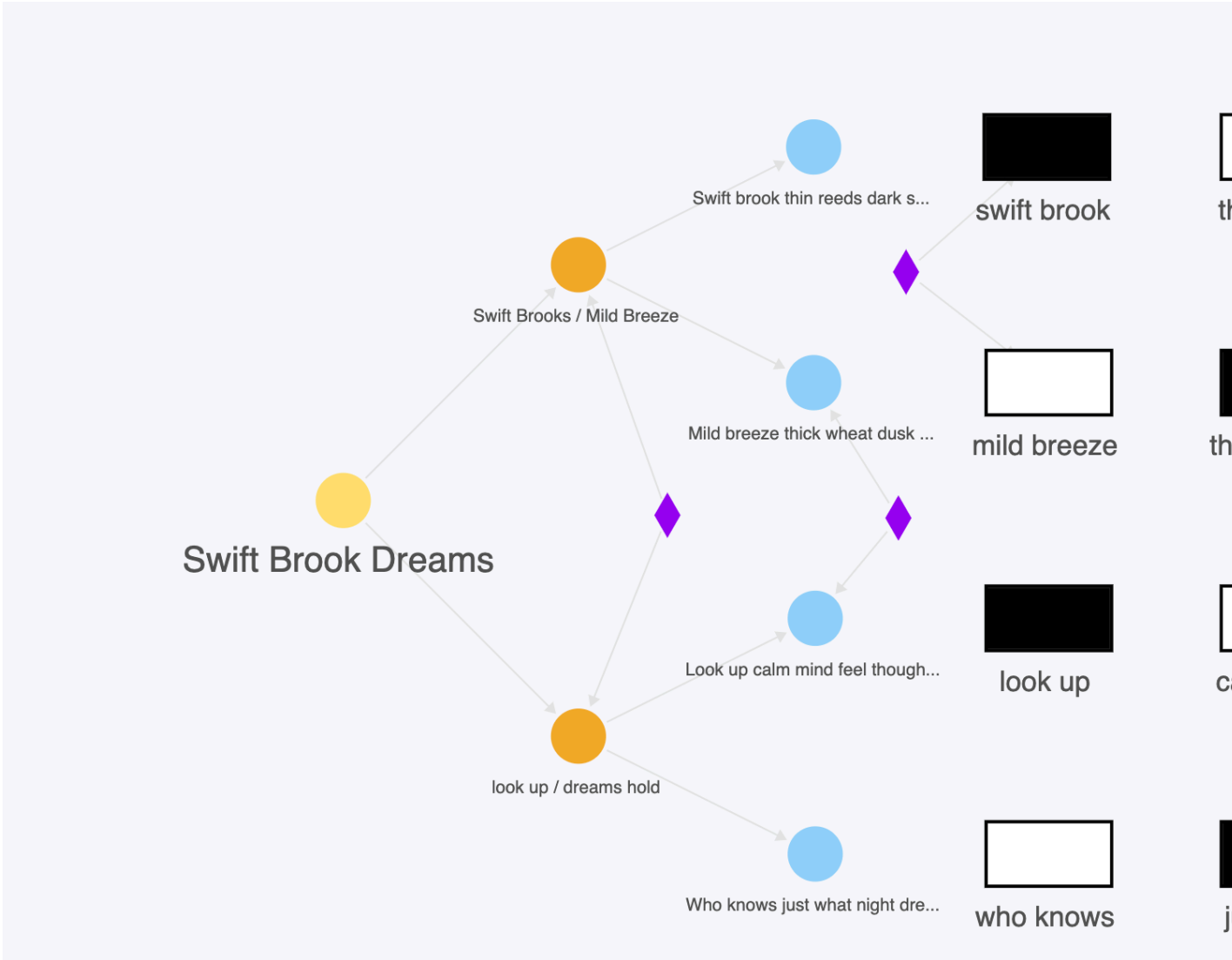
Ze Start:


	●	●	●	●	●	●
	□	□	□	□	□	□
	●	●	●	●	●	●
	□	□	□	□	□	□
	●	●	●	●	●	●
	□	□	□	□	□	□

	Unit 1		Unit 2			Unit 3	
Intro	smooth ●	stones ●	swift ●	brook ●	brisk ●	wind ●	blows ●
Extend	wet ●	path ●	bird ●	song ●	thick ●	grass ●	grows ●
Turn	cut	bait	old	hands	aged	wrist	casts



Turn	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Conclude	sun ●	fades ●	soft ●	light ●	fast ●	mind ●	slows ●




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\$500 FOR 28 WORDS

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	Unit 1		Unit 2			Unit 3	
Intro	smooth	stones	swift	brook	brisk	wind	blows



## The 2022 Newman Prize for English Jueju

If you like word games, poetry, or both, try your hand at this year's Newman Prize for English Jueju, sponsored by the Institute for US-China Issues at the University of Oklahoma. This year's English Jueju prize will offer a **\$500 prizes** for the best English Jueju. There is only one catch — the winning English poems must follow the rules of Classical Chinese Poetry. Learn the rules, in the English Jueju handbook, learning videos, worksheets and games at [link.ou.edu/english-jueju-resources](http://link.ou.edu/english-jueju-resources).

**Submit your poem by May 15, 2022 at [newmanpoetryaward@ou.edu](mailto:newmanpoetryaward@ou.edu).**

The winning poem will be featured in an online ceremony video and published on the institute website.



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**INSTITUTE FOR US-CHINA ISSUES**  
*The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA*

