

How to write an Old Style (古体诗) English Jueju:

By Jonathan Stalling

Basic Rules:

1. Only use monosyllabic words and try to avoid unstressed particles.
2. Chose between a quatrain (four line poem) of either five-word or seven-word lines but both will end in a “AABA” rhyme scheme.
3. Pair your imagistic monosyllable words into two- and three-word units.
 - a. If you are composing a five-word-line jueju (五绝), you should have a two-word unit followed by a three-word unit on each line. Here is an example:

white+stones/ cold+stream+flows

- b. If you are composing a seven-word-line jueju (七绝), you should have two two-word units followed by a three-word unit: For example:

white+stones/ soft+breeze/ cold+stream+flows

In every case your word units should “stick together” more in their groups than they do between groups. The break between units creates a natural cesura which one can further emphasize in oral recitation.

4. Follow the traditional thematic progression: A 起, line one introduces external scene; B 承 line two deepens and extends the external scene, C 转, line three turns the poem inward toward emotional resonance and D 合 the fourth line resolves the poem, and brings it to a close revealing a wider or deeper frame of reference wherein the external (natural) scene and internal feeling are revealed to be inter-resonant extensions of one another.

Example:

1. The first line 起 introduces a scene of nature:

White stones/ soft breeze/ cold stream flows

2. The second line 承 extends and deepens the scene:

Wet path/ birds sing/ tall grass blows

3. The third line 转 introduces a turns toward the human world, often beginning an inward movement to poet’s inner feelings (which can extend into the final line):

Aged hands/ cut bait/ cast clear line

4 and the fourth line 合 concludes the poem, brings it to a conclusion:

Still thoughts, hours pass, wide mind slows

So the final quatrain reveals a single wholistic scene that blends the natural and human worlds (*qing & jing*) into an inter-resonant whole:

White stones/ soft breeze/ cold stream flows
Wet path/ birds sing/ tall grass blows
Aged hands/ cut bait/ cast clear line
Still thoughts hours pass/ wide mind slows

For more rules about how to compose a New Style Jueju (近体绝句) that includes rules for semantic and prosodic parallel and antithetical parallelism, please visit <https://link.ou.edu/english-jueju> and <https://link.ou.edu/english-jueju-resources>