

**The following information was written and compiled by Jay Friedenberg from a variety of different books and web resources.**

## **HAIKU NOTES**

### **I. TERMINOLOGY**

#### **English Language Terms:**

**Adjectives** – describe a noun. Try to avoid using them too much.

**Adverb** – a characteristic of something ending in “ly” (slowly). Minimize their use.

**Alliteration** – Using the same sounds at the beginning of words.

**Anthropomorphizing** – attributing human characteristics to something that is not human.

**Articles** - “a”, “an”, & “the”. Try not to use them.

**Assonance** – vowel repetitions (penitent and reticence).

**Caesura** – a pause.

**Colon** - throws the action forward, directing the reader’s attention to what follows. (:)

**Commas**, question marks, and exclamation marks are also but seldom used in haiku.

**Consonance** – repeated consonants (from stem to stern).

**Ellipsis** – the three dots that follow the end of a phrase. (...) It indicates that something is missing or has been omitted.

**Em dash** - the most commonly used mark in haiku. (-) Used to show a sharp break in focus or an unexpected contrast. Can also be used to separate the base from the superposed sections. Put if you want a break.

**Enjambment** – the syntactical suspension at the end of a line, indicated by a dash that divides a single word into two pieces. (-)

**Gerund** – a verb modification in which “ing” is added (running).

**Hyperbole** - The use of exaggeration.

**Irony** - Expressing meaning by using the opposite. (Saying "Good job!", when the waitress drops a tray)

**Lineation** – the breaking up of text into lines.

**Metaphor** – suggesting a resemblance between two things (A might fortress is our God).

**Onomatopoeia** – a word that sounds like what it is (rush of water).

**Pathetic fallacy** – ascribing human emotions to things in the natural world.

**Personification** – endowing nonhuman things with human attributes.

**Preposition** – a word like “on”, “in”, or “around”, that in conjunction with an article, describes a noun.

**Prose** – normal written text without metrical structure.

**Semicolon** - balances two images, separating without emphasis. (;)

**Similie** – the use of “like” or “as” when comparing one thing to another where the two things being compared are not alike (she is like a rose). Try not to use.

**Verbs** – use mostly present tense and participle, not past or future tense.

**Verse** – poetry that has metrical structure.

**Japanese Terms:**

**Butsuga Ichinyo** – object and self as one.

**Fueki Ryuko** – the changing and unchanging.

**Fuga no makoto** – poetic truth.

**Gingko** – a haiku walk.

**Haibun** – a mixed format consisting of haiku and written text.

**Haiga** - a mixed format of haiku and visual art like photos or paintings.

Haikai – an umbrella term that refers to haiku, senryu, haiga, haibun and some forms of linked verse.

**Haiku** – short poem about an experienced moment, usually three lines.

Hokku – the starting line of a renku that evolved into the stand-alone haiku.

**Hosomi** – slenderness. Paint the scene then disappear.

**Karumi** – light humor, not clever or cynical.

**Kigo** – a season word.

**Kireji** – a cutting word that separates the poem into two parts (usually after the second line).

**Kogo kizoku** – awakening to the high, returning to the low.

**Kukai** – a haiku gathering.

**Makoto** – truthfulness, relating the exterior world to the interior one.

**Mono no aware** - a feeling of deep compassion or pathos for things

**Renga** – a linked poem that alternates between several authors.

**Rengay** – a version of renga with fewer rules than the traditional forms of renga.

**Renku** – a synonym for renga.

**Sabi** – lonely isolation or nostalgic.

**Satori** – enlightenment, when we comprehend the completeness, the oneness of all existence.

**Senryu** – short poem about human nature, usually three lines.

**Shasei** – to depict as is, a life sketch.

**Shibumi** – astringency. The flavor of persimmons rather than peaches.

**Shubumi** – classical elegance or separateness.

**Tanka** – has five lines.

**Wabi** – austere, simple beauty or poignant.

**Yugen** – mysterious.

**Zappai** – are pseudohaiku.

**Zoka Ziujun** – following the creative.

**II. PERSONAL NOTES**

**Ordering Haiku:**

Order haiku in a book to reflect the progression of the seasons, so getting warmer poems come near the end of spring. Order them also by months. This way the sequence of poems tells a story. Also, try not to have adjacent poems use identical words because it

reduces novelty – however, ordering them by similar thoughts, topics or words makes it like a renga or linked poem.

**Sources of Inspiration:**

1. Taking walks and viewing things around me. This is external and perceptual.
2. Reading haiku by other authors. This is internal and conceptual, using imagination.
3. To get ideas for city poems read books on urban haiku, look at photographs and take walks.

**Different Types of Haiku (According to Me):**

1. The zoom in.
2. The zoom out.
3. Focus at a macro level.
4. Focus at a micro level.
5. Silence.
6. Locations.
7. Combine different sensory modalities, sights and sounds and smells.
8. Contrasts of hot and cold, fast and slow.
9. Words with double meaning, like “turn” or “fill”.

**III. NOTES ON “HAIKU: A POET’S GUIDE” BY LEE GURGA**

**Five Elements a Haiku Writer Must Address:**

**1. Form.**

No need to stick to the 5-7-5 pattern or the short-long-short pattern of lines. A haiku can have a long-short-long line structure.

Higginson advocates a 2-3-2 stress pattern with 2 stressed or emphasized sounds in the first line, 3 in the second and 2 again in the third.

Be as brief and minimalistic as possible, but not too much so.

Make every word count. No need to say winter if you have already mentioned snow.

**2. Season.**

It ought to refer to a season. This can be done indirectly. The season not be just tacked on. It should actively participate in the poem.

**3. A particular event in the present tense.**

Referred to as the “haiku moment” or the “aha” experience. We find hidden or unexpected significance in the things around us. Best to put yourself in a situation where you are more likely to encounter such a moment, like in a park. It also helps to develop heightened awareness to more easily perceive such situations.

Better to present the sensory experience first, followed by our emotions or impressions.

#### **4. The “cut” or caesura.**

The caesura is a pause. It separates the poem into two sections, the base and the superposed sections. The base is shorter, usually one line, and answers the riddle posed by the longer section, typically two lines. The base can be the first or third lines.

#### **5. Internal comparison.**

Create a space between the images to give the reader’s mind time to see the comparison. The relationship should not be too obvious or too subtle. Three types of relationships are echo, contrast, or expansion.

End a haiku in a way that takes the reader back to the beginning. One image should not be more powerful than another. The two should balance. Also don’t leave everything resolved. There should be lingering mystery.

#### **Sense and Image:**

It is good sometimes contrast images from two senses, like sights and sounds or sounds and smells. It is better to have concrete rather than abstract images. Show don’t tell is the haiku way.

#### **Senryu:**

Haiku is about the relationship between nature and human nature. Senryu is only about human nature. No season word is required. It relies on wit, irony, and satire to say something about the human condition. The third line should contain a witty surprise or a biting comment, like a punch line.

#### **The Craft of Haiku:**

Revision is the heart of haiku. It is OK to back to edit poems time and time again. It is also OK to be inspired by sources other than direct experience, such as haiku written by others or our own memories.

#### **Language:**

Avoid fancy language, rhymes and puns. Be as specific as possible. Instead of saying “tree” say “elm”. Haiku should be as short as possible but not stripped like telegrams.

No need for titles or capitalization.

**Some More Don'ts:**

1. Haiku should seduce, not assault.
2. Haiku is not merely a report or a nature note, but neither is it pure invention.
3. Don't intellectualize or insert preconceived notions.
4. Do not politicize or put in social ideas. Haiku are not slogans.
5. Don't write on over-used topics.
6. Don't use over-used words: shadow, silence, alone, lonely, single, old, dark, etc.

**Getting in the Mood:**

1. Haiku is not competitive.
2. Relax and empty your mind.
3. Write about whatever you experience.
4. Think in image rather than evaluations.
5. Respond to whatever is around you.
6. Don't be in a hurry to move from one experience to the next.
7. Focus on experience rather than writing.
8. “True understanding is actual practice itself.”

**Three Faults in Beginner's Haiku:**

1. An attempt to be profoundly philosophical.
2. Anthropomorphism.
3. Use of trite season words and self-conscious Japanese subject matter.

**A Haiku Typology:**

1. The “story in a sentence”, where something is just explicitly stated. The three lines all form a sentence. To be avoided.
2. “Cause and effect”, where one action directly follows from the previous event. Also to simplistic.
3. “Cause and paradoxical effect”, where one action is implied from another. More interesting because the reader has to make the inference.
4. “Context and action”, where a setting is described and then a result occurs in it.
5. “Object and attribute”, where the second part of the poem expresses an unexpected attribute of the first.
6. “Context and object”, where an object that the poet encounters is juxtaposed with a time or a place where the discovery was made.

7. “Effect and effect”, where two effects of the same cause are presented, leaving the reader to discover what the stimulus for o relationship between the images might be.

The only way to write a good haiku is to write a hundred bad ones.

**Guidelines for Editing:**

1. Choose a single moment.
2. Bring out the significance.
3. Avoid cause and effect.
4. Suggest the season.
5. Provide only what is essential.
6. Say what you mean.
7. Follow the order of perception.
8. Engage the senses.
9. Present clear, specific images.
10. Use internal comparison.
11. Tap the power of suggestion.
12. Choose the best form.
13. Suspect every verb.
14. Challenge adjectives and adverbs.
15. Discriminate among articles and pronouns.
16. Cut unnecessary words.
17. Listen to the sound.
18. Avoid unnecessary punctuation.
19. Use figurative language sparingly.
20. Express mood sensitively.
21. Consider propriety.
22. Keep it light.
23. Avoid half a haiku.
24. Create a clear context.
25. Use fresh images.
26. Break old habits.

**Haiku is About:**

1. Discovery, not invention.
2. What is essential, not entertaining.
3. Sharing, not persuading.
4. Showing, not showing off.

**Zen Characteristics to Help haiku:**

1. Selflessness.
2. Loneliness.

3. Grateful Acceptance.
4. Wordlessness.
5. Non-intellectuality.
6. Contradiction.
7. Humor.
8. Freedom.
9. Non-morality.
10. Simplicity.
11. Materiality.
12. Love.
13. Courage.

**Three Stages in the Development of the Haiku Poet:**

1. Pure description, sketching from life.
2. Selective realism, find what's meaningful or important.
3. Makoto, relate the external to the internal.

**IV. NOTES ON “WRITING AND ENJOYING HAIKU” BY JANE REICHHOLD**

Haiku focus on the here and now. They force you to be “in the moment.” We rely on what our senses tell us.

**Suggestions for How to Live a Haiku Life:**

1. Being aware. Notice what is around you. Shut out our internal dialogue.
2. Being non-judgemental.
3. Being reverent. Feeling kind toward other persons. Live as if everything is sacred.
4. Having a sense of oneness. See satori.
5. Having a sense of simplicity.
6. Having humility.

**Fragment and Phrase:**

A haiku should be divided into two sections. It should not sound like a run-on sentence or with complete sentences each fitting into the next. The first section of one line is the fragment. The second section of two lines is the phrase. The fragment can be either the first or third line. Delete the preposition or article in the fragment. It should sound better. The two lines of the phrase should cohere together. Read the two lines of the phrase out loud to yourself. If they are too choppy, you may want to insert an article or an article plus a preposition.

Present tense is best. Don't use “ing” more than once in a poem.

Reichhold argues that haiku should be drawn entirely off of sensory observations. I disagree. Haiku can be based on thoughts that have strong visual images. A “desk haiku” is a verse written from an idea or from simply playing around with words instead of the result of a direct experience.

One line can contain abstractions, the other two concretes.

Speak simply.

Don't use words that a person from another culture wouldn't understand. Strive for universalism.

Don't be specifically negative, just state a bad thing as it is.

Best to model English-language haiku on haiku written in English, not translated from the Japanese. Copy haiku written by authors whose style you like. Buy anthologies and back editions of popular haiku journals. In this way you can adopt your own style.

### **Six Basic Haiku Rules:**

1. Write in three lines that are short-long-short without counting syllables (I disagree with this, good haiku are composed that are long-short-long).
2. Make sure the haiku has a fragment and phrase.
3. Have some element of nature.
4. Use verbs in the present tense.
5. Avoid capital letters or punctuation.
6. Avoid rhymes.

### **Techniques:**

**The Technique of Comparison** - In the words of Betty Drevniok: "In haiku the SOMETHING and the SOMETHING ELSE are set down together in clearly stated images. Together they complete and fulfill each other as “ONE PARTICULAR EVENT.” She rather leaves the reader to understand that the idea of comparison is showing how two different things are similar or share similar aspects.

a spring nap  
downstream cherry trees  
in bud

What is expressed, but not said, is the thought that buds on a tree can be compared to flowers taking a nap. One could also ask to what other images could cherry buds be compared? A long list of items can form in one's mind and be substituted for the first line. Or one can turn the idea around and ask what in the spring landscape can be compared to a nap without naming things that close their eyes to sleep. By changing



either of these images one can come up with one's own haiku while getting a new appreciation and awareness of comparison.

**The Technique of Contrast** - Now the job feels easier. All one has to do is to contrast images.

long hard rain  
hanging in the willows  
tender new leaves

The delight from this technique is the excitement that opposites creates. You have instant built-in interest in the most common haiku 'moment'. And yet most of the surprises of life are the contrasts, and therefore this technique is a major one for haiku.

**The Technique of Association** - This can be thought of as "how different things relate or come together". The Zen of this technique is called "oneness" or showing how everything is part of everything else. You do not have to be a Buddhist to see this; simply being aware of what is, is illumination enough.

ancestors  
the wild plum  
blooms again

If this is too hard to see because you do not equate your ancestors with plum trees, perhaps it is easier to understand with:

moving into the sun  
the pony takes with him  
some mountain shadow

Does it help for me to explain how this ku came to be written? I was watching some ponies grazing early in the morning on a meadow that was still partially covered with the shadow of the mountain. As the grazing pony moved slowly into the sunshine, I happened to be focused on the shadow and actually saw some of the mountain's shadow follow the pony – to break off and become his shadow. It can also be thought that the pony eating the grass of the mountain becomes the mountain and vice versa. When the boundaries disappear between the things that separates them, it is truly a holy moment of insight and it is no wonder that haiku writers are educated to latch on to these miracles and to preserve them in ku.

**The Technique of the Riddle** - this is probably one of the very oldest poetical techniques. It has been guessed that early spiritual knowledge was secretly preserved and passed along through riddles. Because poetry, as it is today, is the commercialization of religious prayers, incantations, and knowledge, it is no surprise that riddles still form a serious part of poetry's transmission of ideas.

One can ask: "what is still to be seen"

on all four sides  
of the long gone shack

The answer is:

calla lilies

Or another one would be:

spirit bodies  
waving from cacti  
plastic bags

The 'trick' is to state the riddle in as puzzling terms as possible. What can one say that the reader cannot figure out the answer? The more intriguing the 'set-up' and the bigger surprise the answer is, the better the haiku seems to work. As in anything, you can overextend the joke and lose the reader completely. The answer has to make sense to work and it should be realistic. Here *is* a case against desk haiku. If one has seen plastic bags caught on cacti, it is simple and safe to come to the conclusion I did. If I had never seen such an incident, it could be it only happened in my imagination and in that scary territory one can lose a reader. So keep it true, keep it simple and keep it accurate and make it weird.

Oh, the old masters favorite trick with riddles was the one of: is that a flower falling or is it a butterfly? or is that snow on the plum or blossoms and the all-time favorite – am I a butterfly dreaming I am a man or a man dreaming I am a butterfly. Again, if you wish to experiment (the ku may or may not be a keeper) you can ask yourself the question: if I saw snow on a branch, what else could it be? Or seeing a butterfly going by you ask yourself what else besides a butterfly could that be?

**The Technique of Sense-switching** - This is another old-time favorite of the Japanese haiku masters, but one they have used very little and with a great deal of discretion. It is simply to speak of the sensory aspect of a thing and then change to another sensory organ. Usually it involves hearing something one sees or vice versa or to switch between seeing and tasting.

home-grown lettuce  
the taste of well-water  
green

**The Technique of Narrowing Focus** - This is something Buson used a lot because he, being an artist, was a very visual person. Basically what you do is to start with a wide-

angle lens on the world in the first line, switch to a normal lens for the second line and zoom in for a close-up in the end. It sounds simple, but when he did it he was very effective. Read some of Buson's work to see when and how he did this.

the whole sky  
in a wide field of flowers  
one tulip

**The Technique of Metaphor** - I can just hear those of you who have had some training in haiku, sucking in your breath in horror. There IS that ironclad rule that one does not use metaphor in haiku. Posh. Basho used it in his most famous "crow ku". What he was saying in other words (not haiku words) was that an autumn evening come down on one the way it feels when a crow lands on a bare branch. I never understood this hokku until one day I was in my tiny studio with the door open. I was standing so still I excited the resident crow's curiosity causing him to fly down suddenly to land about two feet from my cheek on the tiny nearly bare pine branch. I felt the rush of darkness coming close, as close as an autumn evening and as close as a big black crow. The thud of his big feet hitting the bare branch caused the tiny ripple of anxiety one has when it gets dark so early in the autumn. In that moment I felt I knew what Basho had experienced. It is extremely hard to find a haiku good enough to place up against Basho's rightly famous one, so I'll pass giving you an example of my ku. But this is a valid technique and one that can bring you many lovely and interesting haiku.

**The Technique of Simile** - Usually in English you know a simile is coming when you spot the words "as" and "like". Occasionally one will find in a haiku the use of a simile with these words still wrapped around it, but the Japanese have proved to us that this is totally unnecessary. From them we have learned that it is enough to put two images in juxtaposition (next to each other) to let the reader figure out the "as" and "like" for him/herself. So basically the unspoken rule is that you can use simile (which the rule-sayers warn against) if you are smart enough to simply drop the "as" and "like". Besides, by doing this you give the reader some active part that makes him or her feel very smart when they discover the simile for him/herself.

a long journey  
some cherry petals  
begin to fall

**The Technique of the Sketch or Shiki's *Shasei*** - Though this technique is often given Shiki's term *shasei* (sketch from life) or *shajitsu* (reality) it had been in use since the beginning of poetry in the Orient. The poetic principle is "to depict as is". The reason he took it up as a 'cause' and thus, made it famous, was his own rebellion against the many other techniques used in haiku. Shiki was, by nature it seemed, against whatever was the status quo. If poets had over-used any idea or method his personal goal was to point this out and suggest something else. (Which was followed until someone else got tired of it and suggested something new. This seems to be the way poetry styles go in and out of

fashion.) Thus, Shiki hated word-plays, puns, riddles – all the things you are learning here! He favored the quiet simplicity of just stating what he saw without anything else having to happen in the ku. He found the greatest beauty in the common sight, simply said. And 99% of his haiku were written in his style. And many people still feel he was right. And there are some moments which are perhaps best said as simply as it is possible. Yet, he himself realized, after writing very many in this style in 1893, that used too much, even his new idea can become boring. So the method is an answer, but never the complete answer of how to write a haiku.

evening  
waves come into the cove  
one at a time

**The Technique of Double entendre** (or double meanings) - Anyone who has read translations of Japanese poetry has seen how much poets delighted in saying one thing and meaning something else. Only insiders knew the secret language and got the jokes. In some cases the pun was to cover up a sexual reference by seeming to speaking of something commonplace. There are whole lists of words with double meanings: spring rain = sexual emissions and jade mountain = the Mound of Venus, just to give you an sampling. But we have them in English also, and haiku can use them in the very same way.

eyes in secret places  
deep in the purple middle  
of an iris

**The Technique of using Puns** - Again we can only learn from the master punsters – the Japanese. We have the very same things in English but we haiku writers may not be so well-versed as the Japanese are in using these because there have been periods of Western literary history where this skill has been looked down upon. And even though the *hai* of haiku means "joke, or fun, or unusual" there are still writers whose faces freeze into a frown when encountering a pun in three lines.

a sign  
at the fork in the road  
"fine dining"

**The Technique of Word-plays** - Again, we have to admit the Japanese do this best. Their work is made easier by so many of their place names either having double meaning or many of their words being homonyms (sounding the same). Still (there is one meaning 'quiet' or 'continuation') we have so many words with multiple meaning there is no reason we cannot learn to explore our own language. A steady look at many of our cities' names could give new inspiration: Oak-land, Anchor Bay, Ox-ford, Cam-bridge and even our streets give us Meadowgate, First Street, and one I lived on – Ten Mile Cutoff.

moon set  
now it's right – how it fits  
Half Moon Bay

**The Technique of Verb /Noun Exchange** - This is a very gentle way of doing word play and getting double duty out of words. In English we have many words which function as both verbs and nouns. By constructing the poem carefully, one can utilize both aspects of such words as leaves, spots, flowers, blossoms, sprouts, greens, fall, spring, circles and hundreds more. You can use this technique to say things that are not allowed in haiku. For instance, one would not be admired for saying that the willow tree strings raindrops, but one can get away with making it sound as if the strings of willow are really the spring rain manifested in raindrops. This is one of those cases where the reader has to decide which permissible stance the ku has taken.

spring rain  
the willow strings  
raindrops

**The Technique of Close Linkage** - Basically this could come as a sub-topic to association but it also works with contrast and comparison so I like to give it its own rubric. In making any connection between the two parts of a haiku, the leap can be a small and even a well-known one. Usually beginners are easily impressed with close linkage and experiment first with this form. They understand it and feel comfortable using the technique.

winter cold  
finding on a beach  
an open knife

**The Technique of Leap Linkage** - Then as a writer's skills increase, and as he or she reads many haiku (either their own or others) such 'easy' leaps quickly fade in excitement. Being human animals we seem destined to seek the next level of difficulty and find that thrilling. So the writer begins to attempt leaps that a reader new to haiku may not follow and therefore find the ku to espouse nonsense. The nice thing about this aspect, is when one begins to read haiku by a certain author, one will find some of the haiku simply leave the reader cold and untouched. Years later, returning to the same book, with many haiku experiences, the reader will discover the truth or poetry or beauty in a haiku that seemed dead and closed earlier. I think the important point in creating with this technique is that the writer is always totally aware of his or her 'truth'. Poets of the surrealistic often make leaps which simply seem impossible to follow (I am thinking of Paul Celan) where the reader simply has to go on faith that the author knew what he was writing about. This is rare in haiku. Usually, if you think about the ku long enough and deeply enough, one can find the author's truth. I know I have quickly read a link in a renga and thought the author was kidding me or had gone off the deep end. Sometimes it is days later when I will go, "Ah-ha!" and in that instant understand what the ku was truly about.

wildflowers  
the early spring sunshine  
in my hand

**The Technique of Mixing It Up** - What I mean here is mixing up the action so the reader does not know if nature is doing the acting or if a human is doing it. As you know, haiku are praised for getting rid of authors, authors' opinions and authors' action. One way to sneak this in is to use the gerund (-ing added to a verb) combined with an action that seems sensible for both a human and for the nature/nature to do. Very often when I use a gerund in a haiku I am basically saying, "I am. . ." making an action but leaving unsaid the "I am". The Japanese language has allowed poets to use this tactic so long and so well that even their translators are barely aware of what is being done. It is a good way to combine humanity's action with nature in a way that minimizes the impact of the author but allows an interaction between humanity and nature.

end of winter  
covering the first row  
of lettuce seeds

**The Technique of *Sabi*** - I almost hesitate to bring up this idea as a technique because the word *sabi* has gotten so many meanings over the innumerable years it has been in Japan, and now that it comes to the English language it is undergoing even new mutations. As fascinated as Westerners have become with the word, the Japanese have maintained for centuries that no one can really, truly comprehend what *sabi* really is and thus, they change its definition according to their moods. Bill Higginson, in *The Haiku Handbook*, calls *sabi* – "(patina/loneliness) Beauty with a sense of loneliness in time, akin to, but deeper than, nostalgia." Suzuki maintains that *sabi* is "loneliness" or "solitude" but that it can also be "miserable", "insignificant", and "pitiable", "asymmetry" and "poverty". Donald Keene sees *sabi* as "an understatement hinting at great depths". So you see, we are rather on our own with this! I have translated this as: *sabi* (SAH-BEE)-aged/loneliness - A quality of images used in poetry that expresses something aged or weathered with a hint of sadness because of being abandoned. A split-rail fence sagging with overgrown vines has *sabi*; a freshly painted picket fence does not." As a technique, one puts together images and verbs which create this desired atmosphere. Often in English this hallowed state is sought by using the word "old" and by writing of cemeteries and grandmas. These English tricks wear thin quickly.

rocky spring  
lips taking a sip  
from a stone mouth

or

coming home

flower  
by flower

**The Technique of *Wabi*** - the twin brother to *sabi* who has as many personas can be defined as "(WAH-BEE)-poverty- Beauty judged to be the result of living simply. Frayed and faded Levis have the *wabi* that bleached designer jeans can never achieve." Thus one can argue that the above haiku samples are really more *wabi* than *sabi* – and suddenly one understands the big debate. However, I offer one more ku that I think is more *wabi* than *sabi* because it offers a scene of austere beauty and poignancy.

parting fog  
on wind barren meadows  
birth of a lamb

**The Technique of *Yûgen*** - another of these Japanese states of poetry which is usually defined as "mystery" and "unknowable depth". Somehow *yûgen* has avoided the controversy of the other two terms but since deciding which haiku exemplifies this quality is a judgmental decision, there is rarely consent over which ku has it and which one does not. In my glossary I am brave enough to propound: "One could say a woman's face half-hidden behind a fan has *yûgen*. The same face half-covered with pink goo while getting a facial, however, does not." But still haiku writers do use the atmosphere as defined by *yûgen* to make their ku be a good haiku by forcing their readers to think and to delve into the everyday sacredness of common things. (In a letter from Jeanne Emrich, she suggests one can obtain *yûgen* by having something disappear, or something appear suddenly out of nowhere, or by the use of night, fog, mist, empty streets, alleys, and houses. Using the sense-switching technique can create an air of mystery because of the information from the from the 'missing' sense.) Some English writers have tried to create *yûgen* by using the word "old" which became so overused there was an outcry against the adjective. Others tried to reach this state by writing about ghosts or 'spooky' subjects which did not impress the Japanese at all. Jeanne's suggestions seem, to me, to bring the writer closer to this goal.

tied to the pier  
the fishy smells  
of empty boats

**The Technique of the Paradox** - One of the aims of the playing with haiku is to confuse the reader just enough to attract interest. Using a paradox will engage interest and give the reader much to think about. Again, one cannot use nonsense but has to construct a true (connected to reality) paradox. It is not easy to come up with new ones or good ones, but when it happens, one should not be afraid of using it in a haiku.

climbing the temple hill  
leg muscles tighten  
in our throats

**The Technique of The Improbable World** - This is very close to paradox but has a slight difference. Again, this is an old Japanese tool which is often used to make the poet sound simple and child-like. Often it demonstrates a distorted view of science – one we 'know' is not true, but always has the possibility of being true (as in quantum physics).

evening wind  
colors of the day  
blown away

or

waiting room  
a patch of sunlight  
wears out the chairs

**The Technique of Humor** - This is the dangerous stuff. Because one has no way of judging another person's tolerance for wisecracks, jokes, slurs, bathroom and bedroom references, one should enter the territory of humor as if it is strewn with land-mines. And yet, if one is reading before a live audience nothing draws in the admiration and applause like some humorous haiku. Very often the humor of a haiku comes from the honest reactions of humankind. Choose your terms carefully, add to your situation with appropriate leaps, and may the haiku gods smile on you.

dried prune faces  
guests when they hear  
we have only a privy

**The Above as Below Technique.** Seeming to be a religious precept, yet this technique works to make the tiny haiku a well-rounded thought. Simply said: the first line and the third line exhibit a connectedness or a completeness. Some say one should be able to read the first line and the third line to find it makes a complete thought. Sometimes one does not know in which order to place the images in a haiku. When the images in the first and third lines have the strongest relationship, the haiku usually feels 'complete'. For exercise, take any haiku and switch the lines around to see how this factor works or try reading the haiku without the second line.

holding the day  
between my hands  
a clay pot

This ku is also using the riddle technique.

In searching for these examples, I found so many more of my haiku which did not fit into any of these categories, which tells me there are surely many more techniques which are



in use but are waiting for discovery, definition and naming. I stop here, hoping I have given you enough to pique your interest in the quest and new ways of exploring the miracles of haiku.

**A Checklist for Revising Haiku:**

1. Can you clearly see or hear the two distinct parts? If not, check where to add a preposition and/or article.
2. Does the haiku read like a sentence? By changing either the order of the words or the verb structure you can usually solve this problem.
3. What is the shape of the haiku? If you are counting syllables, are you sure you have the right numbers in each of the lines?
4. If the first or last line is the longest, could it fit better in the middle so the haiku has the shape you wish for it to have?
5. Are there pronouns in it? Do you really need them or can they be written out?
6. Are all the verbs in the present tense?
7. How many gerunds, or words ending in “ing” have you used?
8. Are there adverbs in the haiku? Do you really, really need them to convey the sense of the thought?
9. Is there any word that could be removed without losing the sense of the verse?
10. Is there any word that could have another word substituted for it? There are so many similar words that one must be certain to use the one and only one that makes the haiku. Wiggle every word.
11. Poetry comes from exactitude. This means that instead of writing “tree”, the author tells whether the tress I an oak or a pine. Appreciate the additional information that comes from associations of certain names- for example, “oak” suggests strength and endurance and “pine” can also mean to yearn for or long for – and use these opportunities to enrich the haiku.
12. Does the haiku work on more than one level? Is it at once describing a scene and also a state of mind or being or a philosophy?
13. Can others understand your poem? If you are not sure, this is the time to show your haiku to others to see if they can understand it.
14. Have you read this haiku somewhere else? Have you unconsciously taken someone else’s haiku for your own?
15. Does the haiku sing to you? Do you love repeating it to yourself? Does it totally delight you? (Does it sound right when spoken out loud?)
16. If not, if something bothers you about it, go back to the moment of inspiration, when you were given the idea for the haiku. Look around the scene to see if you have missed any vital details that need to be in your poem. Does the reworked poem still express your original feeling or idea?
17. Should this idea be expressed in a haiku? Does it need more than one haiku to say it all? Should there be a series of haiku on the subject?
18. Could the idea or inspiration be better expressed in a tanka or another form of poetry?

19. Can it be stated in other ways? Take the time to write up all the variations that you think of. Save and honor them all.

**Rules That Can be Followed:**

1. Seventeen syllables in one line.
2. Seventeen syllables written in three lines.
3. Seventeen syllables written in three lines divided into 5-7-5.
4. Seventeen syllables written in a vertical (flush left or centered) line.
5. Less than 17 syllables written in three lines as short-long-short.
6. Less than 17 syllables written in three vertical lines as short-long-short. (Ala Barry Semegran)
7. Write what can be said in one breath.
8. Use a season word (kigo) or seasonal reference.
9. Use a caesura at the end of either the first or second line, but not at both.
10. Never have all three lines make a complete or run-on sentence.
11. Have two images that are only comparative when illuminated by the third image.  
Example: spirit in retreat / cleaning first the black stove / and washing my hands
12. Have two images that are only associative when illuminated by the third image.  
Example: fire-white halo / at the moment of eclipse / I notice your face
13. Have two images that are only in contrast when illuminated by the third image.  
Example: two things ready / but not touching the space between / fire
14. Always written in the present tense of here and now.
15. Limited use (or non-use) of personal pronouns.
16. Use of personal pronouns written in the lower case. Example: i am a ...
17. Eliminating all the possible uses of gerunds (ing endings on wording).
18. Study and check on articles. Do you use too many the's? too little? all the same in one poem or varied?
19. Use of common sentence syntax in both phrases.
20. Use of sentence fragments.
21. Study the order in which the images are presented. First the wide-angle view, medium range and zoomed in close-up. (Thanks to George Price for this clarification!)
22. Save the "punch line" for the end line.
23. Work to find the most fascinating and eye-catching first lines.
24. Just write about ordinary things in an ordinary way using ordinary language.
25. Study Zen and let your haiku express the wordless way of making images.
26. Study any religion or philosophy and let this echo in the background of your haiku.
27. Use only concrete images.
28. Invent lyrical expressions for the image.
29. Attempt to have levels of meaning in the haiku. On the surface it is a set of simple images; underneath a philosophy or lesson of life.
30. Use images that evoke simple rustic seclusion or accepted poverty. (sabi)
31. Use images that evoke classical elegant separateness. (shubumi)
32. Use images that evoke nostalgic romantic images. Austere beauty. (wabi)
33. Use images that evoke a mysterious aloneness. (Yugen)

34. Use of paradox.
35. Use of puns and word plays.
36. Write of the impossible in an ordinary way.
37. Use of lofty or uplifting images. (No war, blatant sex, or crime)
38. Telling it as it is in the real world around us.
39. Use only images from nature. (No mention of humanity.)
40. Mixing humans and nature in a haiku by relating a human feeling to an aspect of nature.
41. Designation of humans a non-nature and giving all these non-nature haiku another name.
42. Avoid all reference to yourself in the haiku.
43. Refer to yourself obliquely as the poet, this old man, or with a personal pronoun.
44. Use no punctuation for ambiguity.
45. Use all normal sentence punctuation
  - : = a full stop
  - ; = a half stop or pause
  - ... = something left unsaid
  - , = a slight pause
  - = saying the same thing in other words
  - . = full stop
46. Capitalize the first word of every line.
47. Capitalize the first word only.
48. Capitalize proper names according to English rules.
49. All words in lower case.
50. All words in upper case.
51. Avoid rhymes.
52. Rhyme last words in the first and third lines.
53. Use rhymes in other places within the haiku.
54. Use alliteration. Example by Calvin of Calvin & Hobbes: twitching tufted tail / a toasty, tawny tummy: / a tired tiger
55. Use of words' sounds to echo feeling.
56. Always end the haiku with a noun.
57. Write haiku only from an "ah-ha" moment.
58. Use any inspiration as starting point to develop and write haiku. (These are known as desk haiku.)
59. Avoid too many (or all) verbs.
60. Cut out prepositions (in - on - at - among - between) whenever possible; especially in the short 1/3 phrase.
61. Eliminate adverbs.
62. Don't use more than one modifier per noun. This use should be limited to the absolute sense of the haiku.
63. Share your haiku by adding one at the close of your letters.
64. Treat your haiku like poetry; it's not a greeting card verse.
65. Write down every haiku that comes to you. Even the bad ones. It may inspire the next one which will surely be better.

Basho said “Learn the rules and then forget them.”

### **Copyright Issues:**

As soon as you create a haiku it becomes your personal property for life and to your heirs for seventy years. At that time they can renew the copyright for another seventy years.

We cannot submit the same work to more than a single publisher at the same time. However, as soon as a publisher published your work, the copyright is returned to you. We can even republish the same poem if the next magazine’s policy accepts previously published material. Be careful with publishers who pay for your work this may allow them to have copyright over it.

Consider joining online user lists, where people can distribute haiku amongst themselves without an editor.

### **Organizing Haiku for Publication:**

According to the four seasons, usually beginning with spring. This won’t work if your haiku are mostly about people or not related to the seasons. They can also be arranged in a narrative so that they tell a story. Haiku, like chocolates, need to be savored one at a time. Space them apart with pictures. This art must reflect the the simplicity and directness of the haiku without overpowering the words or undermining the meaning. In this case they become haiga.

## **V. NOTES ON “HOW TO HAIKU” BY BRUCE ROSS**

We are touched by something and it causes us to have feelings. We then share those feelings through haiku.

Haiku should use neither the intellectual part of our mind or our imagination to make things up. We should be open to the world the way a child is.

Tone down our personality and ego, then the world will open up to us.

Line one presents one image and lines two and three combine to present a second image.

The dash or punctuation between lines one and two is the pivot or diving line between the two images. Lines two and three can be almost grammatically correct. However this pivot can happen at the end of the second line as well. The single line should express a generalized connection with nature.

### **Haiku Writing Guidelines:**

1. Haiku takes place in the present.
2. A haiku is a moment of awareness, insight, surprise, or delight.
3. Haiku is most usually connected with nature.
4. A short-long-short pattern is usual.
5. A haiku usually contains two images.
6. Your haiku should have a varying tone
7. Remember that haiku is not merely description.
8. Avoid sentimentality.
9. Do not explain anything.

Be open or attentive to nature.

A haiku should have elegance or polish. There should be a perfect balance in the images, ideas, phrasing, word choice, and sound. Nothing could be added and nothing could be taken away.

A haiku should have an image and an idea that blend perfectly.

The American poet Elizabeth Bishop said that poetry should be accurate, spontaneous, and mysterious. It should not be airy, vague, and indefinite.

### **Haiku Writing Suggestions:**

I should try writing haiku that combine more than one sense. The write haiku that have two images of one particular sense: touch, taste, sound, etc.

Write a set of haiku on one theme.

Write haiku that emphasize, *sabi*, *wabi*, *yuengen*, etc.

### **Senryu:**

Senryu are not about human-made things or environments. They are about human nature/psychology.

A senryu is a poem with a humorous perspective on the failings and weaknesses of human nature.

Garry Gay and Tom Clausen are two good modern senryu authors.

Another main characteristic of senryu is satire, poking fun at human weaknesses.

Forms of senryu: joke, wordplay, found in the environment on signs, etc..

Subject matter of senryu: satire, human nature, vulgarity.

Themes of senryu: relationships, professional satire, pets, children, the modern world

Best advice for senryu is to have a good sense of humor and to keep your eye open for the funny things people do.

## VI. NOTES FROM THE HAIKU LIFE BY MICHELE ROOT-BERNSTEIN AND FRANCINE BANWARTH

They use the acronym "LIFE" to denote what they sought out in good haiku:

L = Language that surprises, making unusual connections.

I = Imagery that is fresh, seeing things in a new and different way.

F = Form that functions, word and line arrangement to achieve effects.

E = Elusiveness that engages imagination, making us be creative.

They define haiku as having the following fundamental elements:

**Sensual imagery**, sometimes coupled with thoughts or introspections. This simulates things in and of themselves, connects outer things with inner feeling states, and represents or symbolizes abstract thought about both.

**Juxtaposition** of disparate images, triggering an unexpected comparison or relationship. Unrelated images within the same frame have the potential to generate: unseen patterns or connections, explosions of likeness between unlike things, and creative insight and discovery.

**Brevity** of thought or suggestion. Brevity involves the paring away of unnecessary imagery or words, to two effects: simplification (focusing) and compression (connecting)

**Ambiguity** of reference or association. This expands meaning through inherent complexities in language, including: uncertainties of references, double meanings, and multiple associations.

The above then create a **conceptual space** for the reader to (re)experience or (re)create insight or resonance of meaning. Forging of this space depends on: "just right" use of imagery, juxtaposition, brevity, and ambiguity and the creative reader.

The best haiku have the "just right" combination of the following four elements:

**Linguistic technique**. Consists of sound values, form values and word choices.

**Surprise**. Consists of fresh perceptions, overturned expectations, and synesthetic fusions.

**Heightened awareness**. Makes the reader more aware of the outer world, inner world, and the connection between them.

**Interpretive possibility**. Involves linking natural to human, literal to figurative, and particular to universal.

## VII. NOTES FROM THE WONDER CODE BY SCOTT MASON

Haiku do a number of things.

1. Make us see the wonder of the world in something **small**. How beauty or some other aspect of the universe can be represented in an often tiny example.

2. A heightening of **sensory awareness**. To experience the world directly through sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch.
3. Experience the **present moment**. Being in the here and now.
4. Enable us to be **surprised**, to have a violation of expectation that allows us to experience delight, excitement, adventure, curiosity, wonder, and serendipity.
5. To see the **connection** between things, not to connect with nature only but to see relationships instead of separation and fragmentation.

### **VIII. NOTES FROM HAIKU AND SENRYU. A SIMPLE GUIDE FOR ALL BY CHARLOTTE DIGREGORIO.**

Journalists often ask the following questions: Who, what, when, where, how, and why?

1. Who? The writer should not be obvious. Like the hand pointing at the moon, one should see the moon, not the hand. But other characters should be clear.
2. What? The image(s). These should be vivid and easy to see in one's mind.
3. When? The moment or when the poem is happening in time. It should be in the present. Can be a memory written in present tense.
4. Where? The context, scene, or location.
5. How? The action or movement, causality.
6. Why? What is the message or bigger point? Does it say something interesting about the universe or man's relation to it?

She defines a haiku as:

1. About nature.
2. Moment in time.
3. Sensory images.
4. Imply season.
5. Fewest words.
6. "Aha" moment revealed in last line.
7. Usually three lines.
8. 17-18 syllables.
9. Juxtaposition of two seemingly unrelated images.
10. Avoid simile. Don't use "like" or "as".
11. Sparing use of punctuation or capitalization.
12. Sparing use of adjectives.
13. Avoid abstraction.
14. Avoid rhyme.
15. Simple, not flowery language.

### **IX. NOTES FROM JAPANESE HAIKU. ITS ESSENTIAL NATURE AND HISTORY BY KENNETH YASUDA**

The describing of something as is and of not imposing ideas or intellectuality is know as "disinterestedness". It means being objective, not subjective. The observer has no awareness of themselves as separate from what they see or hear. The unification of the poet's nature and the environment. Literally, this is becoming one with nature.

Never mention the location, only imply it.

Where, what and when in the poem should all come together and be seamless.

He has an extended discussion on syllabic structure starting on pg. 110.

Rhyming in haiku in his examples occurs at the end of the first and third lines and is intended to frame a poem. They serve as connective devices, bringing the reader back at the end to what was introduced at the beginning. It echoes the subject or action that happens earlier. For instance "bright" applied to moon in the first line and "white" applied to a wave in the third. Rhyme should not be phonetic only but closely tied to the meaning. Rhyming of this sort was done more in earlier English translations of Japanese haiku.

He lists six different types of alliteration in haiku.

1. Initial alliteration: Consonants that start words, whether they are accented or not.
2. Stressed alliteration: Stressed syllables of two or more beginning consonants at the start of words.
3. Syllable alliteration: Close repetition of the same syllables, stressed or unstressed.
4. Oblique alliteration: Repetition of close, but not identical sounding consonants.
5. Buried alliteration: Repeated consonantal sounds. Some can be at the start of words, others can be buried inside words.
6. Crossed alliteration: Sets of letters that alternate with similar consonant sounds.

Assonance is repetition of the same vowel sounds, whether intial or buried, that are similar in sound.

He has a list of selected haiku at the end of the book that all have titles. So this too seems a tradition of 20th century and earlier translations of Japanese haiku.

## **X. NOTES ON HAIKU IN ENGLISH BY HAROLD G. HENDERSON**

There is no rhyme in classical Japanese haiku because most syllables end in a short vowel or an "n" sound. It would become monotonous. Most English language haiku writers don't use rhyme, arguing that it tends to close a poem, and that haiku should be open. However rhyme can be used for poems that close inwards (pg. 35). The danger in rhyme is that it may make a haiku tinkly, or cause the words to distract the reader from the image or emotion. See the following article: *American Haiku*, Vol. III, No. 1, by W. H. Kerr.



The arguments against the use of kigo:

It is impractical (Japanese and other geographic locations differ) and its artificial.

Arguments for:

If it used naturally so that the word and the season are integral parts of the poem, it can provide the haiku with a special depth.

In my view, one can go further and have haiku that don't refer to a season at all, even indirectly. This applies to haiku, not just to senryu.

### **NOTES ON THE DISJUNCTIVE DRAGONFLY BY RICHARD GILBERT**

He lists 24 different disjunctive styles. A disjunction is a disruption in expectation typically generated by the two-part structure of a haiku. His efforts are similar to those of Jane Reichold's techniques. How many such categories exist may be open ended. Written in a very opaque way.

### **NOTES FROM VARIOUS INTERNET SITES.**

#### **Incomplete or Flawed Haiku Have the Following characteristics:**

1. Use simile, metaphor or anthropomorphizing
2. Have bad meter or rhythm
3. Say instead of imply
4. Are too abstract
5. Use "I", "my" and the first person too much
6. Include angst or personal feelings. These can go in senryu and tanka
7. Use adverbs like "slowly"

#### **To Improve Haiku:**

1. Read the haiku out loud to yourself, pausing after each line and for a few seconds at the end to see how it reverberates
2. Have it critiqued by another poet who has had some experience.
3. Form a very vivid image of the scene (visual, auditory, or other sense) and keep it in mind when composing.
4. First, you see something in the world that makes you have a certain feeling. Second, you compose the poem in such a way as to convey that feeling to the reader.
5. Constantly rewrite and edit them until they get better.
6. Read book reviews in Frog Pond.
7. Read the editor's choice and reader's choice comments in the Heron's nest. To better understand what makes good haiku.

**Contemporary Haiku: Origins and New Directions by A. C. Missias:**

Most Americans have heard of haiku, if ever, during their elementary school years, when they were introduced to a short nature poem with arcane rules of construction. Perhaps they later happened across examples of Japanese haiku, or the ubiquitous humorous derivative forms such as "spam-ku" that dot the Internet. But what is this strange little poetry form, and how does it come to be popular here hundreds of years after it came into existence on the far side of the world?

Haiku originally derived from an earlier form of court poetry, called wakka or tanka, in vogue in Japan during the 9th-12th centuries. Tanka were formed in a pattern equivalent to five lines with syllable counts of 5-7-5-7-7, and often had religious or courtly themes. From competitions in writing tanka gradually evolved a game of writing linked multi-part poems, with one person contributing a 5-7-5 verse, followed by a related 7-7 verse by a different author, often adding up to poems of hundreds or thousands of verses. As this new form, called renga, evolved, ever greater emphasis was placed on skill in writing the important starting verses, or hokku. Poets began to write these verses in advance of renga parties, so that they would always have an impressive offering on hand if called upon to begin the game. Gradually these single verses began to be recognized as a poetry form in themselves, and were collected into anthologies of great popularity. It was only in the late 19th-early 20th century that the most modern of the Japanese haiku masters, Masaoka Shiki, combined the formal name "haikai no renga" with the starting verse name "hokku" to yield the familiar name "haiku". In the decades since, haiku have been absorbed into many languages and cultures, and are now being written and published all around the world.

So, what characterizes a haiku today? This is not an easy question to answer. Certainly, the majority of haiku currently written in English do not conform to the 5-7-5 syllable pattern typical in Japanese, nor do they always concern nature topics; however, all of these divergences are matters of ongoing debate within the haiku community. I will attempt to touch on some of those issues here, but even more I will try to give you a sense of the "haiku aesthetic" which unifies the form across time, language, and culture.

Haiku is more than a form of poetry; it is a way of seeing the world. Each haiku captures a moment of experience; an instant when the ordinary suddenly reveals its inner nature and makes us take a second look at the event, at human nature, at life. It can be as elevated as the ringing of a temple bell, or as simple as sunlight catching a bit of silverware on your table; as isolated as a mountain top, or as crowded as a subway car; revelling in beauty or acknowledging the ugly. What unifies these moments is the way they make us pause and take notice, the way we are still recalling them hours later, the feeling of having had a momentary insight transcending the ordinary, or a glimpse into the very essence of ordinariness itself.

Such an experience, referred to as the "aha moment," is the central root of a haiku. The

## Haiku Notes

### Friedenberg

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act of writing a haiku is an attempt to capture that moment so that others (or we ourselves) can re-experience it and its associated insight. This means picking out of memory the elements of the scene that made it vivid, and expressing them as directly as possible -- that is, the goal is to recreate the moment for the reader, not explain it to them (this is sometimes called the "show, don't tell" rule).

sunflowers:  
one facing  
the other way

-Kenneth Leibman

sudden shower  
in the empty park  
a swing still swinging

-Margaret Chula

In haiku, unlike in many Western poetic forms, the writer tries to maintain an invisible hand, avoiding overt "poetic" phrasing, use of metaphors, etc. in favor of simple, direct language. The writer's reaction to the scene is not stated, but comes across in the choice of images and juxtapositions, the exact wording used.

edge of the marsh –  
the wind from rising geese  
in our hair

-Ebba Story

You have perhaps noted that haiku are generally broken into two asymmetrical parts, often corresponding to one and two of the (common) 3 lines. Indeed, good haiku are seldom written in a single sentence, but tend to take the form of either "setting and action" or a juxtaposition of two images. It is at the interface of these elements that resonances arise.

november nightfall  
the shadow of the headstone  
longer than the grave

-Nick Avis

So, what other features characterize haiku? Traditionally haiku makes use of a seasonal setting word or phrase, which serves as a shorthand for a range of emotional connotations. For example, "spring rain" might be cleansing, while "autumn rain" is more nostalgic or grim; "hot nights" conjures the agitation of summer, while "bare branches" may give a feeling of loneliness to a winter scene. Such seasonal elements are considered critical in the writing of Japanese haiku, a defining feature. In English, too they are a desirable way to convey a lot of meaning in a few words.

spring morning --  
a goose feather floats

his side of it.  
her side of it.

in the quiet room

winter silence

-Bruce Ross

-Lee Gurga

However, most Western cultures do not have the wealth of seasonal references that are commonly recognizable in Japan, where every insect and animal is assigned a typical seasonal association. Thus, judgement of English-language haiku often makes allowance for other elements that may play a comparable role in setting context or evoking connotations.

Monday morning  
traffic jam --  
slow steady rain

sunset rays –  
shadows of mountains  
beyond the horizon

-Paul Mena

-Paul MacNeil

So, back to form. What ever happened to the 5-7-5 structure that characterized the original hokku? There is a strong tradition of 17-syllable haiku in English, particularly dating from the spurt of haiku appreciation in the 1960's. Many authors wished to respect the Japanese structure, seeing that as one of the key defining aspects of the historical form, and thus aimed their own efforts into a 5-7-5 mold. However, the English and Japanese languages are very different in their grammar and syllabic rhythms (this has been wonderfully addressed by Keiko Iamoka in her essay [Form in Haiku](#)), such that the typical Japanese haiku is generally translated most directly into around 12 English syllables, with variable line lengths. For example, probably the most famous haiku of all time is Basho's "old pond", which can be translated as:

Old pond...  
a frog jumps in  
water's sound.

(William Higginson)

To bring this up to 17 syllables would require the interpolation of much additional information, or a more overtly poetic wording. Several translators have tried to do exactly that, yielding awful versions.

But even beyond translation, an aspiring haiku poet will often find that striving for 17 syllables leads to the addition of extra words or images; such "padding" can hinder the direct expression of an experience, by tempting one to include too many components of a scene and thus distract from the central observation. Thus many authors prefer to use an unstructured approach to haiku form, taking 17 syllables as a sort of maximum-length guideline. Other authors have attempted to define an alternative form which would more closely approximate the length of a Japanese haiku while demanding the discipline of a set structure. Advocates of this approach often recommend guidelines of 3-5-3 syllables

or 2-3-2 accented beats, as closest approximations to that goal.

autumn rain –  
the weathered tire swing  
overflows

-ACM

However, the variable word length and unforgiving grammatical structure inherent to English can make such a narrow definition prohibitive, and thus the unstructured form is likely to continue to play an important part in the future of modern haiku. So where does this leave us? Haiku is a flexible form for brief, vivid capture of single moments of time, the writing of which allows one to both share those "aha moments" with others and to become more open to them oneself. So jump on in, give it a try! Read good translations of the haiku masters, compilations of contemporary writers, and journals offering a range of tiny gems. Open yourself to the world around you, to the inputs from all five senses, to the details of existence. Try to write poems which are simple and direct; which appear to portray an objective scene, but which have unspoken depths of insight and meaning. It's not an easy task, but one which offers a wealth of satisfaction in both the striving and the accomplishment. I wish you much great pleasure in reading and writing haiku, and many moments of insight to alter your way of looking at the everyday world.

### **How to Evaluate Haiku (from Anita Virgil):**

1. Is it one particular event in the present?
2. Is it a moment the poet views with fresh insight or awareness the relationship between man and nature?
3. Is it objectively presented? Does it allow the reader to experience the emotion? It should not tell the reader what to feel.
4. Does it avoid simile, metaphor, personification or clichés?
5. Does each word serve a vital function in recreating the poet's moment of deep response? Does the selection of words, the order in which they are placed, their sound and tempo capture the quality of the experience?
6. If the poem allows for more than one interpretation through choice of words, punctuation or line breaks, does this add to or detract from the poem?
7. Does it have growth potential? Does it have the ability to add more emotion with subsequent reading?
8. What is the value of what the poet conveys?
9. Does it contain universal significance?

### **Criteria for Good Haiku from the Heron's Nest:**

Here are some qualities we find essential to haiku:

1. Present moment magnified (immediacy of emotion)
2. Interpenetrating the source of inspiration (no space between observer and observed)
3. Simple, uncomplicated images
4. Common language
5. Finding the extraordinary in "ordinary" things
6. Implication through objective presentation, not explanation: appeal to intuition, not intellect
7. Human presence is fine if presented as an archetypical, harmonious part of nature (human nature should blend in with the rest of nature rather than dominate the forefront)
8. Humor is fine, if in keeping with "karumi" (lightness) - nothing overly clever, cynical, comic, or raucous
9. Musical sensitivity to language (effective use of rhythm and lyricism)
10. Feeling of a particular place within the cycle of seasons

**Heron's Nest Commentary Notes:**

1. Try to employ multiple senses, sight, sound, temperature, etc.
2. Leave the observer out. He or she should disappear. So try not to use any "I" or "my".
3. Instead of saying the season "autumn", imply it as in "cold snap" or an action like "raking".
4. Try to avoid use of adverbs like "slowly" because they tell rather than show.
5. It is OK to have a short middle line, even one word. In fact, any line can consist of a single word.
6. Alliteration can be used to effect: the "Ss" in "a snake sloughs its skin" sound like the hissing or slithering of a snake.
7. Try to imbue each poem with a deeper meaning like how we shield ourselves from the rain and experience.
8. It is nice to have the last line be a contrast to the first two, where there is a violation of expectation. Set up the expectation in the first two lines, then deliver the unexpected in the third.
9. You can use the same word twice or even three times.
10. The first line can be used to set a mood.
11. Observe small novel events in nature that you may not have noticed, like a spider cutting a petal from its web.
12. There is a classic 2 beat – 3 beat – 1 beat pattern in the three lines where each beat is a stressed or accented sound.
13. A contrast can happen between two adjacent lines or between the first and third line. For example, contrasting something that is still with something that is in motion.
14. An idiom or local slang term like "Indian summer" or "Christmas" is acceptable, although it makes the poem less universal.
15. Assonance, the repetition of stressed vowels, can also be used for effect. So can consonance, the repetition of consonants.
16. Onomatopoeia is also good, using a word that sounds like what it means.
17. Caesura, means pause. Try to use it.

18. Karumi means lightness. The sound or immediate image can be light with the meaning more somber.
19. Location does not need to be specified, it can be imagined to be in different places based on the experience of the reader. One way to achieve this is to use a locale-specific word like “burro”, which makes it central or south American.
20. The environment can be implied also. If a soft noise is heard, by default it must be quiet.
21. A theme like color can be echoed throughout, as can a sound, as in ending each line with a word that starts with the same sound.
22. The “macro” or “telescoping” principle or going from small to big is used. Going from “ears” to “wall” to “sun”. “A “micro” or “microscoping” principle would be the opposite of this. Going from “sun” to “wall” to “ear”.
23. The concision principle. can any word be removed without altering the meaning?
24. Try creating a specific instant in time and in space. Make the action happen in a second or minute and be in a particular spot, such as a garden gate.
25. Use symbolism to good effect but without using obvious metaphor or standard linguistic similarity technique. Never use a simile which employs “like” or “as”.
26. Pauses can be created by long sounds such as the “o” in “snow”. Contrastingly, quick moments can be conveyed by short sounds like the “t” in “shut”.
27. Try not to put author’s opinion in, but in some cases it is acceptable.
28. Emphasizing the relationship between man and nature is a good approach to use. So is death or the loss of a loved one.
29. Avoid use of proper nouns like a person’s name.
30. It is nice to juxtapose two things that are not alike at first but become so upon further reflection. Use of words that have different meanings can also work.
31. Shadows are another good topic.
32. Use kigo words or learn the names of real trees and plants.
33. Read the poem aloud to yourself to get a sense of whether it sounds right.
34. Supply the locale, let the readers fill in the details.
35. Try kinesthetic or motor experiences like feeling the stretch on a hose that is fully extended.
36. Surprise endings are nice.
37. Ambiguity is OK. Allow for multiple interpretations, but it can’t be completely opaque.
38. Write some haiku that convey sounds rather than visual images.
39. Use words that have multiple meanings. A tooth can signify white, snow, aging, eating, etc.
40. Use juxtaposition where two images exist side by side that are either complementary or contrasting.

**Criteria for Haiku from James Hackett:**

1. The present is the touchstone of the haiku experience, so always be aware of this present moment.
2. Remember that nature is the province of haiku.

- (Carry a notebook for recording your haiku experiences.)
3. Contemplate natural objects closely... unseen wonders will reveal themselves.
  4. Interpenetrate with nature. Allow subjects to express their life through you. "That art Thou."
  5. Reflect upon your notes of nature in solitude and quiet. Let these be the basis of your haiku poems.
  6. Write about nature just as it is... be true to life!
  7. Choose each word very carefully. Use words that clearly express what you feel.
  8. Use verbs in the present tense.
  9. For added dimension choose words that suggest the season, location, or time of the day.
  10. Use only common language.
  11. Write in three lines which total approximately 17 syllables. Many haiku experiences can be well expressed in the Japanese line arrangement of 5, 7, 5 syllables - but not all.
  12. Avoid end rhyme in haiku. Read each verse aloud to make sure that it sounds natural.
  13. Remember that lifefulness, not beauty, is the real quality of haiku.
  14. Never use obscure allusions: real haiku are intuitive, not abstract or intellectual.
  15. Don't overlook humour, but avoid mere wit.
  16. Work on each poem until it suggests exactly what you want others to see and feel.
  17. Remember that haiku is a finger pointing at the moon, and if the hand is bejewelled, we no longer see that to which it points.
  18. Honour your senses with awareness, and your Spirit with zazen or other centering meditation. The Zen-haiku mind should be like a clear mountain pond: reflective, not with thought, but of the moon and every flight beyond...

**The Japanese Principle of Shibui can be Applied to Painting or Haiku:**

1. Simplicity.
2. Implicitness or meaningful depth, having rich meaning.
3. Humility, not imposing oneself on the subject.
4. Tranquility, serenity, quiet and calmness.
5. Spontaneity, a sense of naturalness.
6. Contact with the commonplace, seeing and creating beauty out of the common things in life.
7. Imperfection, the naturalness of life that includes the awkward and homely in a complete, honest rendering of beauty.



**British Haiku Society Guidelines:**

1. Write only when you have been moved, touched or inspired by an actual experience.
2. Just relax and be yourself, without straining or effort. So be honest, simple, clear and straightforward. Avoid cliché, cleverness and wordiness.
3. Say how it is without abstractions, avoid explanations and philosophising, leave space for readers to feel their own responses.
4. Resist heaviness and overloading; prefer allusion and understatement.
5. Try to express your feelings through the images you use, rather than actually saying you are “sad” or “lonely”. This gives space for the readers to experience those feelings for themselves.
6. Many of the best haiku present unexpected and contrasting images. These can arouse profound and subtle emotions and can convey layers of elusive meaning.
7. Finally, are there words which you could omit which would make the haiku work better? And what happens if you change the lines around?