How to Write a Symbol Poem

**Step 1:**

**Choose a topic & think of something that symbolises that topic. You can change the symbol later if you decide it’s not working.**

E.g. Courage/bravery – a lion

**Step 2:**

**Brainstorm some ideas about your topic. Try finding examples “[topic] is when… [topic] means…” or similes - “[topic] is like….”**

E.g. Courage

* Not just fighting in wars or doing risky/daredevil things
  + Courage isn’t recklessness
* Courage means feeling scared but doing it anyway
  + Not lack of fear, control of fear
* There are lots of different types of courage or things that take courage.
  + What is difficult/takes courage for one person might be easy for another.
  + Your courageous step looks different to mine.
* Sometimes takes more courage to stand up to friends than enemies (- Dumbledore)
* You can’t prevent bad things happening to you, but courage means dealing with bad situations in a good way
* Takes optimism – have to believe you can get through it before you try
* Examples: some things that show courage:
  + saying no when everyone else is doing something
  + telling someone about your faith or standing up for your beliefs
  + persisting with something difficult
  + Fighting an illness (inc. mental illness), coping with pain without complaining
  + Being vulnerable – saying how you feel, asking for help, admitting you failed
* Courage is like (similes):
  + Facing a charging elephant head on
  + Controlling a stampede
  + Learning to ride a bike, training in a sport, play an instrument (gets easier with practice)
  + A journey, often without a clear end (new challenges arise)
  + Doesn’t always roar, sometimes a little voice saying try again

***If you need help brainstorming, you can work with a partner.***

***You could also try searching the internet – look for ‘quotes about courage’, ‘courage is like’ etc.***

***Don’t just copy someone else’s poem about courage, OBVIOUSLY.***

**Step 3:**

**Sort & group the thoughts into rough stanzas, or into a free verse poem.**

**As you go, re-write each thought so that you’re talking about the symbol instead of the idea it represents.** (E.g. instead of talking about courage, talk about a lion – but don’t DIRECTLY say ‘courage is a lion’)

**Keep it loose, put down whatever occurs, don’t overthink it. You can always change it around later – doesn’t matter if it doesn’t really make sense at first.**

**Try and think of some devices to add in as you go – similes, metaphors, alliteration, allusions**

The lion doesn’t always roar

He doesn’t always fight his enemies, stalk prey, attack, kill

Sometimes he pads quietly

Sometimes he is a small voice

Saying no when everyone else says yes

Saying get up and try again, and again

Saying I believe…

Saying I need help, I failed, I can’t do this alone

The lion faces a charging elephant, but he fears the rushing river

A puppy splashes in, but trembles at a vacuum cleaner

Their brave steps look different,

but they both have to fight if they want to overcome

Push on, practice, persist

Until their fear is controlled, like a horse with reins

It’s journey that doesn’t have an end

New bumps appear in the road, new obstacles

But before the lion takes his first step,

He must believe he can do it

Hope is a lamp to his feet and a light to his path

**Step 5:**

**You have the basic outline of your poem now. The result might work as a free verse.**

**BUT – to make it fit one of the required formats (ballad, sonnet, villanelle, psalm) you will need to do some re-working and re-writing. Adding rhyme and rhythm, changing the number of lines, creating a refrain, etc. This is the tricky part.**

You have to be flexible – be willing to re-write the whole line, leave things it out, change the order or replace words to make it fit.

**Use internet resources to help - rhyming dictionaries (to suggest words that rhyme with your word) or a thesaurus (to find a synonym that’s alliterative)**

Sonnet

**Sonnet Rules:**

* 14 lines
* Shift at line 9
* Iambic pentameter
* ABABCDCD EFEFGG

A lion doesn’t always have to **roar**

He doesn’t only fight and stalk and **kill**

At times his feet are quiet on the **floor**

At times he is a voice that’s small and **still**

To whisper no when all around say **yes**

To rise and try again despite the **cost**

To tell about the faith that you **possess**

To say I failed, I need your help, I’m **lost**

**Techniques used:**

* Rhyme
* Rhythm
* Alliteration
* Metaphor
* SYMBOL

Despite his strength, the lion has his **fears**

While others swim and splash, he won’t, of **course**

We all must fight our doubts, and **persevere**

Until our fear’s controlled, a bridled **horse**

Before the lion moves, he knows he **can**  
It’s hope that lights the path that he **began**

Villanelle

The lion doesn’t always **roar**

Sometimes his voice is small and **still**

It’s hope that brings light to his **paw**

**Villanelle Rules:**

* 19 lines
* Repeat line 1&3 alternating at the end of each verse, and as a couplet at the end
* Any consistent meter
* ABA ABA ABA ABA ABA ABAA

At times he’s silent at the **door**

He doesn’t always stalk and **kill**

The lion doesn’t always **roar**

To rise again up off the **floor**

To speak of prophecy **fulfilled**

It’s hope that brings light to his **paw**

To reach for help when he is **sore**

To stand apart when all do **ill**

**Techniques used:**

* Rhyme
* Rhythm
* Alliteration
* Metaphor
* SYMBOL

The lion doesn’t always **roar**

He’s brave, but fears the river’s **shore**

While others swim and splash at **will**

It’s hope that brings light to his **paw**

His fear controlled, a bridled **horse**

Before he steps, believes he **will**

The lion doesn’t always **roar**

It’s hope that brings light to his **paw**

Ballad

**Ballad Rules:**

* Tell a story
* Use a chorus/refrain
* Consistent rhyme & rhythm
* Song style

A lion brave set out one day

To stalk and catch his lunch

His claws and teeth were on display

He wanted bones to crunch

O lion, lion, don’t you know?

Each one of us has fears

But facing them, you’ll overthrow

It’s hope that gets us here!

**Techniques used:**

* Rhyme
* Rhythm
* Refrain
* Alliteration
* SYMBOL

The lion walked along the path

Whilst planning his attacks

A raging river in his path

Soon stopped him in his tracks!

O lion, lion, don’t you know?

Each one of us has fears

But facing them, you’ll overthrow

It’s hope that gets us here!

AND SO ON…