How to Write a Limerick

by Bruce Lansky

To help you get started writing limericks, here's some helpful information about writing limericks.

To begin, a limerick is a funny little poem containing five lines. It has a very distinctive rhythm and rhyme pattern.

— **Rhyme Pattern:** The last words of the 1st, second, and fifth lines all rhyme with each other. We'll call these rhyming words "A." Sometimes the words could be "Grey," "okay," and "hay" as illustrated in the first poem below or "Tim," "swim," and "him" as illustrated in the second poem below, and the last words of the third and fourth lines rhyme with each other. We'll call these rhyming words "B." Sometimes the words could be "night" and "might" as the first example or "blue" and "true" as the second example.

— **Rhythm Pattern:** The FIRST, second, and FIFTH lines all have three rhythm patterns, da DUM da da DUM da da DUM da da DUM and there are 8 SYLLABLES in total. Say, "There once was a DUM-numbered TWO" and hold your hand up. "Its DUM da da DUM da da DUM" and hold. Wave your hand back and forth to show the rhythm. The third and fourth lines have a different rhythm pattern, da DUM da da DUM da da DUM and there are 5 SYLLABLES in total. Say, "We fell without a word" and hold. Now say "da DUM da da DUM" and hold. Wave your hand back and forth to show the rhythm.

Now, a young Benjamin Franklin, whose birthday is the rhyme and rhythm pattern:

1. There once was a Benjamin Franklin (A)
   da DUM da da DUM da da DUM (3 SYLLABLES)
2. Who discovered that wind was nothing but air (A)
   da DUM da da DUM da da DUM (3 SYLLABLES)
3. He wondered a thousand (B)
   da DUM da da DUM (2 SYLLABLES)
4. Bolts of lightning he might (B)
   da da DUM da da DUM (2 SYLLABLES)
5. and found out that it was mere wind, (A)
   da DUM da da DUM da da DUM (3 SYLLABLES)

When you write a limerick, make sure that it has the same rhythm and rhyme pattern. Make sure it also has the same 8 SYLLABLES, 5 SYLLABLES, 8 SYLLABLES, 5 SYLLABLES rhythm pattern, too. To be sure, you can use a pencil, tapping "da" for the da syllables and "DUM" for all accented or stressed syllables, as shown above. If your poem doesn't have a similar rhythm pattern, then you need to make some adjustments.

Okay, for your limericks, you can use funny phrases or nonsense. For example, in your city, state, or country, or maybe if your name is Ben or Jim, you could write something like this:

A Funny Young Fellow Named Tim

1. There once was a fellow named Tim (A)
2. Who ate that lemon he thought was a limb. (A)
3. He fell off a cliff (B)
4. and could like swim (B)