Blank Verse
Blank verse is unrhymed iambic pentameter. William Shakespeare wrote most of his plays in blank verse, but modern poets, including Robert Frost, have also used the form with great success. Iambic pentameter is thought to closely resemble normal speaking patterns.

Exercises XIX:
Read “Mending Wall,” by Robert Frost (GAP, 48). Scan the poem to verify the meter.

1. In the first 11 lines, Frost identifies two entities that don't love walls. What are they?

2. Where is this particular wall (stone fence) located?

3. How does the neighbor view the wall? How does Frost view the wall?

4. What sentence expresses the neighbor's view? What would Frost consider a good reason for erecting a wall?
5. Read lines 32–34 (beginning with “Before”). Explain what the poet is saying. How could erecting a wall hurt someone?

6. Do you agree with Frost or his neighbor? Explain your response.

7. Read Romans 12:18. How might this verse apply to the situation in Frost’s poem?

8. Read Acts 2, focusing on verses 41–47. How might this passage refute the view of Frost’s neighbor?

Writing Activity:

9. Imagine that you are sitting in your bedroom one day, looking out the window. You see that your lifelong friend is busy digging postholes to make a fence between his property and yours. Write 5–10 lines of blank verse to express your feelings.
The Haiku

The haiku is a Japanese poetic form that English-speaking people have adopted. Traditionally, the haiku has three lines of five, seven, and five syllables (seventeen syllables in all). It is a sensory poem, with strong imagery, written in the present tense (happening now). A haiku usually involves nature and, in some metaphorical way, one of the seasons. Often when Japanese haiku are translated, they lose their syllabic structure in the effort to preserve meaning. Here are three haiku that follow the formula:

A giant firefly:
that way, this way, that way, this—
and it passes by.

The sea at springtime.
All day it rises and falls
yes, rises and falls.

Under cherry trees
Soup, the salad, fish and all
Seasoned with petals.

Modern poets are abandoning the syllabic requirements, while keeping some of the other requirements such as present tense and a single image.

Exercise XX:
Read “In a Station of the Metro,” and “L’Art, 1910,” by Ezra Pound (GSP, 49).

1. Pound, in his own words, said that his poem “In a Station of the Metro,” was haiku-like. How is this poem similar to a haiku? How is it different?
2. Is the general tone of “In a Station of the Metro” cheerful or sad? What words make it so?

3. Compare and contrast “L’Art, 1910” with traditional haiku form.

4. To what sense do these two poems appeal? Aside from their sensory appeal, does there seem to be any other meaning that these two poems are attempting to communicate? If so, what is that meaning?

5. Read Psalm 131, which is the shortest Psalm. How is it like a haiku?

6. Aside from the single image, what meaning is communicated through this Psalm?
Writing Activity:

7. Write your own haiku following the traditional structure for lines and syllables. Try to focus on a single image, perhaps what you see around you right now.
The Ballad

The ballad is a *narrative* poem that was told in song. The usual form for a ballad is a series of *quatrain* (4-line stanzas) with the rhyme scheme *abcb* and with alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and trimeter. This meter is also known as common meter or hymnal measure. You have seen it previously in Emily Dickinson’s poems.

**Exercises XXI:**

Read “Sir Patrick Spens” (BLP, 2).

1. How many quatrains does it contain?

2. Mark the accented syllables in the ninth stanza (quatrain).

   **Mak ready, mak ready, my merry men a’!**
   
   **Our gude ship sails the morn.”**
   
   “Now ever alack, my master dear,
   
   **I fear a deadly storm.”**

3. Why did the king want Sir Patrick Spens to sail to Norway?
4. What was Sir Patrick’s reaction to receiving the king’s letter? Why?

5. What happened during the return voyage? What was the fate of the ship and her crew?

6. What personal characteristic did Sir Patrick display? What would you say is the theme of this poem?


7. Note the lines, rhyme scheme, and meter. How does the structure of “The Village Blacksmith” differ from the traditional ballad form? How is it the same?

8. How does the content of this ballad compare or contrast to “Sir Patrick Spens”? 
9. What sort of character does the blacksmith demonstrate? What “lesson” does he teach the people of his town?

10. Read Ecclesiastes 5:18–20. How does this passage compare or contrast to the “lesson” of “The Village Blacksmith”?

11. Read Ecclesiastes 8:2–8. How does Sir Patrick Spens demonstrate the teaching found in this passage?

**Writing Activity:**

12. Quickly read through the entire book of Ecclesiastes, then choose one chapter to focus on and read it again more closely. Write a short poem expressing your thoughts about what you read. For a challenge, try writing your poem as a ballad, using the traditional meter and rhyme scheme, and expressing your thoughts in a narrative form.

**Web Link:**
Longfellow’s poem was apparently written in tribute to a blacksmith named Elihu Burritt who worked in Worcester, Massachusetts. You can read more about the life of Elihu Burritt in the following internet article:

http://www.anvilmag.com/smith/209f2.htm