

Tanka: Contemporary

Exercise: Complete the tanka

how long has it been
since we parted?
(2 lines with something personal)

prairie grasses
all the wild horses grazing
in noon sun
(3 lines. shift with something in nature)

Tanka: Contemporary

Guidelines for Writing Tanka
from Margaret Chula, President
of the Tanka Society of America

1. Five lines. The form for writing English tanka is untitled and unrhymed.
2. Syllable count. When writing in Japanese, it is 5-7-5-7-7 (31 syllables) In English, typical tanka are anywhere between 19-31 syllables.
3. Diction. Use natural English phrasing in each line. Do not end a line with 'a', 'the' or a preposition.
4. Link and shift. Somewhere in your tanka, there should be a shift away from what's been stated in the first few lines. A common shift is from natural to something personal or from something in your life to a seasonal event.
5. Content: The theme, content, subject is wide open, but tanka is lyrical verse and should not be didactic (giving advice, instruction or a moral message). Tanka are not sentences.
6. Last line. The fifth line of a tanka is the most important. It should be at least as long as the second or fourth lines.
7. Minimal punctuation and adjectives.
8. When in a series called tanka strings, the series can be titled.

My examples from prompts

how long has it been
since we parted?
moon eclipse and many orbits
moonlight in shifting phases
fell on other moonstruck lovers

Prairies grasses
all the wild horses grazing
in noon sun
afternoon sun on track stars
racing to finish line

Write a tanka related to a season

April Fools Day
sun-rain-sun-rain
confuses strollers
umbrella open or none
beach umbrellas too soon.

Any topic

space junk orbits
with moon, sun, planets
shiny objects glow
headlights in vast dark
universal traffic jam