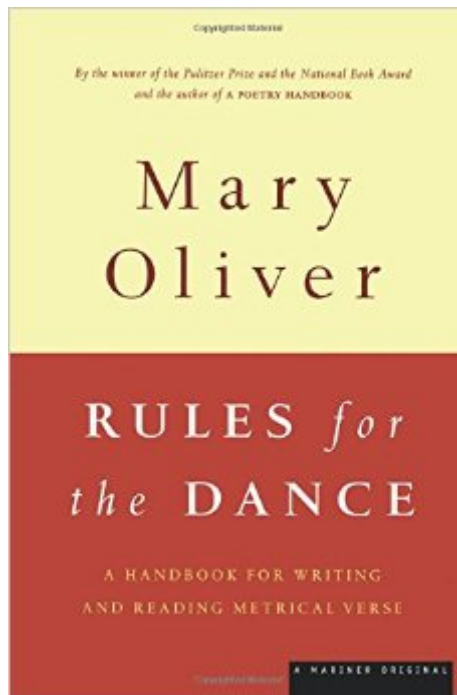


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# Rules For The Dance: A Handbook For Writing And Reading Metrical Verse



## Synopsis

"True ease in writing comes from art, not chance, / As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance," wrote Alexander Pope. "The dance," in the case of Oliver's brief and luminous book, refers to the interwoven pleasures of sound and sense to be found in some of the most celebrated and beautiful poems in the English language, from Shakespeare to Edna St. Vincent Millay to Robert Frost. With a poet's ear and a poet's grace of expression, Oliver shows what makes a metrical poem work - and enables readers, as only she can, to "enter the thudding deeps and the rippling shallows of sound-pleasure and rhythm-pleasure that intensify both the poem's narrative and its ideas."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Mary Oliver brings to this small book all the clarity and economy that characterize her poetry, and produces the most plain-spoken, profound work that I have read on poetry as a conscious craft. The book is divided into five parts. Part One is 12 brief, carefully-examined chapters with titles like "Breath", "Line Length", and "Meter in Non-Metric Verse". Part Two is a single chapter on "Style". Part Three explores scansion for both reader and writer. Part Four is a 2-page statement of the timelessness of poetry. Part Five is a fine little anthology of works studied in the earlier text. This austere, remote poet has written a book that speaks to the reader with great intimacy and passion. To quote from Oliver's envoi: "No poet ever wrote a poem to dishonor life, to compromise high ideals, to scorn religious views, to demean hope or gratitude, to argue against tenderness, to place

rancor before love, or to praise littleness of soul. Not one. Not ever."

This book is really well written and inspirational. It helped me to understand better the purpose of metrical poetry. For a lay person such as myself it's easy to fall into thinking that "rules" can only constrict the emotional possibilities of poems. But, Mary Oliver explains, in practical terms, how meter is a tool to evoke an even greater impact from our words. I would say this book is probably best for those who are new to writing metric poetry. Experienced writers might find it a little superficial. I also have the "Poetry Handbook" by the same author, but I think "Rules for the Dance" is better for the same material and more entertaining. Enjoy!

Dance is a wonderful, succinct explication of metrics. Oliver removes the mystery from meter and makes you want to...well, scan! I've read a few books on this subject, including Pinsky's Fussell's, Kinzie's and some others, but this one is the best introduction. Whether reader or writer of poetry, you'll finish this book with new practical tools of craft and comprehension.

Mary Oliver writes in a readable style with poetic flare about possibly the dullest subject to non-poets on the planet. Her insight into the necessity of understanding metrical verse for writers and readers is long overdue. In an era that produces more poetry than in any other time in history, Oliver's book encourages writers and readers to know the traditions and understand that no poem is written in a vacuum.

Mary Oliver shines in this prose manual on the writing and issues of poetic composition. Her economy of words combines with an easy style to help an utter novice (like me) gain an understanding of the metric and rhyming tools involved. Clarity and suppleness of expression mark this book and I would recommend it to anyone who reads poetry or has an interest in trying their hand at writing. What you may enjoy the most is that Mary does not wander all about the landscape of poetry, but maintains a steady course and uses many pretty little examples to illustrate the concepts. The book is not long but is one of those gems that you will enjoy diving into from time to time for some thoughtful reading on poetics. The author's personality shines through the words - and there is no pretense here, just someone who loves and lives through words. Consider reading her *Wild Geese* if you haven't yet - a stunning beautiful piece of work.

I read this book expecting to learn about metrical poetry: kind of the basics of how they work, how

they are constructed. I didn't expect spiritual and personal growth lessons. Needless to say, I was delighted to be fed on so many different levels. Given Mary Oliver is the author, I shouldn't be surprised..... I also wasn't expecting to be so compelled to try on the metrical form by reading this book yet I am! And the great thing is I am also learning (through practice) the freedom and spiritual side of writing "according to form and rhythm". Highly recommended to poets and anyone who loves a poet or the written word.

Despite being an English lit major, a prolific reader of fiction and non-fiction, and a not too shabby piano player, I had never, until my encounter with Mary Oliver's careful, clear teaching style, understood how metric poetry links together attributes of both music and the written word. 'Hell-o-o-! It's not so difficult to understand,' you say. Oh, but it has been, for me, stuck on the idea that the two arts are completely separate. They're not. In "Rules for the Dance..", Ms. Oliver illustrates how, in metric poetry, the dimensions of sound and rhythm (musicality) and lyrical words (assonance, alliteration, etc..) combine: one reads not only for comprehension of the artful words, but for the added emotional pleasure of hearing them in rhythmic sound patterns - metrics, which she defines in detail- the result being powerful poetry. I now 'get' the 'rules for the dance,' and you will too should you pick up this book with a mind to hear what is being said.

This is an excellent introduction to formal poetry; not just meter, but rhyme, sonics, and traditional forms. You'll learn about substitution, catalectic feet, slant rhymes, and all the other techniques which go into the making of verse. The last part of the book is an anthology which shows how the greatest poets of the English language have applied these concepts to their own writing. All aspiring poets should learn about formal poetry before they even think about writing so-called "free verse." Readers of poetry can benefit from some formal knowledge as well. This book is a very good place to start.

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