

## How to Write a Tribute Poem - By: [Alice Langholt](#)

### The Process

Make a list of the qualities of the special person you wish to include in the poem. What makes the person fun, special or good to be around? What are the special person's talents, great qualities and favorite hobbies? If it's a couple you are honoring, what about them shines as an example of enduring love? How did they meet? What special experiences do they share?

Once the list is formed, you'll begin to see similarities and items that can be grouped together by theme, such as qualities, hobbies or experiences. Organize the list into a few groups that you want to include together.

Create phrases from words or sentences on the organized list. If you wrote "sweet," how can you make that into a phrase? "Kind sweetness," "Sweet demeanor," "Likable and sweet" or "Sweet and caring" are some ideas. Turn as many items on the list into phrases as you can, and feel free to combine the items as needed.

Reorganize phrases into stanzas, and add words if you want to make alternate line endings rhyme. An easy rhyme scheme is A-B-C-B, meaning that the ending words in the second and fourth line rhyme with each other. That is only two rhyming words per four lines, so it's not hard to put together. Use a thesaurus for ideas if you need synonyms. Prepare a strong beginning and a nice thought for the end that sums up the tribute.

### Helpful Notes

A tribute poem doesn't have to be long. Four stanzas of four lines each is usually just right. Add more or less to suit your particular choice. Nor does the poem have to rhyme. In fact, plenty of poems don't rhyme. Use descriptive words, have flowing phrases and organize them into stanzas.

It's the thought that counts. Express a gracious thought that tells specifically why the recipient or recipients of the tribute is special, and you're sure to have your efforts appreciated.

For Vel

I remember...

The shock of flaming red hair.  
Her arrow straight posture.  
The impeccable wardrobe, Burberry.

The stern temperament but, at the same time,  
The quiet interest she'd take in you.  
How in a conversation you felt listened to.

Words...

Educator  
Administrator  
Reader

Things...

Her infamous mac and cheese.  
The way she and Wick would pick out antiques.  
Her love of Pepperidge Farm cookies.

Stories...

Meeting my granddad and Col.  
How they brought her home to their wives.  
Her comparison of marriage to WWII - hilarious.

And how she'd greet you.  
Walking into family gatherings.  
Her gaze would lock in on yours.  
And you'd hear the words you were waiting for,  
But hadn't even realized it.  
"Hello, friend."

Godspeed, Vel. We'll miss you.

### **A Tribute to Chief Joseph (1840?-1904) - BY DUANE NIATUM**

Never reaching the promised land in Canada,  
HIN-MAH-TOO-YAH-LAT-KET:  
"Thunder-rolling-in-the-mountins,"  
the fugitive chief sits in a corner  
of the prison car headed for Oklahoma,  
chained to his warriors,  
a featherless hawk in exile.

He sees out the window  
geese rise from the storm's center  
and knows more men died  
by snow blizzard  
than by cavalry shot.

Still his father's shield  
of Wallowa Valley deer and elk  
flashes in his eyes  
and coyote runs the circles  
and a cricket swallows the dark.

How many songs this elder  
sang to break the cycle  
of cold weather and disease  
his people coughed and breathed  
in this land of drifting ice.

Now sleepless as the door-guard,  
the train rattles like dirt in his teeth,  
straw in his eyes.

Holding rage in the palm of his fist,  
his people's future spirals to red-forest dust,  
leaves his bones on the track,  
his soul in the whistle.\

## **Dr Maya Angelou – His Day is Done – a tribute poem for Nelson Mandela**

His day is done. Is done.  
The news came on the wings of a wind, reluctant to carry its burden.  
Nelson Mandela's day is done.  
The news, expected and still unwelcome, reached us in the United States, and suddenly our world became somber.  
Our skies were leadened.  
His day is done.  
We see you, South African people standing speechless at the slamming of that final door through which no traveler returns.  
Our spirits reach out to you Bantu, Zulu, Xhosa, Boer.  
We think of you and your son of Africa, your father, your one more wonder of the world.  
We send our souls to you as you reflect upon your David armed with a mere stone, facing down the mighty Goliath.  
You are man of strength, Gideon, emerging triumphant.  
Although born into the brutal embrace of Apartheid, scarred by the savage atmosphere of racism, unjustly imprisoned in the bloody maws of South African dungeons.  
Would the man survive? Could the man survive?  
His answer strengthened men and women around the world.  
In the Alamo, in San Antonio, Texas, on the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, in Chicago's Loop, in New Orleans Mardi Gras, in New York City's Times Square, we watched as the hope of Africa sprang through the prison's doors.  
His stupendous heart intact, his gargantuan will hale and hearty.  
He had not been crippled by brutes, nor was his passion for the rights of human beings diminished by twenty-seven years of imprisonment.  
Even here in America, we felt the cool, refreshing breeze of freedom.  
When Nelson Mandela took the seat of Presidency in his country where formerly he was not even allowed to vote we were enlarged by tears of pride  
As we saw Nelson Mandela's former prison guards invited, courteously, by him to watch from the front rows his inauguration.  
We saw him accept the world's award in Norway with the grace and gratitude of the Solon in Ancient Roman Courts, and the confidence of African Chiefs from ancient royal stools.  
No sun outlasts its sunset, but it will rise again and bring the dawn.  
Yes, Mandela's day is done, yet we, his inheritors, will open the gates wider for reconciliation, and we will respond generously to the cries of Blacks and Whites, Asians, Hispanics, the poor who live piteously on the floor of our planet.  
He has offered us understanding.  
We will not withhold forgiveness even from those who do not ask.  
Nelson Mandela's day is done, we confess it in tearful voices, yet we lift our own to say thank you.  
Thank you our Gideon, thank you our David, our great courageous man.  
We will not forget you, we will not dishonor you, we will remember and be glad that you lived among us, that you taught us, and that you loved us all.