



## **Prose and poetry techniques: The rhythms of prose**

People often think of rhythm as a quality of poetry, particularly of rhyming poetry or formal verse. Whilst this is true, you could argue that rhythm is a part of everyday speech, and that even the most ordinary sentence has a musicality of its own. Consider a line like:

I went to the gate, but he'd already gone.

This is a very mundane statement, but it has a lilt to it.

When you write a piece of prose, you sometimes forget that you can play with its sounds. A short piece of prose that changes speed from one paragraph to the next can be exciting to write and read.

### **Short sentences**

Short sentences can speed up a paragraph:

'No!' He said. The vase dropped. 'NO!' Crack. Shards of pot ... Sounds of running feet.  
'Ah, no.'

Here, the exclamation marks increase the sense of urgency.

### **Long sentences**

Long sentences can make a passage move more slowly. This description, dwelling on the details of the smashed pot, changes gear along with the mood:

The vase had shown fearful roe-deer running through a vast, lush, lime-green forest. It had depicted hunters, their bows primed, aiming at the lovely animals, their cruel human eyes meeting liquid deer pupils.

Imagine if a reader read those two paragraphs one after the other, how they would have to speed up and then slow down.

Bear in mind that passages of dialogue tend to move faster than passages of description.