

TANKA LENGTH — THREE STYLES

www.modernenglishtanka.com

Minimalist • Abbreviated • Full Count

For tanka information, see:

APPROACHES TO TANKA FORM BY SYLLABLE COUNT

www.TankaCentral.com

Based on the original Japanese structure of tanka, some tanka are written in English in 31 syllables, as follows, or slightly shorter lines. The standard full count - 5-7-5-7-7 = 31 total

1/1	2/2	3/3	4/4	5/5		
1/6	2/7	3/8	4/9	5/10	6/11	7/12
1/13	2/14	3/15	4/16	5/17		
1/18	2/19	3/20	4/21	5/22	6/23	7/24
1/25	2/26	3/27	4/28	5/29	6/30	7/31

Abbreviated tanka - from 18 to 24 syllables. Arguably, the best English analog of the Japanese original structure in which sound units are more brief than English syllables.

An abbreviated count - 3-5-3-5-5 = 21 total

1/1	2/2	3/3		
1/4	2/5	3/6	4/7	5/8
1/9	2/10	3/11		
1/12	2/13	3/14	4/15	5/16
1/17	2/18	3/19	4/20	5/21

Minimalist tanka - from 10 to 17 syllables. A radically brief tanka, as short as haiku.

Minimalist count - 2-3-2-3-3 = 13 total. Not all tankaists accept such short verses as tanka.

1/1	2/2	
1/3	2/4	3/5
1/6	2/7	
1/8	2/9	3/10
1/11	2/12	3/13

It should be noted that tanka writers, readers, and critics do not all agree on whether there is, or even should be, a standard form for tanka in English. Each of the three styles shown on this handout has its supporters and its detractors. In addition, there are some who appreciate all these styles. When one is actually writing, formulas need to be forgotten— their touch is poisonous to poetry. Rules form the poet—they cannot form a poem.

Minimalist

Abbreviated

Full Count

1	2	3	4	5		
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17		
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

This handout is for educational purposes only. Do **NOT** write poetry by formula—it does not work.