**Rhyming Pattern**

.......The following presentation of Sonnet 18, one of Shakespeare's most famous, will help you visualize the rhyming pattern of the sonnets. I capitalized the last part of each line and typed a letter to the left of the line to indicate the pattern. The meaning of each line appears at right.

**Sonnet XVIII (18)**   
Quatrain 1 (four-line stanza)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **A**  Shall I compare thee to a summer's **DAY**? | If I compared you to a summer day |
| **B**  Thou art more lovely and more temper**ATE**: | I'd have to say you are more beautiful and serene: |
| **A**   Rough winds do shake the darling buds of**MAY**, | By comparison, summer is rough on budding life, |
| **B**   And summer's lease hath all too short a**DATE**: | And doesn't last long either: |

*Comment: In Shakespeare's time, May (Line 3) was considered a summer month.*

Quatrain 2 (four-line stanza)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **C**   Sometime too hot the eye of heaven**SHINES**, | At times the summer sun [heaven's eye] is too hot, |
| **D**   And often is his gold complexion **DIMM'D**; | And at other times clouds dim its brilliance; |
| **C**  And every fair from fair sometime de**CLINES**, | Everything fair in nature becomes less fair from time to time, |
| **D**   By chance or nature's changing course un**TRIMM'D**; | No one can change [trim] nature or chance; |

*Comment:."Every fair" may also refer to every fair woman, who "declines" because of aging or bodily changes.*

Quatrain 3 (four-line stanza)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **E**    But thy eternal summer shall not **FADE** | However, you yourself will not fade |
| **F**    Nor lose possession of that fair thou **OWEST**; | Nor lose ownership of your fairness; |
| **E**    Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his**SHADE**, | Not even death will claim you, |
| **F**    When in eternal lines to time thou **GROWEST**: | Because these lines I write will immortalize you: |

*Couplet (two rhyming lines)*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **G**    So long as men can breathe or eyes can**SEE**, | Your beauty will last as long as men breathe and see, |
| **G**    So long lives this and this gives life to**THEE**. | As Long as this sonnet lives and gives you life. |

As you can see, the rhyme scheme of the sonnet is as follows: First stanza, ABAB; second stanza, CDCD; third stanza, EFEF; and the couplet, GG.    
.......Notice that Shakespeare introduces the main point of the sonnet in the first two lines of Stanza 1: that the young woman’s radiance is greater than the sun's. He then devotes the second two lines of Stanza 1 and all of Stanza 2 to the inferior qualities of the sun. In Stanza 3, he says the young woman’s brilliance will never fade because Sonnet XVIII will keep it alive. He then sums up his thoughts in the ending couplet.