What should a poem look like?
This is a difficult question to answer. With poetry you have the freedom to make your own rules about what your writing ends up being like.

The unique characteristics of poetry include:

- Organising your writing by **lines**. You might like to purposefully start a new line mid-sentence to make your reader interpret your words differently, for example:

  “What happens to a dream deferred?
  Does it dry up
  Like a raisin in the sun?
  Or fester like a sore —
  And then run? …

  Maybe it just sags
  like a heavy load?

  Or does it explode?”

  *Harlem, Langston Hughes*

*Imagine reading that as a single line:* What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? Or fester like a sore and then run? Maybe it just sags like a heavy load? Or does it explode?

- Organising your ideas into **stanzas** instead of paragraphs. Often in poems, this is a group of four lines. Have a look at the poem above and think about how the different stanzas organise the way you interpret the words. Differently to other writing, the way you organise your stanzas is up to you and you can play around with this to be the most effective structure in your mind.

- **‘Condensed’ language and ideas.** You need your poem to communicate a thought in fewer words than you would use in other forms of writing. You should think carefully about every single word you include and try replacing these with other options to see what you think is most effective. Start by thinking about a key idea to base your poem around.

- **Strong use of imagery.** Imagery in poetry refers to any language that "sparks the senses". This could be visual, but could also refer to any of the senses (smell, touch, sound, taste). For example

  "The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
  The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
  Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
  Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains, …

  *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock - T.S. Eliot*