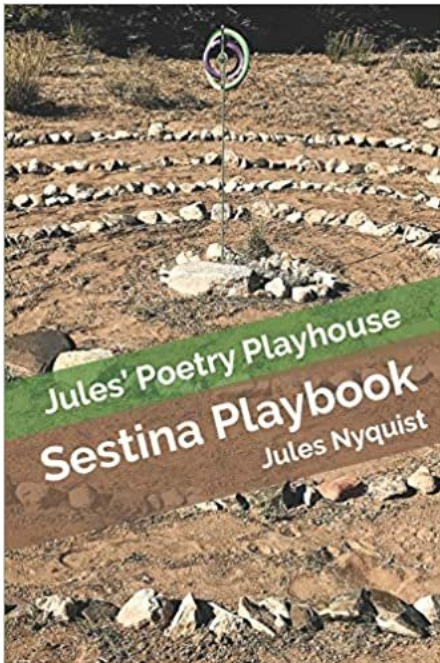


Sestina Sampler for the ABQ NMSPS Chapter March 2021 on line via zoom

Jules Nyquist, instructor jules@poetryplayhouse.com

Jules Nyquist is the founder of Jules' Poetry Playhouse in Placitas, NM, a place for poetry, writing classes, and readings, in the spirit of play. She took her MFA in Writing and Literature from Bennington College, VT. Her latest book *Atomic Paradise*, winner of the 2021 NM/AZ Book Award for New Mexico History, is an exploration of growing up in the Cold War and living in the Land of Enchantment surrounded by nuclear secrets. **Jules' handbook on sestina writing, *The Sestina Playbook*, winner of the 2021 NM/AZ Book Award for Activity Book, instructs students on writing their own sestinas.** Her other award-winning books are *Zozobra Poems*, 2019 NM/AZ Book Award winner in philosophy and *Homesick*, then 2018 NM/AZ Book Award winner in poetry. She is co-editor of the Poets Speak Anthology series co-published by Poetry Playhouse Publications and Beatlick Press. More info at our new website: <https://www.poetryplayhouse.com/>



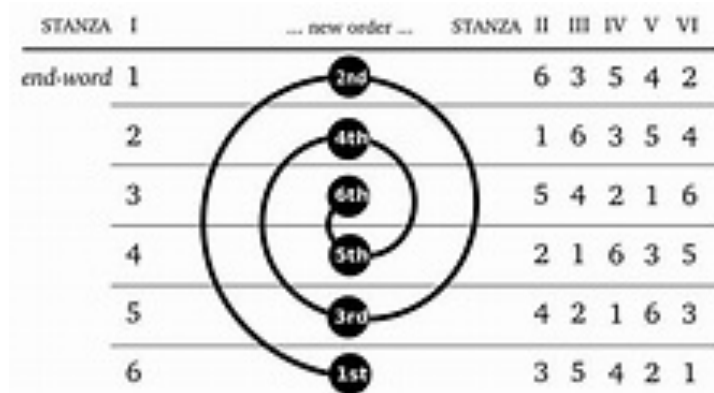
Welcome! I hope you have fun with us in writing sestinas!

Want the book? [Order your signed copy here!](https://www.poetryplayhouse.com/shop-art-books/p/sestina-playbook-7p5tp) (10% off through Valentine's Day and for all NMSPS members)

<https://www.poetryplayhouse.com/shop-art-books/p/sestina-playbook-7p5tp>



The Sestina Pattern



1 2 3 4 5 6 – Stanza A
 6 1 5 2 4 3 – Stanza B
 3 6 4 1 2 5 – Stanza C
 5 3 2 6 1 4 – Stanza D
 4 5 1 3 6 2 – Stanza E
 2 4 6 5 3 1 – Stanza F
 (6 2) (1 4) (5 3) – Envoi,
 or the “grand finale”

Sestina, by Elizabeth Bishop <https://staff.washington.edu/rmcnamar/383/bishop.html>

We will be reading this poem in class. What are the end words?

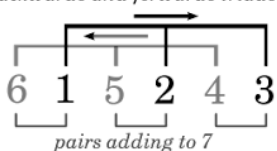
Number the end words 1 – 6

Number the lines of the sestina pattern.

*The sestina is a form
like a thin sheet of flame,
folding and infolding
upon itself.....*
Ezra Pound

Write your first stanza (from The Sestina Playbook)

backwards and forwards triads



Six words are chosen and occur as end words in each line, and repeat themselves in a set order in each stanza. The last word of the end line of the one stanza is repeated as the last word of the first line of the next stanza, technically rhyming with themselves.

There are a couple of different ways to start a sestina. Some poets like to choose their six words in advance and write the first stanza using those words. Others may want to write a stanza with six lines and then see what those end words turn out to be, and use those end words as the teleutons for the sestina. Whatever way you choose, experiment! You'll have many exercises to practice your sestina writing. The first recorded sestina words are said to be: *soul, chamber, nail, uncle, rod, enter*, recorded by our first sestina troubadour, Arnaut Daniel, written around 1200 AD.

Let's start with Jules' sestina *School*:

School

or will clouds
cluster
to cover
her &
the blue wind
gather at her

shoulders she
reads Erica Jong under cloudy
skies, wind
popping clusters
of couples together &
under cover

of trees over
muted her
professors lecture &

she'll never get clouds
of science bluster
to unwind

her windy
classmates, undercover
crushes fish cluster
in schools girls unlike her
all clouded
with mascara &
faces to the winding
long road of Beatles cloud
bearing songs to cover
scratched heart, she
clusters

by herself, clustering
couples under &
below trees under her
favorite branches water wind
around her cover
homeroom clouds

endless cluster of names her
body cloudy &
small covering wild wind

What are the six end words?
What are the teleuton variations?

Teleutons: clouds/cloudy/clouded, cluster/clusters/clustering, cover/over/bluster, &, wind/windy/unwind/winding, her/she



Exercise #1A (from the Sestina Playbook)
Write your first stanza

1. Think of six words you'd like to use as teleutons. Use them to write a first stanza.
2. Now, write another stanza on the same subject, not paying attention to the end words. Where would you put the line breaks? What words would you use as teleutons?

Compare your two versions. What do you like best? You are free to choose your teleutons from here. Be sure these are the ones you want, as your form will progress in the sestina pattern from this point forward.

Exercise #1B (from the Sestina Playbook)

Write your sestina

1 2 3 4 5 6 – Stanza A
 6 1 5 2 4 3 – Stanza B
 3 6 4 1 2 5 – Stanza C
 5 3 2 6 1 4 – Stanza D
 4 5 1 3 6 2 – Stanza E
 2 4 6 5 3 1 – Stanza F
 (6 2) (1 4) (5 3) – Envoi, or the "grand finale"

Using your first stanza, from the first part of this exercise, write it out labeling each line with the end words assigned a number. I have used my poem *School* as an example. Use YOUR first stanza when you fill in the blanks.

clouds	1
cluster	2
cover	3
&	4
wind	5
her	6

Now you have numbered your teleutons (end words). Repeat the end words for the remaining five stanzas. I like to take a blank sheet of paper and write ONLY the end words out, repeating the pattern. This is my framework for the rest of the poem.

6 1 5 2 4 3 – Stanza B

she	6
cloudy	1
wind	5
clusters	2
&	4
cover	3

3 6 4 1 2 5 – Stanza C

over	3
her	6
&	4

clouds	1
bluster	2
unwind`	5

5 3 2 6 1 4 – Stanza D

windy	5
undercover	3
cluster	2
her	6
clouded	1
&	4

4 5 1 3 6 2 – Stanza E

&	4
winding	5
cloud	1
cover	3
she	6
clusters	2

2 4 6 5 3 1 – Stanza F

clustering	2
&	4
her	6
wind	5
cover	3
clouds	1

(6 2) (1 4) (5 3) – Envoi (any order)
in this poem I used cluster 2, her 6
cloudy, 1 &, 4
covering, 3 wind, 5

If things don't work out as planned, that's okay. Sometimes a poem isn't meant to be a sestina. Even if it isn't finished, you'll have some word combinations that you may not have come up with, which may work for the poem in another form.

Choosing your teleutons

There can be a trick to choosing words that have potential for variations. What words make the best teleutons? If a word can be spelled or used in more than one way, it can be easier to work with. Common words such as their/there/they're or two/too/to have a lot of possibilities. Don't overlook common words such as "the" or "and." Variations such as fast/breakfast add dimension. Another language can be used for the same word, such as dog/perro.

Sestina Variations

Tritina – read pgs 80-83 in Sestina [Playbook](#)
review Jules' poems: Featheredge and Mating Rituals

Half Sestina

This is a sestina with 6 line stanzas and the full sestina form – cut short after 3 stanzas. It has a 3 line envoi.

Double Sestina

This is the grand master of sestinas! (p. 83, [Sestina Playbook](#))

Double Sestina pattern in Fiction

[Sestina Playbook](#) – p. 84 –

Jules Nyquist – [Atomic Paradise](#) – **Decaying nuclear bomb double sestina** where all the end words are **'bomb'**

#

More sestinas to explore – further reading outside of this class

Farm Implements and Rutabagas in a Landscape by John Ashbery <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/16189>

Brewed Sestina by Miriam Sagan <https://miriamswell.wordpress.com/2020/02/13/upcoming-at-vivo-gallery-poem-by-miriam-sagan-art-by-ann-lasser/>

Sestina: Here in Katmandu by Donald Justice
<https://allpoetry.com/Sestina:--Here-in-Katmandu>

A Miracle for Breakfast by Elizabeth Bishop
<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-miracle-for-breakfast/>

James Cummins and David Lehman Defeat the Masked Man
<https://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/jim-cummins-and-david-lehman-defeat-the-masked-man>

The Shrinking Lonesome Sestina by Miller Williams (line length)
<https://apoemaday.tumblr.com/post/166293615115/the-shrinking-lonesome-sestina>
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/miller-williams>

Sestina: Writing by Kim Addonizio <https://www.rattle.com/sestina-writing-by-kim-addonizio/>