

Tense

Written both in present and in past tense

Subject matter

Autobiographical prose, travel journal, slice of life, memory, dream short sketch of a person, place, event, object

Traditional topics: life as a journey, love affairs, illness, human concerns & experiences

Point of View

Written in first person (everything seen through the author's eyes—I), third person (he/she), or first person plural (we).

Tone

Consistent, sets a mood, often interrupted by the haiku

Sensory Power

Uses sensory images, concrete details, no abstractions

Focus

One or two elements

Language

Uses language to suit the subject matter and mood (colloquial, formal, dialect)

Length

Varies from very brief (1-2 sentences) with one haiku, to long prose entries with interspersed haiku, to memoir-length works

Styles

Haiku/prose

Prose/haiku

Haiku/prose/haiku

Prose/haiku/prose/haiku/prose/haiku etc.

Prose in Haibun

Tells the story

Gives information, defines the theme

Creates a mood through tone

Provides a background to spotlight the haiku

Haiku in Haibun

Moves the story forward

Takes the narrative in another direction

Adds insight or another dimension to the prose

Resolves the conflict in an unpredictable way, or questions the resolution of the prose.

Prose is the narrative and haiku is the revelation or the reaction.

TIPS ON WRITING HAIBUN

- Don't accept the first haiku that comes to you after writing the prose. Find a word or image in the prose to play off of
- Avoid the linear in the capping haiku—take a right angle turn. Haiku should link to but not repeat what the prose has said.
- Prose best if kept to a single theme with sensory detail, haiku crystallizes the experience
- Use symbolism in your haibun to deepen the emotional impact
- End with a surprise, not a narrative resolution
- Often the haiku is contained in the last sentence of the prose, waiting to be transformed.