

The Rules of the Game

The background of the slide is decorated with various abstract geometric shapes. In the top right, there is a blue circle. Below it, a green line forms a right-angled triangle pointing right. To the left of this, a blue circle is positioned. Further down, a large orange semi-circle is visible. In the bottom right corner, there is a green square outline. Several yellow dashed lines of varying lengths are scattered across the right side of the slide. A large orange circle is located at the bottom center.

In this video we will:

- Meet a French poet
- Discover a unique group of writers
- Find out how a poem can be like a game
- Write a poem – anywhere!

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Frédéric Forte: The Rules of the Game

Part 1

From Wales to Paris
and back

PLANEFAIRPWLLGWYNGYLLIOGRANTHWYLLIO



OULIPO

Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle
Workshop of Potential Literature

Questions:

1. How did Raymond Queneau fit
100,000,000,000,000
poems into one book? Can you say this
number in French and English?
2. What rule did Georges Perec use for
writing his most famous novel?
3. What games does Frédéric compare
writing with?
4. Why do some writers like to use special
rules for writing?



Extra activity

Georges Perec wrote a novel without using the letter 'e'

Can you write a full sentence in English without using the letter 'e'?

Did it make you think of something you would not have said without the rule?



Extra-extra activity

Can you write a correct sentence in French that does not use the letter 'e'? If you think this is tricky, imagine writing a whole novel following this rule! Here are some of Perec's examples:

Anton Voyl n'arrivait pas à dormir.

Son pouls battait trop fort.

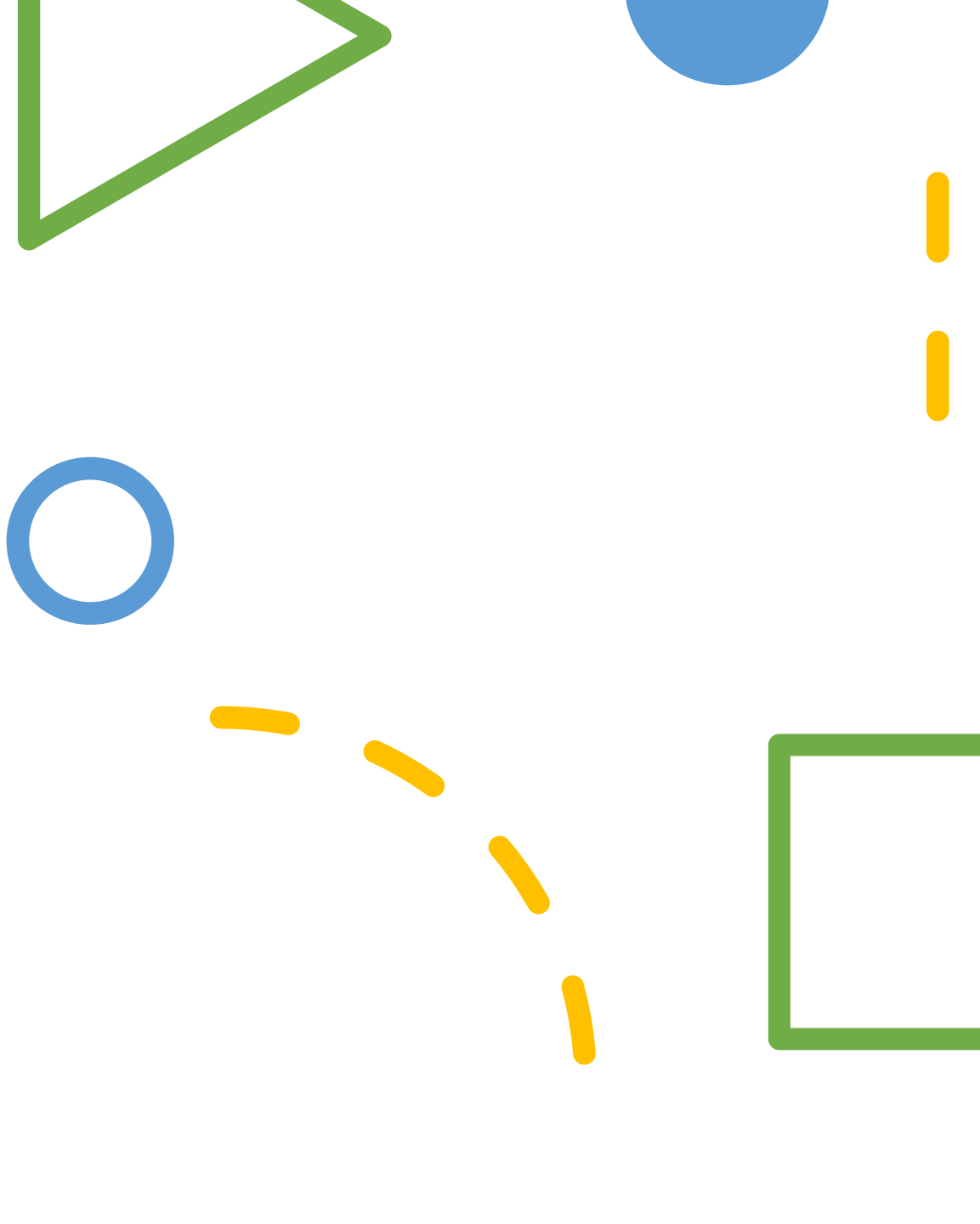
Il a disparu.

Why is it so difficult to write in French without using the letter 'e'?

As well as all the words that are already spelled with an 'e', an 'e' is often used to show the feminine version of certain words, especially adjectives:

un jardin **rond**

une table **ronde**



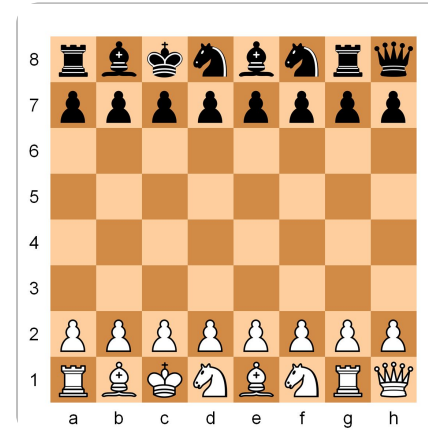
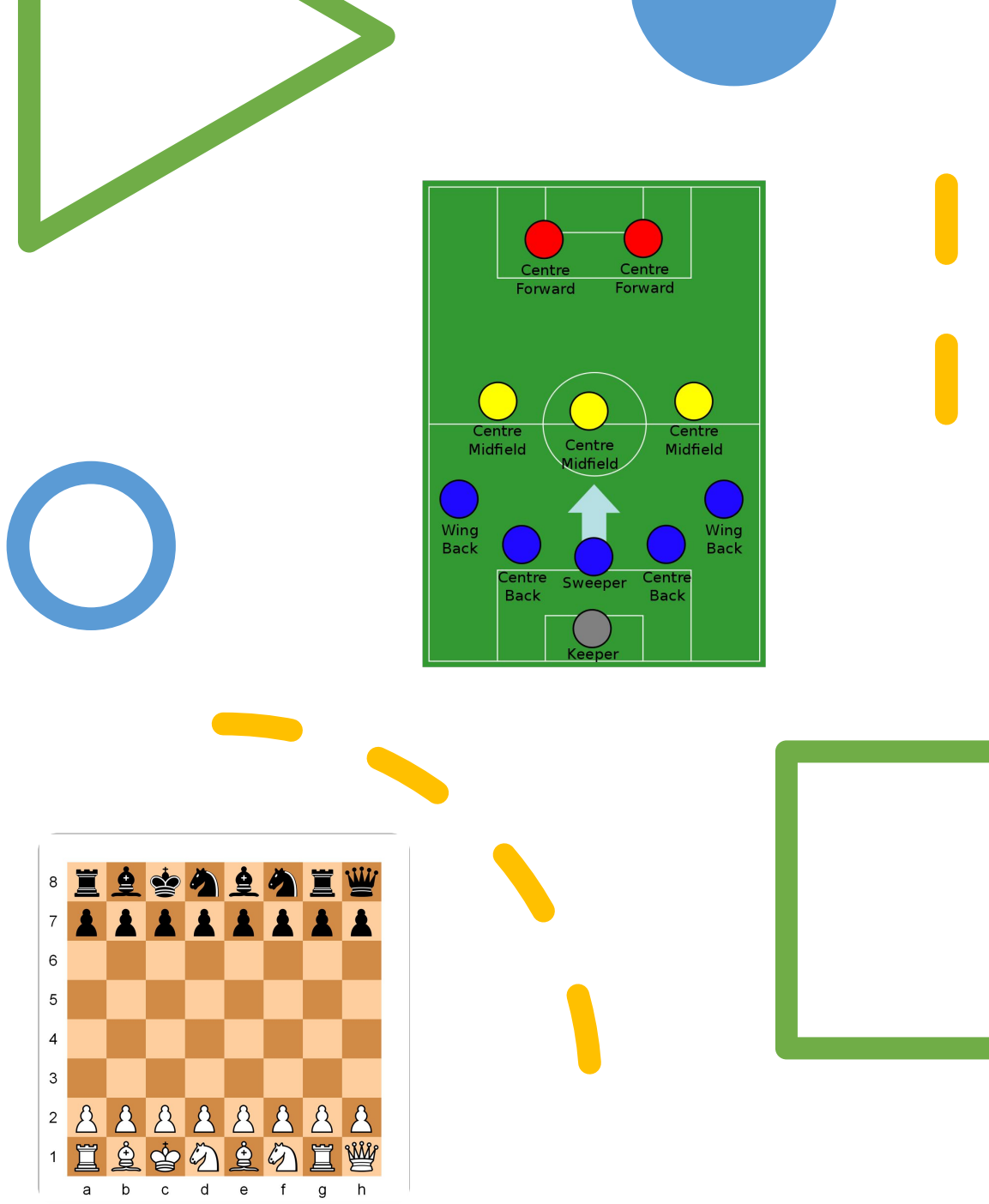
Discussion:

Do all games have rules?

Are the rules of languages like the rules of games?

If you can make up your own rules, are they still rules?

What is a rule?



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Part 2

Inventing rules



Raymond Queneau invented many of his own rules for poem-games. One of them is called a 'quennet' when it's translated into English, because it's a similar shape to a sonnet but condensed. It is named after him.



Enfants gris	Aigles purs	Cailles chantantes
	Choses épicènes	
Orgues sonnantes	Amours trébuchantes	Délices tremblantes
	Vocables scalènes	
Noms propres	Prénoms transparents	Surnoms illégitimes
	Vies parallèles	
	Sous la mousse	
	s'énroulent	
	les glomériss	
	tandis	
	que sous l'orme	
	poussent	
	les épices	
Orgues chantantes	Amours sonnantes	Cailles tremblantes
	Voyelles actuelles	

This is the form invented by Raymond Queneau, so you can see how it looks on the page.

(Raymond Queneau, *Morale Élémentaire*, 1975)

Philip Terry used this invented form to write his own versions in English, and he called them quennets, after Raymond Queneau.

Most of the lines are made with an adjective and a noun.

Still pool	Colourful sails	Lip of mussel
	Vapour trail	
Blue shell	Squashed beetle	Razor shell
	Pool shadow	
Yellow gorse	Salty shore	White butterfly
	Still pool	
	Sunlight	
	on	
	water	
	Mother of pearl	
	driftwood	
	shingle	
	distant laughter	
Colourful sails	Blue mussel	Still shadow
	Vapour trail	

Pocket Quennet

Frédéric Forte has made his own even shorter version of the quennet, a *pocket quennet*.

It's a poem you can write wherever you are, whatever you're thinking about, small enough to fit in your pocket.



Lointain suspendu Fantôme tenace
 Vitre
Points purs Noir noir
 Vite

Mon reflet là
ne parle pas
observe ce
plus moi que moi

Train fantastique Gare plantée
 Là

Suspended distance Insistent ghost
 Window
Pure points Black black
 Window

My reflection
there says nothing
observes this
me more than me

Fantastical train Grounded station
 There

Chaussures neuves Peine animale
Rumination
Questions inopportunes Réponses alambiquées
Stand-by

Le matériel
l'immatériel
moi j'm'en tamponne
j'joue du trombone

Exemple concret Foi mauvaise
Flou

New shoes Animal pain
Rumination
Awkward questions Convoluted answers
Stand-by

Material
immaterial
don't give a hoot
I play the flute

Concrete example Bad faith
Blurred

Café express Livre irlandais
Table
Temps isolé Esprit lâché
Lest

Hier peut-être
ç'aura été
pareil
autrement

Temps cyclique Listes programmatiques
Jours

Espresso coffee Irish book
Table
Alone time Unleashed mind
Weight

Yesterday
perhaps it would
have been the same
otherwise

Cyclical time Ordered lists
Days

Grrrrr! entêtants *Poum!* entêtés
Idée
Jeu *clic!* Mur *crac!*
Bête

Je tourne en rond
je tourne en rond
je tourne en
rond je tourne

Grrrrr! clic! *Poum! crac!*
Bon

Heady *Grrrrr!* Headstrong *Boom!*
Idea
Click! game *Crack!* wall
Idiot

I'm going round
I'm going round
I'm going
round I'm going

Grrrrr! click! *Boom! crack!*
Good

Inimigo público Humor jocoso
« Sexta-Feira »
Inglês técnico Família política
« crash test dummies »

Contrairement
aux apparences
je ne parle
pas portugais

Governo sombra Ministros obscuros
Gabinete

Inimigo público Humor jocoso
" Sexta-Feira "
Inglês técnico Família política
" crash test dummies "

Contrary to
appearances
I don't
speak Portuguese

Governo sombra Ministros obscuros
Gabinete

Shape and sound

Frédéric says that these poems are made 'for the ear and for the eye'.

1. They have a shape on the page. Can you draw it?
2. Read one of the poems aloud. Can you hear the rhythm in the way the words are arranged?

Why are some of the sounds translated?

Grrrrr

Grrrrr

(same word but a different sound)

Boum

Boom

(but could be 'bang' in English)

Clic

Click

Crac

Crack

What other sound words (onomatopoeic words) do you know in French, Welsh or English?



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Part 3

Writing your own
pocket-sized poem



Here's the pattern for you to try your own:

Adjective Noun	Adjective Noun
	Word
Adjective Noun	Adjective Noun
	Word

Four short lines
(like this)
of one to four
syllables

Adjective Noun	Adjective Noun
	Word

You can be
a different YOU
in every poem!