Form of the Villanelle:

A1 (refrain)

B

A2 (refrain)

A

B

A1 (refrain)

A

B

A2 (refrain)

A

B

A1 (refrain)

A

B

A2 (refrain)

A

B

A1

A2 (refrain)

The poet can choose the meter, but a standard in English is iambic pentameter, five “feet” of two syllables, unaccented-accented. “Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.”

The key thing is to find a couplet that can be sustained and developed as the poem works itself out.

# *Dylan Thomas, “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night”*

“Addressed to the poet’s father as he approached blindness and death. The relevant aspect of the relationship was Thomas’s profound respect for his father’s uncompromising independence of mind, now tamed by illness. In the face of strong emotion, the poet sets himself the task of mastering it in the difficult form of the villanelle. Five tercets are followed by a quatrain, with the first and last line of the stanza repeated alternately as the last line of the subsequent stanzas and gathered into a couplet at the end of the quatrain. And all this on only two rhymes. Thomas further compounds his difficulty by having each line contain 10 syllables”.

Dylan Thomas: Selected PoemsEdited by Walford Davies, JM Dent & Sons Ltd, London, 1974 pp 131-33