

Poetry Terms: Brief Definitions

Alliteration: The repetition of identical consonant sounds, most often the sounds beginning words, in close proximity. Example: pensive poets, nattering nabobs of negativism.

Allusion: Unacknowledged reference and quotations that authors assume their readers will recognize.

Anaphora: Repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of a line throughout a work or the section of a work.

Assonance: The repetition of identical vowel sounds in different words in close proximity. Example: deep green sea.

Couplet: two successive rhyming lines. Couplets end the pattern of a Shakespearean sonnet.

Connotation: an idea or feeling that a word invokes in addition to its literal or primary meaning

Denotation: the literal or primary meaning of a word, in contrast to the feelings or ideas that the word suggests.

Diction: Diction is usually used to describe the level of formality that a speaker uses.

- Diction (formal or high): Proper, elevated, elaborate, and often polysyllabic language. This type of language used to be thought the only type suitable for poetry
- Neutral or middle diction: Correct language characterized by directness and simplicity.
- Diction (informal or low): Relaxed, conversational and familiar language.

Dramatic monologue: A type of poem, derived from the theater, in which a speaker addresses an internal listener or the reader. In some dramatic monologues, especially those by Robert Browning, the speaker may reveal his personality in unexpected and unflattering ways.

End-stopped line: A line ending in a full pause, usually indicated with a period or semicolon.

Enjambment (or enjambement): A line having no end punctuation but running over to the next line.

Foot (prosody): A measured combination of heavy and light stresses. The numbers of feet are given below. monometer (1 foot) dimeter (2 feet) trimeter (3 feet) tetrameter (4 feet) pentameter (5 feet) hexameter (6 feet) heptameter or septenary (7 feet)

Hyperbole (overstatement) and litotes (understatement): Hyperbole is exaggeration for effect; litotes is understatement for effect, often used for irony.

Iambic pentameter: Iamb (iambic): an unstressed stressed foot. The most natural and common kind of meter in English; it elevates speech to poetry.

Image: Images are references that trigger the mind to fuse together memories of sight (visual), sounds (auditory), tastes (gustatory), smells (olfactory), and sensations of touch (tactile). Imagery refers to images throughout a work or throughout the works of a writer or group of writers.

Internal rhyme: An exact rhyme (rather than rhyming vowel sounds, as with assonance) within a line of poetry

Metaphor: A comparison between two unlike things, this describes one thing as if it were something else. Does not use "like" or "as" for the comparison (see **simile**).

Meter: The number of feet within a line of traditional verse. Example: iambic pentameter.

Onomatopoeia. A blending of consonant and vowel sounds designed to imitate or suggest the activity being described. Example: buzz, slurp.

Personification: Attributing human characteristics to nonhuman things or abstractions.

Rhyme: The repetition of identical concluding syllables in different words, most often at the ends of lines. Example: June--moon.

- **Double rhyme or trochaic rhyme:** rhyming words of two syllables in which the first syllable is accented (flower, shower)
- **Triple rhyme or dactylic rhyme:** Rhyming words of three or more syllables in which any syllable but the last is accented. Example: Macavity/gravity/depravity
- **Eye rhyme:** Words that seem to rhyme because they are spelled identically but pronounced differently. Example: bear/fear, dough/cough/through/bough
- **Slant rhyme:** A near rhyme in which the concluding consonant sounds are identical but not the vowels. Example: sun/noon, should/food, slim/ham.
- **Rhyme scheme:** The pattern of rhyme, usually indicated by assigning a letter of the alphabet to each rhyme at the end of a line of poetry.

Shakespearean sonnet: A fourteen-line poem written in iambic pentameter, composed of three quatrains and a couplet rhyming abab cdcd efef gg.

Simile. A direct comparison between two dissimilar things; uses "like" or "as" to state the terms of the comparison.

Sonnet: A closed form consisting of fourteen lines of rhyming iambic pentameter.

Stanza: A group of poetic lines corresponding to paragraphs in prose; the meters and rhymes are usually repeating or systematic.

Syntax: Word order and sentence structure.