

## Poetic Terms to Know

**Alliteration:** Repeated consonant sounds at the beginning of a series of words. This device uses sound to catch the reader's attention. "I kicked cold coffee coloured puddles" is an alliteration because of the repeating "ck" sound.

**Allusion:** A reference in one piece of literature to something from another piece of literature. Allusions can also be references to person/events/places in history, religion, or myth.

**Assonance:** Repeating vowel sounds in the middle of words. This device also uses sound to catch the reader's attention. This is a subtle device for which you have to listen carefully. Twinkle twinkle little star is an example of assonance because of the repeating short "i" sound.

**Cliché:** A phrase, line or expression that has been so overused, it is boring and commonplace, such as "It was a dark and stormy night" or "Don't judge a book by its cover."

**Connotation:** The unspoken, unwritten series of associations made with a particular word. For example, the word "home," depending on how it is used, might connote warmth and family; whereas "house" lacks those associations. Often, words are referred to as having negative or positive connotations to them.

**Consonance:** Repeating consonant sounds in the middle of words. This device also uses sound to catch the reader's attention. This is a subtle device, although it is less subtle than assonance. If elephants laugh carefully, it is because they are afraid is an 17 example of consonance with the repeating "f" sound. Notice that the 'ph', 'gh' and 'f' letter patterns all make the "f" sound.

**Colloquial Language:** The informal language of conversation (not acceptable when writing essays and reports) that often makes a character seem more "real" and believable. Words such as "blab", "okay", "check it out", and "surf the web" are colloquial. Slang can be a form of colloquial language.

**Denotation:** The literal meaning of the word that a person would find in the dictionary.

**Diction:** Choice and use of words in speech or writing—a style of speaking or writing results from a deliberate choice and arrangement of words in a story/essay. Each writer uses diction appropriate to his or her purpose, subject, essay type, and style.

**Extended Metaphor:** If a metaphor is a direct comparison between two dissimilar items (see below), an extended metaphor is a longer version of the same thing. In an extended metaphor, the comparison is stretched through an entire stanza or poem, often by multiple comparisons of unlike objects or ideas.

**Figurative Language:** The imaginative language that makes a poem rich to a reader. Figurative language often relies on comparison devices like simile, metaphor, and personification to make the point. Figurative language is the opposite of literal language.

**Hyperbole:** An extreme exaggeration intended for effect; not to be taken literally. Some examples include: “My backpack weighs a ton” ; “I’m grounded for life.”

**Idiom:** A phrase that can’t be translated literally into another language because the meaning isn’t the same as the words that make up the phrase. There are thousands of idioms in English. Some examples include: “it is raining cats and dogs”; “flat broke”; “going to hell in a hand-basket”; and “head in the clouds.”

**Image:** A single mental picture that the poem creates in the reader’s mind.

**Imagery:** Poets create pictures in the reader’s mind that appeal to the sense of sight; they also create descriptions to appeal to the other four senses. This collection of appeals to the five senses is called the imagery of the poem. Also: the collection and/or pattern of images in a poem.

**Jargon:** Words or expressions developed for use within a specific group (e.g. technology, science, education, sports) that are often meaningless to people outside of that group. For example: megabytes, stat, hat trick.

**Juxtaposition:** The deliberate placing together of two or more related thoughts, images or other elements that emphasize each other through their side-by-side placement. Juxtaposition is a form of contrast.

**Literal language:** The literal meaning of the poem, which ignores imagery, symbolism, figurative language and any imagination on the part of the poet or the reader. Literal language is the opposite of figurative language.

**Metaphor:** A direct comparison between two dissimilar items. She is a monster is a metaphor comparing a girl to a monster.

**Metre (meter):** The regular beat of a poem. There are different kinds of meters, depending on the syllable pattern in the line of poetry. Different syllable patterns, and different numbers of patterns, have different names. For example: dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, hexameter, heptameter, and octameter.

**Mood:** The emotion of the poem. The atmosphere. The predominant feeling created by or in the poem, usually through word choice or description. The feelings created by the poem in the reader; mood is best discovered through careful consideration of the images presented by the poem, and thinking about what feelings those images prompt. For example: if the “rain weeps”, the mood is sad; if the “rain dances”, the mood is happy. Mood and tone are not the same.

**Onomatopoeia:** Words that sound like what they mean are called onomatopoeia. “Buzz”, “hiss”, “splash” are typical examples of this sound device. Onomatopoeia is also known as imitative harmony.

**Oxymoron:** An oxymoron is a pair of single word opposites placed side by side for dramatic effect. A contradiction in terms. For example, “alone together” or “a little big” or “jumbo shrimp”.

**Paradox:** An apparently contradictory statement that, despite the contradiction, has an element of truth in it. “No one goes to that restaurant because it’s always so busy” is a paradoxical statement.

**Parody:** A parody is a mockery of another piece of literature; it copies the style and voice, and sometimes language of the original for comedic effect.

**Personification:** A comparison between a non-human item and a human so that the non-human item is given human characteristics. “The trees stretched their arms to the sky” is a personification because the trees are described as if they are people stretching.

**Pun:** This is a play on words in which a word or phrase can be taken to mean more than one thing.

**Refrain:** The chorus of a ballad, or a repeating set of words or lines, is the refrain of a poem. Refrains add to the musical quality of a poem and make them more song-like. This is interesting because the ancestral origin of poetry was song.

**Repetition:** Deliberately repeated words, sounds, phrases, or whole stanzas. Repetition is used to make a point in the poem.

**Rhyme:** When sounds match at the end of lines of poetry, they rhyme (technically, it is end-rhyme). The examples below in “rhyme scheme” and “couplet” demonstrate this.

**Rhyme Scheme:** The pattern of rhyme in a poem, indicated with letters of the alphabet. To decide on a rhyme scheme, you assign a letter of the alphabet to all rhyming words at the ends of lines of poetry, starting with the letter “a”. When you run out of one rhyme sound, you start with the next letter of the alphabet. For example, the following is an example of an aabb rhyme scheme (star, are, high, sky):  
Twinkle, twinkle, little star  
How I wonder what you are  
Up above the world so high  
Like a diamond in the sky

**Rhythm:** A pattern of sound in a poem; it may be a regular or irregular pattern. Rhythm is the musical beat of the poem, and some poems are more musical than others.

**Satire:** A style of writing that has the goal of mocking or scorning an individual, an institution, or society as a whole.

**Simile:** A comparison between two dissimilar items using “like” or “as” to make the comparison. The stars are like diamonds in the sky is a simile, comparing stars to diamonds.

**Slang:** Another word for casual, colloquial language, which is often the form everyday speech takes: “I was, like, ya know, so INTO that movie!” or “My bad” are examples of slang, or colloquial, expressions.

**Speaker:** The voice used by a poet to speak a poem. The speaker is often a created identity (a made up self) and should not automatically be equated with the author. The speaker is not the same as the author—poets and storytellers make things up (fiction). The speaker does not necessarily reflect the author’s personal voice; however, authors sometimes use speakers as masks to protect themselves when they are writing about controversial ideas and/or criticizing politics or religion.

**Stanza:** A paragraph of writing in a poem.

**Symbol:** A symbol has two levels of meaning: a literal level and a figurative level. Objects, characters, events and settings can all be symbolic in that they represent something else beyond themselves. E.g. the dove is literally a bird, but it has become a universal symbol of peace.

**Theme:** The message of the story, stated in one or two complete sentences. When a person describes a story's theme, the person is describing what can be learned about life and/or people from the story. Theme is so important, it is often described as the fourth element of the short story. Sometimes theme is confused with "the moral" of the story. Also, do not confuse theme with 'the topic' which is the subject a piece of writing is about. For example, the topic of Scooby Doo is solving mysteries, yet one theme of Scooby Doo is that good triumphs over evil.

**Tone:** The narrator's attitude toward the subject of the poem and, sometimes, toward the reader of the poem. Tone is NOT THE SAME AS MOOD, although the two can overlap.

**Understatement:** The opposite of hyperbole. Understatement achieves its effect through stating less than what is necessary. For example, after Mercutio is fatally stabbed, he claims it is "just a scratch."

**Voice:** Voice is the personality of the writing, the specific characteristics that make the writing unique. The voice of a piece of writing is assessed in terms of style and/or tone. Every writer/narrator/speaker has a unique and recognizable voice.

### TYPES OF POEMS

**Ballad:** a narrative poem (tells a story) that is often dramatic or emotional. They are often written in quatrains (4 lines per stanza), have repeated refrains, are written in rhythmic verse, and may be sung.

**Blank verse:** poetry that has regular meter (rhythm) but lacks rhyme.

**Free verse:** poetry that does not contain rhyme or meter (rhythm).

**Epic:** a very long poem which tells the story of a hero or a significant event. It is not typically meant to be sung.

**Lyric poetry:** short poems which express a single feeling, mood, or opinion. (Elegies, odes, and sonnets are all forms of lyric poems).

**Elegy:** a sad poem that expresses sorrow (usually over someone who has died).

**Ode:** a poem that expresses deep feeling or admiration for something (such as a person).

**Sonnet:** a poem with 14 lines of iambic pentameter and a fixed rhyme scheme.