

Poetry Terms

Accent: when a syllable is given a greater amount of force in speaking than is given to another; also called a *stress*

Allegory: a narrative in either verse or prose in which characters, events, and in some cases setting represent abstract concepts apart from the literal meaning of the story

Alliteration: the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words

Allusion: an indirect reference to a person place or thing—fictitious, historical, or actual

Anapest: a metrical foot consisting of three syllables, two unaccented followed by one accented

Anaphora: the repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of several successive clauses, verses, or paragraphs

Apostrophe: a figure of speech in which a character or narrator directly addresses an abstract concept, an inanimate object, or a person who is not present

Assonance: the repetition of similar vowel sounds in stressed syllables or words

Ballad: a narrative song or poem passed on orally

Blank verse: verse written in unrhymed iambic pentameter

Caesura: a light but definite pause within a line of poetry

Chiasmus: a rhetorical device in which words or phrases initially presented are restated in reverse order; for example, “do not live to eat, but eat to live.”

Conceit: an elaborate, extended, and often surprising comparison made between two very dissimilar things that exhibits the author’s ingenuity and cleverness

Concrete poem: a poem in which the visual arrangement of the letters and words suggests its meaning

Connotation: the emotional associations that surround a word, as opposed to its *denotation*

Consonance: the repetition of consonant sounds that are preceded by a different vowel

Couplet: two successive lines of verse that have the same meter and in many cases rhyme

Dactyl: a three-syllable metrical foot consisting of a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables

Denotation: the literal meaning of a words—its “dictionary definition” that does not take into account any other emotions or ideas the reader may associate with it

Dialect: variety of language spoken by a social group in a certain locality that differs from the standard speech in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical form

Diction: the author’s choice of words and phrases; involves both *denotation* and *connotation*

Didactic poetry: poetry whose purpose is to teach the reader some kind of lesson

Elegy: a lament or sadly meditative poem, sometimes written on the occasion of a death; usually formal in language and structure and solemn or melancholy in tone

End rhyme: rhyming words at the ends of lines of poetry

End stopped line: a line poetry that contains a complete thought, usually ending with a period, colon, or semicolon, and therefore ends in a full pause; the opposite of a *run-on line*

Enjambment: the employment of *run-on lines* of poetry, whereby the meaning of a statement is carried from one line to the next without pause

Epic: a long narrative poem describing the deeds of a great hero, great adventures, and matters of national or global significance and sometimes featuring supernatural forces

Epigram: a short poem that ends in a witty or ingenious turn of thought, to which the rest of the composition is intended to lead up

Epigraph: a motto or quotation at the beginning of a book, poem, or chapter that usually indicates its theme

Eye rhyme: rhyme in which two or more words look the same and are spelled similarly but have different pronunciations, for example, "have" and "grave"; also called *sight rhyme*

Feminine ending: an unaccented syllable at the end of a line of poetry

Feminine rhyme: a rhyme in which the similarity of sound is in both of the last two syllables; for example, "weary" and "dreary"

Figurative language: language used in a non-literal way; figurative language uses figures of speech such as similes, metaphors, personification, hyperbole, synecdoche, etc.

Foot: a division of verse consisting of a number of syllables, one of which has the principal stress; the basic unit of meter in poetry

Free verse: poetry that does not have a fixed meter or rhyme scheme

Haiku: a Japanese poetic form that is comprised of three unrhymed lines of five, seven, and five syllables respectively

Half-rhyme: two words or syllables that have approximately the same vowel sounds but not exactly; also called *near, off, partial, or slant rhyme*

Heroic couplet: two rhymed lines of iambic pentameter

Hyperbole: a figure of speech in which exaggeration or overstatement is used for special effect

Iamb: a metrical foot consisting of two syllables, the first unaccented, the second accented

Iambic pentameter: poetry consisting of a line of five *iamb*s; the most common verse line in English poetry; a meter especially familiar because it occurs in all *blank verse, heroic couplets, and sonnets*

Imagery: the details in a work of literature that appeal to the sense of the reader, lend the work vividness, and tend to arouse an emotional response in the reader

Internal rhyme: rhyme that occurs within a line of poetry

Litotes: a type of understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by the negation of its opposite; for example, "This is no small problem."

Lyric: a poem that expresses an emotion or state of mind, creating a single, highly personal impression upon the reader

Masculine ending: an accented syllable that ends a line of verse

Masculine rhyme: a rhyme of one-syllable words ("jail" and "bail") or of stressed final syllables, (e.g., "divorce" and "remorse")

Metaphor: a figure of speech that makes a direct comparison (without the use of a qualifier such as "like" or "as") between two things which are basically dissimilar but share something in common

Meter: a regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in poetry

Metonymy: a figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated; for example, the use of the word "Washington" to mean the U.S. government

Mood: the overall atmosphere or prevailing emotional aura of a literary work

Narrative: a story or an account of an event or a series of events; narratives can be told in either prose or poetry, and they may be either fiction or nonfiction

Ode: a formal, ceremonious, and complexly organized form of lyric poetry; usually rather long and often commemorate an important event or celebration such as a marriage or public ceremony

Onomatopoeia: a word or words that imitate the sound of the thing spoken of; for example, "zoom," "whiz," and "crash"

Oxymoron: a phrase that combines two seemingly contradictory elements; for example, "living death," "dear enemy," and "wise fool."

Paradox: a statement that appears to be self-contradictory but nonetheless has valid meaning

Parody: a humorous imitation of serious writing; parodies will often imitate the style of a writer for a humorous effect

Pastoral: a conventional form of lyric poetry that presents an idealized view of rural life

Personification: a figure of speech in which abstractions, ideas, inanimate objects, or animals are endowed with human qualities

Pun: a play on words with similar sounds or on a single word with different meanings

Pyrrhic: a metrical foot of two unaccented syllables

Quatrain: a stanza of four lines of verse

Rhyme: the exact repetition of sounds in at least the last accented syllable of two or more words

Rhyme scheme: the ordered patterning of end-rhymes in a metrical composition

Run-on line: a line of verse that does not express a complete thought, but rather, the thought continues on to the next line; there is no pause at the end of the run-on line; opposite of *end-stopped line*

Scansion: the process of demarking the metrical feet of a poem and marking the accented and unaccented symbols to indicate the *meter* of a poem

Sestet: a six-line unit of verse that can stand alone as a stanza or as the concluding part of an Italian (Petrarchan) sonnet

Sestina: a complicated verse form comprised of six *sestets* and a concluding *tercet*, with the end words of each line of the first sestet being repeated in the subsequent stanzas

Simile: a figure of speech that compares two essentially unlike things to highlight something they have in common; this comparison is indicated by a connective such as "like," "as," or "than"

Sonnet: a fourteen-line lyric poem, written in iambic pentameter and with a set rhyme scheme

Spondee: a metrical foot consisting of two accented syllables

Stanza: a group of lines that are set off and form a division in a poem; a sequence of lines that form a metrical, tonal, or topic unit

Synecdoche: a figure of speech in which a part of something is used to represent the whole; the whole of something is used to represent a part; the specific is used for the general; the general is used for the specific; or the material of an object is used in place of the object; for example, "hired hands"

Synesthesia: the manner of speaking about one sense in terms of another; for example, "She wore a screaming red skirt."

Tone: the author's attitude, whether stated or implied, about his or her subject matter and toward the audience

Trochee: a metrical foot consisting of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable

Villanelle: a poetic form that usually is comprised of five tercets, each rhyming *aba*, and a concluding quatrain, rhyming *abaa*, with the first and third lines of the first tercet alternating as refrains throughout the poem