

Poetry Terms

The following list of terms and definitions will assist you in your explication of poetry. Some of the terms on this list apply to prose as well as poetry. For particularly difficult or complex terms, examples have been provided along with a definition.

For your convenience, the terms have been divided according to type:

- Types/Forms of Poetry
- Terms of Poetic Structure & Meter
- Poetic Sound Devices
- Figurative Language
- Terms Associated with Imagery
- Misc. Terms to Aid Analysis of Poetry

Please note that you are responsible for knowing variations on the words included in this list. For example, you should know that *lyrical* would be the adjectival form of the word *lyric*.

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Types/Forms of Poetry

ballada song-like narrative poem (often with a refrain or “chorus”)
dramatic monologue	.....speaker “thinking aloud” in a poem, expressing ideas or thoughts without reply
elegy	.....a lyric poem of mourning; often (but not always) the arrangement approximates the stages of mourning: (1) lamentation (2) praise (3) acceptance. If something is mournful or similar to an elegy, it is called <i>elegiac</i> .
epic	.....a long narrative poem that relates great deeds or the journey of a larger-than-life hero who embodies the values of a particular society (the word <i>epic</i> can also be used as an adjective to describe something that is epic-like)
epitaph	.....a brief inscription on a gravestone OR a commemorative poem written as if it were for that purpose
free verse	.....unrhymed poetry that is not written in a particular rhythmic pattern (“no rules”)
idyll	.....either a short poem depicting a peaceful, idealized country scene, or a long poem that tells a story about heroic deeds or extraordinary events set in the distant past
limerick	.....a humorous, rhyming 5-line poem; the rhyme scheme is usually a-a-b-b-a.. The first, second, and fifth lines are three metrical feet; the third and fourth are two metrical feet.
lyric	.....verse of a subjective, personal nature that expresses abstract ideas, perceptions, and feelings rather than telling a story; often rhyming, but not always
narrative	.....a poem that tells a story
ode	.....a stately, serious, and elaborate lyrical poem, often praising or offering commentary on a person, place, or object; classical odes occur in three parts
pastoral	.....a poem that depicts rural life in a peaceful, idealized way
sonnet	.....a 14-line lyric poem written in iambic pentameter
Shakespearean (English)	three quatrains and a couplet: abab cdcd efef gg
Spenserian (English)	three quatrains and a couplet: abab bcbe cdcd ee
Petrarchan (Italian)	an octave and a sestet: abbaabba cdecde (final tercet may have varied rhyme)
modified	many poets have written similar variations on the sonnet forms above
sestina	.....six 6-line stanzas followed by a tercet (39 lines total); the same set of six words ends the lines of each of the six-line stanzas, but in a different order each time; these six words then appear in the tercet as well
spiritual	.....a folk song, often of a religious theme
terza rima	.....a three-line stanzas in chain rhyme of aba, bcb, cdc, ded; there is no limit to the number of lines
villanelle	.....a poetic form with no set meter, but a repetition of entire lines; the rhyme-and-refrain pattern of the villanelle can be schematized as A ¹ bA ² abA ¹ abA ² abA ¹ abA ² abA ¹ A ²

Terms of Poetic Structure & Meter

- scansionthe process of analyzing a poem's meter and rhythm
- rhythmthe "beat" of the poem, as achieved by arrangement of syllables
- meterarrangement of accented and unaccented syllables in a line of poetry
- foota basic repeated sequence of meter comprised of two or more accented (´) or unaccented (˘) syllables
- anapestic3-syllable foot: ˘ ˘ ´ (ex: intervene) noun form: an anapest
- trochaic2-syllable foot: ´ ˘ (ex: topsy) noun form: a trochee
- iambic2-syllable foot: ˘ ´ (ex: destroy) noun form: an iamb
- dactylic3-syllable foot: ´ ˘ ˘ (ex: merrily) noun form: a dactyl
- spondaic2 stressed syllables: ´ ´ (not used as primary meter) noun form: a spondee
- pyrrhic2 unstressed syllables: ˘ ˘ (not used as primary meter) AKA: a dibrach
- line lengththe number of feet in a line of poetry
- monometerone foot
- dimetertwo feet:
- trimeterthree feet
- tetrameterfour feet
- pentameterfive feet
- hexametersix feet
- heptameterseven feet
- octametereight feet
- blank verseunrhymed iambic pentameter (meant to mimic actual speech patterns)
- alexandrineline of poetry that has 12 syllables (often iambic)
- end-stoppeda line of poetry in which the reader is meant to pause at the end of the line
- enjambmenta line of poetry which is not end-stopped, in which the thought continues into the next line without any pause
- inversiona change in what would be considered "normal" syntax; AKA "Yoda-Speak." For example: "Happy I am that you came here today."
- stanzaa grouping of lines of poetry
- couplettwo lines
- rhyming couplettwo lines with end rhyme
- heroic couplettwo lines of rhyming iambic pentameter
- tercetthree lines
- quatrainfour lines
- sestetsix lines
- octaveeight lines
- cantoa division, or "chapter" in a lengthy poem
- caesuraa purposeful pause in a poem, sometimes mid-line

- parallelism.....repetition of the syntactical structure of a line or phrase
- refraina repeating stanza or line
- internal rhyme.....rhyme that occurs within the middle of lines of poetry
- end rhyme.....rhyme that occurs at the end of lines of poetry; denoted with letters of the alphabet to signify which lines rhyme (ex: abba abba)
- approximate rhyme.....“almost” rhyming; AKA near rhyme or slant rhyme
- feminine rhyme.....end rhyme that occurs on a final unstressed syllable (ex: va´por / pa´per)
- masculine rhyme.....end rhyme that occurs on a final stressed syllable (ex: re hearse´ / so terse´)

Poetic Sound Devices

- alliteration.....repetition of *initial* consonant sounds
- assonance.....repetition of internal vowel sounds
- consonance.....repetition of *final* consonant sounds
- onomatopoeia.....words that sound like the idea or thing they represent
- euphonylines of poetry that are “musically pleasant” to the ear
- cacophonylines of poetry that are “musically unpleasant” or discordant to the ear (see “dissonance” under “Other Terms...”)
- rhythmsee above in “Terms of Poetic Structure & Meter”
- rhymesee all variations of rhyme above in “Terms of Poetic Structure & Meter”

Figurative Language

- figurative languagewords or phrases that are not intended to be interpreted literally
- antithesis.....words or phrases with opposite ideas or meanings are balanced against each other.
Example: "To err is human, to forgive, divine." (Alexander Pope)
- apostrophe.....spoken to a person who is absent or imaginary, or to an object or abstract idea
- conceitan elaborate extended metaphor (the entire poem compares one thing to another)
- euphemismsubstitution of a mild or less negative word or phrase for a harsh or blunt one, as in the use of "passed away" or “no longer with us” instead of "dead"; “with child” or “in the family way” instead of “pregnant”
- dysphemismopposite of euphemism, the usage of intentionally harsh or vulgar phrasing instead of a polite one; usually used for humor or satire; for example, “croak” or “kick the bucket” instead of “die”; “knocked up” instead of “pregnant”
- hyperbole.....a deliberate and purposeful exaggeration
- idioman expression whose meaning cannot be inferred from the meanings of the words that make it up; meaning is culturally-dependent

- litotesa positive is stated by negating its opposite; e.g. *no small victory, not a bad idea, not unhappy*; a form of understatement
- metaphora comparison of two seemingly unlike things that does not use comparative words
- metonymy.....one word is substituted for another with which it is closely associated. For example, in the expression *The pen is mightier than the sword*, the word *pen* is used for "the written word," and *sword* is used for "military power."
- oxymorona brief phrase that combines two paradoxical ideas or things; examples from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: "Why then, O brawling love! O loving hate! O heavy lightness, serious vanity; Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms! Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health!" (1.1).
- personification.....nonhuman things or abstract ideas are given human attributes
- puna play on the meanings and/or sounds of words
- similea comparison of two seemingly unlike things that uses comparative words (*such, like, as*, etc.)
- symbolanything (word, phrase, person, action, etc.) that represents itself but also stands for a more abstract idea
- synecdoche.....a part is used to designate the whole or the whole is used to designate a part. For example, the phrase "all hands on deck" means "all men on deck," not just their hands. The reverse situation, in which the whole is used for a part, occurs in the sentence "The U.S. beat Russia in the final game," where the *U.S.* and *Russia* stand for "the U.S. team" and "the Russian team," respectively.
- synesthesia.....see "Terms Associated with Imagery"
- zeugmaoccurs when a word (usually a verb) has the same grammatical relation to two or more other words, but a different meaning in each application; Examples: "Mr. Pickwick took his hat and his leave" or "Both the tea and the sympathy were lukewarm."

Terms Associated with Imagery

- imagerydescriptive language that relies on at least one of the five senses
- visualsight, vision (shape, size, color, mass, etc.)
- aural/auditorysound, hearing
- tactile/texturaltouch, feel (weight, surface texture, etc.)
- olfactory.....scent, aroma, smell, stench
- oral/gustatorytaste, flavor
- synesthesia.....one sensory experience is described in terms of another sensory experience; a form of figurative language; for example: hearing colors or seeing sounds

Other Terms Associated with the Analysis of Poetry

allusion	.....an <u>indirect</u> reference to a well-known work of art, literary work, person, place, event, song, etc.
analogy	.....another word for “comparison”; saying something is <i>analogous</i> to something means that it is similar to, or easily compared with, that thing
cliché	.....a word, phrase, or idea that has been used so much over time that it has lost any impact it may have originally carried; can be used as a noun (“That title is a cliché”) or as an adjective (“That is a cliché title.”); as an adjective it is synonymous with <i>hackneyed</i> or <i>trite</i>
colloquial	.....informal speech or writing, not generally accepted in formal or academic speech or writing; noun form is <i>colloquialism</i> ; similar to <i>vernacular</i>
connotations	.....implied additional meaning(s) of a word or phrase, beyond the actual definition; includes all of the associations carried by the word
denotation	.....the actual definition of a word or phrase
diction	.....word choice; phrasing
dissonance	.....harsh or disagreeable combination of sounds; sometimes figuratively used to refer to a harsh combination of ideas, as well
doggerel	.....derogatory term for “bad” poetry; short pieces of verse without obvious style and little artistic merit; clumsy verse
epiphany	.....a sudden moment of understanding or enlightenment
irony	.....general term for literary techniques that involve differences between appearance and reality, expectation and result, or meaning and intention
verbal irony	.....what is said (or written) is more-or-less the opposite of what is actually meant
situational irony	.....what occurs defies the expectations of the reader, or a character
dramatic irony	.....occurs when the reader knows something that one or more of the characters does not know
juxtaposition	.....normally unassociated ideas, words, or phrases are placed near one another for a purposeful effect
mock	.....“making fun of”; for example, a mock epic is an epic poem written as a spoof on actual epic poems – it uses all of the conventions of the epic but does so in a sarcastic or ironic way
paradox	.....occurs when an apparent contradiction contains truth; for example: “Youth is wasted on the young.”; something that is contradictory but carries truth can be called <i>paradoxical</i>
parody	.....a form of satire that imitates another work of art in order to ridicule it
pathos	.....a writer or speaker's attempt to inspire an emotional reaction in an audience-- usually a deep feeling of suffering, or sorrow
point-of-view	.....the vantage from which a poem is narrated

rhetorical shift.....a shift in a poem's tone or style

sarcasmverbal irony used to show disapproval, to mock or to scorn something

satirea literary tone or work used to make fun of human vice or weakness often with the hope or intent of changing or correcting the behavior

sensory language.....AKA imagery

speakerthe voice "telling" the poem

syntaxthe order/arrangement of words in a line of poetry (or in a sentence)

themethe main idea(s) expressed in a work of poetry

tonethe poet's attitude as conveyed through the poem

vernaculareveryday spoken language; similar to *colloquial*