

Terms for Poetry

Poets: artists more sensitive to beauty and ugliness, the stars and the dirt, the dignity and the dishonesty, the love and the hate than you and I. Thus they can make us see and feel and taste and smell things vividly. They order the chaos for us; they pull out of reality only those things that will give us insight. Their business is humankind, you and I. Poets are in love with words using them in new and exciting ways so they can clue us in on their sense of reality. Words are their tools.

1. The poem in general

A poem can be narrative (tell a story), dramatic (like a little play), or lyric (express a feeling or idea). These types may be combined in a single poem or found exclusively in individual poems.

Tone—the attitude, mood and feeling of a poem. This is governed by the topic, which then influences the choice of rhythm and meter, figurative language and sound patterns.

Theme—the purpose of message of a work.

2. Form

A poem has a certain shape on a page, a printed shape that reflects its message and/or aural shape. This specific form can be very rigid or restricted (look at concrete poetry) for example, “Easter Wings” or, at least apparently, rather free.

A stanza (sometimes called a verse) is similar to a paragraph in prose: it is a recurrent grouping of two or more lines of a poem in terms of length, metrical form, and often rhyme-scheme (the pattern or sequence of rhyme).

- a. couplet: two lines of verse with similar end rhymes

Aunt Jennifer’s fingers fluttering through the wool	A
Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.	A
The massive weight of Uncle’s wedding band	B
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer’s hand.	B

- b. quatrain: four line unit of verse. A quatrain may be unrhymed, but it usually follows a rhyme scheme like abba or abcb. The lines below rhyme abab (alternating rhyme).

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments	A
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme;	B
But you shall shine more bright in these contents	A
Than upswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time.	B

- c. free verse: made up of rhythmical lines varying in length, with no fixed metrical pattern, and usually unrhymed. Pattern is achieved through repetition and parallel grammatical structure.

- d. sonnet: has been and still is widely used as a poetic form. It has fourteen lines of iambic pentameter, with a rhyme pattern usually conforming to one of two common patterns: Italian (Petrarchian) or English (Shakespearean). Italian: 8 lines rhyming in the pattern abba abba and 6 lines rhyming cdc cdc. English: 3 quatrains rhyming abab cdcd efef and a couplet rhyming gg. The distinguishing mark of a sonnet is the correspondence between its structure and the development of its thought. For example:

Italian: 8 lines (abba abba) = generalization (picture, idea, situation)

6 lines (cdc cdc) = comment or conclusion
 English: 4 lines , 3 times (abab) (cdcd) (efef) = three related pictures or
 examples or aspects of an idea
 2 lines (gg) = conclusion or comment (couplet)

3 Meter

Rhythmic pattern in poetry. They rhythmic unit within a line is called a foot and contains at least one stressed syllable. English poetry has six standard types of feet:

- a. iambic (∪ /): the most common metrical measure—one unaccented (or weakly stressed) syllable followed by one accented (or more strongly stressed syllable).
 Many words are iambs: to-day, be-cause
 That time of year thou mayst in me behold
- b. trochaic (/ ∪): the reverse of iambic, this form is not used for sustained lines but is often used to break up the regularity of an iambic line. Many words are trochees: won-der, dou-ble, tru-ant
 Bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet birds sang
- c. anapestic (∪ ∪ /): two unaccented (or weakly stressed) syllables followed by one accented syllable. Such a pattern tends to become sing-song rather quickly. Few single words are anapests.
 Like a ghost from the tomb/ I arise and unbuild it again.
- d. dactylic (/ ∪ ∪): the reverse of the anapestic. Many words are dactyls: man-u-script, cer-tain-ly, yes-ter-day
- d. spondee (/ /): two strong stresses.
 Out! Out! Brief candle
- e. pyrrhic (∪ ∪): two unaccented or weak stresses.
 Begin with the new play

The number of feet in a line is the other element of meter

A monometer line has 1 foot, a dimeter line has 2, a trimeter 3, a tetrameter 4, a pentameter has 5, a hexameter 6, a heptameter 7, an octameter 8. Most English verse consists of tetrameter and pentameter lines, with some use of trimeter. Other lengths are rarely used.

Rhythm is the occurrence of stressed and unstressed syllables. A poet varies the rhythm by using enjambment (a poetic line that does not have a pause at its end so that its sense carries over to the next line) and by varying the position of the caesura or pause in a given line. End-stopped lines are those that have a strong pause (usually marked by a comma or by end punctuation at the end of the line.

Abbess: Thirty-three years have I but gone in travail
 Of you, my sons, and till this present hour
 My heavy burden ne-er delivered.
 The Duke, my husband, and my children both,
 And you the calendars of their nativity,
 Go to a gossips' feast, and so with me;
 After so long grief, such nativity! (CEV.i.400-06)

In the above quotation, lines 1 and 2 are enjambment; the remaining lines are end-stopped.

4. Rhyme

This is the close association of sounds, especially in accented syllables occurring at corresponding positions in two or more lines of verse. Rhyme is recognized and determined by your ear, not your eye.

- a. end-rhyme: rhyme that occurs at the end of the line. Most rhymed verse is based on this.
- b. internal rhyme: rhyme that occurs within a line
- c. perfect rhyme: rhyme that is absolute and in the accented syllables, such as “behold/cold.” It is usually based on vowel/consonant patterns, e.g., ran/ban and differs from imperfect rhyme where the rhyme takes place in the unaccented syllables, as in “forming” and “foaming,” and feminine rhyme “stating/mating,” where both accented and unaccented syllables rhyme.
- d. slant rhyme (near rhyme): rhyme dependant on vowels or on sight, rather than on perfect rhyme, e.g., food/good

5. Other Devices

Good poets keep rhyme and meter from becoming overbearing and singsong by employing certain devices. They don't make each line an end-stopped one (where grammar and sense reach completion at the end of the line). Rather, they use enjambment, running the structure and sense of one line into the next. These other devices are also techniques for getting their message across.

- a. alliteration: the repetition of identical sounds at the beginning of successive or closely associated words or syllables (and also sounds repeated within words). These are usually consonant sounds but may be vowel sounds.
ex. “When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrances of things past” (Sonnet 30)
- b. assonance: the repetition of vowel sounds, especially in stressed syllables or at the beginning of words.
- c. onomatopoeia: words whose pronunciation suggest their meaning, e.g., “hiss,” “whirr,” “buzz.”
- d. consonance: the matching of non-initial consonant sounds.
ex. “Twig by twig the night-entangled trees.”
- e. euphony: the grouping of easily pronounced syllables that give fluency and ease to the lines.
- f. cacophony: harsh, unpleasant sounds achieved by grouping of difficult to pronounce consonants. Slows down the rhythm.

6. Figurative language

Various used of language in order to achieve special effects and add to the meaning.

- a. allegory: a work in which persons and event parallel each other. It is a technique for aligning imaginative constructs, mythological or poetic, with conceptual or moral models; for example, a garden scene could possibly be an allegory for the Garden of Eden with all its moral significance.
- b. allusion: a meaningful reference, either direct or indirect to a person, place, event, or other literary work. It taps the knowledge and memory of the reader/viewer and, thereby, builds an intellectual and emotional response from associations already existing in the reader's mind. Some allusions are clear to

most readers; some are topical or dependant on knowledge few readers have and must be accompanied by footnotes.

- c. analogy: drawing a similarity in some respect between things that are otherwise unlike. Frequently based on metaphor and simile, symbols and images. Frequently used to explain the unfamiliar by the familiar, for example, when a camera is compared by analogy to the human eye or the heart to a pump. Metaphors and similes are sometimes extended into analogies.
- d. metaphor: treats something as though it were something else. It helps us picture a general idea. When Shakespeare wrote:
That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs, which shake against the cold. . . .
he compares loneliness and old age to a tree in winter through metaphor.
- e. simile: a metaphor containing *like*, *as*, or *as if*. She swims *like* a fish, *as if* she were a fish or *as* a fish swims.
- f. conceit: a kind of extended metaphor involving startling or unlikely comparisons, for example, the metaphysical poet John Donne likens two lovers' souls to a compass (a geometric compass) in that however far he roams from the his loved one, ultimately, he will return to her.
- g. apostrophe: addressing something directly as though it were a listening person.
- h. personification: giving human characteristics to abstractions, things or animals, e.g., time's cruel hands.
- i. hyperbole: exaggeration used to heighten the effect of something or, often, to achieve a comic effect as in "I've told you a thousand times!"
- j. understatement: the opposite of hyperbole, in which something represented as less than it in fact is. Both hyperbole and understatement are a form of irony.
- k. image: the creation in words of sensory stimulations; images can appeal to all our senses and can deepen our perception and relate to the theme.
- l. paradox: an apparently untrue or self-contradictory statement or circumstance that proves true upon reflection or when examined in another light, for example, Wordsworth's "the child is father of the man."
- m. oxymoron: a type of paradox that expresses opposing terms into unified compactness "icy heat."
- n. symbol: something that is itself and also stands for or suggest something else. The river in Huckleberry Finn is literally the Mississippi River but also symbolizes the flow of life and experience. Thus, symbol is an object or an image that evokes a concrete reality that, in turn, evokes other levels of meaning. The symbol does **not**, however, "stand for" the meaning, but the meaning is suggested by the object or image.