

## Poetic Devices

### (Basic Ingredients for Your Poetry Pantry)

**Alliteration:** The repetition of consonant sounds at the beginnings of two or more words. Example: **B**ad **B**oy; **C**ute **C**ut; **L**emon **L**ime; **L**ovely **L**anguage. Generally, the alliterative words are in close proximity to each other, but not always.

**Allusion:** A brief, intentional reference to a historical, literary, mythic, or religious person, place, or event.

**Anthromorphism:** A form of personification in which human qualities are attributed to anything inhuman, usually a god, an animal, an object or a concept.

**Assonance:** The repetition of vowel sounds without repeating consonants. Example: **bowing cow, windy din, sleeping sheep.**

**Blank verse:** Unrhyming iambic pentameter, also called heroic verse.

**Cacophony:** Harsh, discordant sounds, often the result of repetition and combination of consonants within a group of words used to express energy or mimic mood.

**Caesura:** A stop or pause...often marked by punctuation or by a grammatical boundary, such as a phrase or a clause.

**Connotation:** The figurative meaning of a word.

**Denotation:** The literal dictionary meaning of a word.

**Dissonance:** A disruption of harmonic sounds or rhythms, usually an intentional harsh collection of sounds rather than the unpleasantness of individual words. It means moving over from the end of one line to the beginning of the next line without the use of terminal punctuation.

**Ekphrasis:** “Description” in Greek. An ekphrastic poem is a vivid description of a scene, or more commonly, a work of art. Through the imaginative of narrating and reflection on the “action” of a painting or sculpture, the poet may amplify and expand its meaning. An example is “Ode to a Grecian Urn” by John Keats.

**End-stopped:** A line of poetry ending at a grammatical boundary or break—such as a dash or closing parenthesis—or with punctuation such as a colon, a semicolon, or a period.

**Free verse** (also known as *vers libre*): Nonrhyming lines that closely follow the natural rhythms of speech. A regular pattern of sound or rhythm may emerge in free verse lines, but the poet does not adhere to a metrical plan in their composition.

**Haiku (or hokku):** A Japanese form most often composed, in English versions, of three unrhymed lines of five, seven, and five syllables. A haiku often features an image, or a pair of images, meant to depict the essence of a specific moment in time.

In its original Japanese form, the haiku is often divided into 17 mora (a Japanese unit of syllable weight) and arranged in a single vertical line. However, in English there is no exact equivalent to the mora unit. As a result, in English and other languages, haikus are most frequently adapted into three lines of verse, usually unrhymed, composed of five, seven, and five syllables, adding up to seventeen syllables total. It usually contains a seasonal element and a turning point.

**Hyperbole:** A figure of speech composed of a striking exaggeration. Example:

*He had to do a million jobs before he could come out to play.*

**Imagery:** The author's use of figuratively descriptive language in order to help the reader understand the poem. Imagery often employs the five senses: taste, touch, smell, sight, sound. Example: *She fumbled for the light switch. The room was velvety-dark, no light, no movement to guide her into it.*

**Irony:** As a literary device, irony implies a distance between what is said and what is meant. Dramatic or situational irony involves a contrast between reality and a character's intentions or ideals.

**Line Break:** A line break is a poetic device that is used at the end of a line and the beginning of the next line in a poem. When traditional punctuation shows up at the end of the line, it creates a line break. A line break that does not possess traditional punctuation at the end of the line is known as enjambment.

**Metaphor:** A comparison using two words without using the words: "like", "as", "as if" or "than". Example: *Her heart is ice-cold.*

**Neologism:** A newly coined word. Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" is filled with them including "slithy" and "gimble".

**Onomatopoeia:** A figure of speech in which the sound of the word imitates its sense. Example: Snap! Crackle! Pop!

**Oxymoron:** A figure of speech that brings together contradictory words for effect, such as "jumbo shrimp" and "deafening silence".

**Palindrome:** A word, phrase, or sentence that reads the same backward and forward: Example: "Civic" and "level" are palindromes.

**Persona:** The speaker of the poem. Sometimes, it may be the poet, but do not assume so. Pay attention to see if the poem is written in first person or second person. Sometimes, a poem may be written in second person: (you), but this is very rarely done.

**Personification:** A figure of speech in which the poet describes and abstraction, a thing, or a nonhuman form as if it were a person. Example: John Donne’s “Death, be not proud”.

**Quatrain:** A four-line stanza.

**Rhyme:** The repetition of syllables, typically at the end of a line of verse. Exact rhyme occurs when the rhymed words share the same sounds. Example: *The rain in Spain/stays mainly on the plain*.

**End rhyme**, the most common type, is the rhyming of the final syllables of a line. Eye rhymes only when spelled, not when pronounced. Example: “through” and “rough”.

**Internal rhyme** is rhyme within a single line of verse, when a word from the middle of the line is rhymed with a word at the end of the line.

**Simile:** A comparison made with “as”, “as if”, “like” or “than”. Example: *Her heart is as cold as a glacier*.

**Stanza:** A grouping of lines separated from others in a poem.

**Tanka:** A Japanese poetic form comprised of five lines with 5, 7, 5, 7, and 7 syllables—31 in all.

**Tone:** The poet’s attitude toward the poem’s speaker, reader, and subject matter as interpreted by the reader. It’s often described as a “mood” that pervades the experience of the poem, which is created by the poem’s vocabulary, rhythm syntax, use of figurative language, and rhyme.

**Verisimilitude:** The appearance of being true or a likeness to the truth.

**Verse:** A line of poetry, and also, poetry in general.

### Helpful poetry sites:

Academy of American Poets: [poets.org](http://poets.org)

American Life in Poetry, Ted Kooser’s syndicated newspaper feature: [americanlifeinpoetry.org](http://americanlifeinpoetry.org)

Poetry Foundation: [poetryfoundation.org](http://poetryfoundation.org)

Poetry Daily: [poems.com](http://poems.com)

Thesaurus: [www.thesaurus.com](http://www.thesaurus.com)

Your Dictionary: [yourdictionary.com](http://yourdictionary.com)

Poetry 180: A Poem a Day for American High Schools, Hosted by Billy Collins, U.S. Poet Laureate, 2001-2003: <https://loc.gov>