

## Poetry terms to know

### **Abecedarian**

Related to acrostic, a poem in which the first letter of each line or stanza follows sequentially through the alphabet.

### **Acrostic**

A poem in which the first letter of each line spells out a word, name, or phrase when read vertically.

### **Allegory**

An extended metaphor in which the characters, places, and objects in a narrative carry figurative meaning.

### **Alliteration**

The repetition of initial stressed, consonant sounds in a series of words within a phrase or verse line. Alliteration need not reuse all initial consonants; “pizza” and “place” alliterate. Example: “We saw the sea sound sing, we heard the salt sheet tell,” from Dylan Thomas’s “Lie Still, Sleep Becalmed.”

### **Allusion**

A brief, intentional reference to a historical, mythic, or literary person, place, event, or movement.

### **Anachronism**

Someone or something placed in an inappropriate period of time. Shakespeare’s placing of a clock in Julius Caesar is an anachronism, because clocks had not yet been invented in the period when the play is set.

### **Anagram**

A word spelled out by rearranging the letters of another word; for example, “The teacher gapes at the mounds of exam pages lying before her.”

### **Anaphora**

The repetition of a word or words at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, or lines. See Walt Whitman’s “I Sing the Body Electric.”

### **Anthropomorphism**

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

### **Apostrophe**

An address to a dead or absent person, or personification as if he or she were present.

### **Assonance**

The repetition of vowel sounds without repeating consonants; sometimes called vowel rhyme.

## Poetry terms to know

### ***Cadence***

The patterning of rhythm in natural speech, or in poetry without a distinct meter (i.e., free verse).

### ***Chiasmus***

Repetition of any group of verse elements (including rhyme and grammatical structure) in reverse order, such as the rhyme scheme ABBA. Examples can be found in Biblical scripture ("But many that are first / Shall be last, / And many that are last / Shall be first"; Matthew 19:30). See also John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" ("Beauty is truth, truth beauty").

### ***Consonance***

A resemblance in sound between two words, or an initial rhyme. Consonance can also refer to shared consonants, whether in sequence ("bed" and "bad") or reversed ("bud" and "dab").

### ***Couplet***

A pair of successive rhyming lines, usually of the same length. A couplet is "closed" when the lines form a bounded grammatical unit like a sentence

### ***Dirge***

A brief hymn or song of lamentation and grief; it was typically composed to be performed at a funeral.

### ***Doggerel***

Bad verse traditionally characterized by clichés, clumsiness, and irregular meter. It is often unintentionally humorous.

### ***Ellipsis***

In poetry, the omission of words whose absence does not impede the reader's ability to understand the expression. For example, Shakespeare makes frequent use of the phrase "I will away" in his plays, with the missing verb understood to be "go."

### ***Enjambment***

The running-over of a sentence or phrase from one poetic line to the next, without terminal punctuation. A rough (seeming random, but purposeful for meaning) editing of a sentence to focus intent on a few words or phrases.

### ***Found poem***

A prose text or texts reshaped by a poet into quasi-metrical lines.

### ***Free verse***

Nonmetrical, 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.

## Poetry terms to know

### *Haiku (or hokku)*

A Japanese verse form of three unrhyming lines in five, seven, and five syllables. It creates a single, memorable image. (example is translated)

On a branch  
floating downriver  
a cricket, singing.

### *Hendecasyllabic*

A Classical Greek and Latin metrical line consisting of 11 syllables.

### *Internal Rhyme*

An exact rhyme (rather than rhyming vowel sounds, as with assonance) within a line of poetry: "Once upon a midnight **dreary**, while i pondered, weak and **weary**."

### *Litotes*

A deliberate understatement for effect; the opposite of hyperbole. For example, a good idea may be described as "not half bad," or a difficult task considered "no small feat."

### *Madrigal*

A song or short lyric poem intended for multiple singers.

### *Metaphor*

A comparison that is made directly (for example, John Keats's "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" from "Ode on a Grecian Urn") or less directly (for example, Shakespeare's "marriage of two minds"), but in any case without pointing out a similarity by using words such as "like," "as," or "than."

### *Metonymy*

A figure of speech in which a related term is substituted for the word itself. Often the substitution is based on a material, causal, or conceptual relation between things. For example, the British monarchy is often referred to as the Crown. In the phrase "lend me your ears," "ears" is substituted for "attention." "O, for a draught of vintage!" exclaims the speaker in John Keats's "Ode to Nightingale," with "vintage" understood to mean "wine." Synecdoche is closely related to metonymy.

### *Onomatopoeia*

A figure of speech in which the sound of a word imitates its sense (for example, "choo-choo," "hiss," or "buzz"). In "Piano," D.H. Lawrence describes the "boom of the tingling strings" as his mother played the piano, mimicking the volume and resonance of the sound ("boom") as well as the fine, high-pitched vibration of the strings that produced it ("tingling strings").

### *Palindrome*

A word, phrase, or sentence that reads the same backward and forward. The words "civic" and "level" are palindromes, as is the phrase "A man, a plan, a canal—Panama." The reversal can be word by word as well, as in "fall leaves when leaves fall."

## Poetry terms to know

### **Personification**

A figure of speech in which the poet describes an abstraction, a thing, or a nonhuman form as if it were a person. William Blake's "O Rose, thou art sick!" is one example; Donne's "Death, be not proud" is another. Gregory Corso quarrels with a series of personified abstractions in his poem "The Whole Mess . . . Almost." Personification is often used in symbolic or allegorical poetry; for instance, the virtue of Justice takes the form of the knight Artegal in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.

### **Quatrain**

A four-line stanza, rhyming

### **Refrain**

A phrase or line repeated at intervals within a poem, especially at the end of a stanza. See the refrain "jump back, honey, jump back" in Paul Lawrence Dunbar's "A Negro Love Song" or "return and return again" in James Laughlin's "O Best of All Nights, Return and Return Again." Browse poems with a refrain.

### **Simile**

A comparison (see Metaphor) made with "as," "like," or "than." In "A Red, Red Rose," Robert Burns declares:

### **Sonnet**

A 14-line poem with a variable rhyme scheme originating in Italy and brought to England. Literally a "little song," the sonnet traditionally reflects upon a single sentiment, with a clarification or "turn" of thought in its concluding lines.

### **Stanza**

A group of poetic lines corresponding to paragraphs in prose; the meters and rhymes are usually repeating or systematic.

### **Synecdoche**

A figure of speech in which a part of something stands for the whole (for example, "I've got wheels" for "I have a car," or a description of a worker as a "hired hand"). It is related to metonymy.

### **Tercet**

A three-line stanza, as the stanzas in Frost's "Acquainted With the Night."