

# Poetic Devices

## Glossary

### Basic terms

**connotation:** the implied or suggested meaning connected with a word.

**denotation:** the dictionary meaning of a word.

**literal meaning:** limited to the simplest, ordinary, most obvious meaning.

**figurative meaning:** associative or connotative meaning; representational.

**meter:** measured pattern of rhythmic accents in a line of verse.

**rhyme:** correspondence of terminal sounds of words or of lines of verse.

### Figurative language

**hyperbole:** exaggeration for emphasis (the opposite of understatement).

Example: "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse."

**metaphor:** comparison between essentially unlike things, or the application of a name or description to something to which it is not literally applicable.

Example: "[Love] is an ever fixed mark, / that looks on tempests and is never shaken."

**metonymy:** a word or phrase that replaces the name of an object or concept for another to which it is related.

Example: "We have always remained loyal to the crown" instead of "We have always remained loyal to the monarchy."

**oxymoron:** a combination of two words, phrases or concepts that appear to contradict each other.

Example: bittersweet.

**paradox:** a situation or phrase that appears to be contradictory but which contains a truth worth considering.

Example: "In order to preserve peace, we must prepare for war."

**personification:** the endowment of inanimate objects or abstract concepts with animate or living qualities.

Example: "Time let me play / and be golden in the mercy of his means."



**pun:** play on words, or a humorous use of a single word or sound with two or more implied meanings; quibble.

**Example:** "They're called lessons . . . because they lessen from day to day."

**simile:** comparison between two essentially unlike things using words such as "like," "as," or "as though."

Example: "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun".

**allusion:** a reference to a person, event, or work outside the poem or literary piece.

Example: "Shining, it was Adam and maiden."

**imagery:** word or sequence of words representing a sensory experience (visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, and gustatory).

Example: "bells knelling classes to a close" (auditory).

**irony:** a contradiction of expectation between what is said and what is meant (verbal irony) or what is expected in a particular circumstance or behavior (situational), or when a character speaks in ignorance of a situation known to the audience or other characters (dramatic).

Example: "Time held me green and dying / Though I sang in my chains like the sea."

**symbol:** an object or action that stands for something beyond itself.

Example: white = innocence, purity, hope.

## Poetic forms

**blank verse:** unrhymed iambic pentameter.

**closed:** poetic form subject to a fixed structure and pattern.

**couplet:** a pair of lines, usually rhymed.

**free verse:** lines with no prescribed pattern or structure.

**heroic couplet:** a pair of rhymed lines in iambic pentameter (tradition of the heroic epic form).

**open:** poetic form free from regularity and consistency in elements such as rhyme, line length, and metrical form.

**quatrain:** four-line stanza or grouping of four lines of verse.

**stanza:** unit of a poem often repeated in the same form throughout a poem; a unit of poetic lines ("verse paragraph").

## Sound devices

**alliteration:** the repetition of consonant sounds, particularly at the beginning of words.

**Example:** “. . . like a wanderer white.”

**assonance:** the repetition of similar vowel sounds.

**Example:** “I rose and told him of my woe.”

**cacophony:** harsh or discordant sounds, often the result of repetition and combination of consonants within a group of words. Writers frequently use cacophony to express energy or mimic mood.

**onomatopoeia:** the use of words to imitate the sounds they describe.

**Example:** “crack” or “whir.”

**slant rhyme:** (off rhyme, half rhyme, imperfect rhyme): rhyme formed with words with similar but not wholly identical sounds.

**Example:** barn / yard.

**rhyme:** correspondence of terminal sounds of words or of lines of verse.

