

Elements of Poetry

Alliteration is a repetition of the same consonant sounds in a sequence of words, usually at the beginning of a word or stressed syllable: “*descending dew drops;*” “*luscious lemons.*” Alliteration is based on the sounds of letters, rather than the spelling of words; for example, “*keen*” and “*car*” alliterate, but “*car*” and “*cite*” do not.

Assonance is the repetition of similar internal vowel sounds in a sentence or a line of poetry, as in “*I rose and told him of my woe.*”

Figurative language is a form of language use in which the writers and speakers mean something other than the literal meaning of their words. Two figures of speech that are particularly important for poetry are simile and metaphor. A **simile** involves a comparison between unlike things using *like* or *as*. For instance, “*My love is like a red, red rose.*” A **metaphor** is a comparison between essentially unlike things without a word such as *like* or *as*. For example, “*My love is a red, red rose.*” **Synecdoche** is a type of metaphor in which part of something is used to signify the whole, as when a gossip is called a “*wagging tongue.*” **Metonymy** is a type of metaphor in which something closely associated with a subject is substituted for it, such as saying the “*silver screen*” to mean motion pictures.

Imagery is the concrete representation of a sense impression, feeling, or idea that triggers our imaginative re-enactment of a sensory experience. Images may be visual (something seen), aural (something heard), tactile (something felt), olfactory (something smelled), or gustatory (something tasted). Imagery may also refer to a pattern of related details in a poem.

Rhyme is the repetition of identical or similar concluding syllables in different words, most often at the ends of lines. Rhyme is predominantly a function of sound rather than spelling; thus, words that end with the same vowel sounds rhyme, for instance, *day, prey, bouquet, weigh,* and words with the same consonant ending rhyme, for instance *vain, rein, lane.* The **rhyme scheme** of a poem, describes the pattern of end rhymes. Rhyme schemes are mapped out by noting patterns of rhyme with small letters: the first rhyme sound is designated *a*, the second becomes *b*, the third *c*, and so on.

Rhythm is the term used to refer to the recurrence of stressed and unstressed sounds in poetry. Poets rely heavily on rhythm to express meaning and convey feeling. **Caesura** is a strong pause within a line of poetry that contributes to the rhythm of the line. When a line has a pause at its end, it is called an **end-stopped line**. Such pauses reflect normal speech patterns and are often marked by punctuation. A line that ends without a pause and continues into the next line for its meaning is called a **run-on line** or **enjambment**.

Stanza is a grouping of lines, set off by a space, which usually has a set pattern of meter and rhyme.

Tone conveys the speaker’s implied attitude toward the poem’s subject. Tone is an abstraction we make from the details of a poem’s language: the use of meter and rhyme (or lack of them); the inclusion of certain kinds of details and exclusion of other kinds; particular choices of words and sentence pattern, or imagery and figurative language (**diction**). Another important element of tone is the order of words in sentences, phrases, or clauses (**syntax**).