

# WHAT IS POETRY?

It is words arranged in a rhythmic pattern with regular accents (like beats in music), words which are carefully selected for sound, accent and meaning to express imaginatively ideas and emotions. Each poem has rhythm, melody, imagery, and form.

## SOME ELEMENTS OF POETRY

### WHAT IS RHYTHM?

**Rhythm** is produced by a recurring pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables and pauses. Each poem has a **metric pattern** (except in "free verse" which has no metrical pattern since it is based on the natural cadences of speech). That is, the accents of the syllables in the words fall at regular intervals, like the beat of music. This pattern is described by indicating the kind and number of feet in a regular verse line.

THE FOUR MOST-USED KIND OF FEET			
No. of Syllables	Technical Name of Kind of Foot	Accented = ( / ) "DUMM" Unaccented = ( ~ ) "de"	Such as
2	<b>iamb, iambic</b>	~ / de DUMM	~ / ~ / a WAY, i WILL
2	<b>trochee, trochaic</b>	/ ~ DUMM de	/ ~ / ~ COM ing, DO it
3	<b>anapest, anapestic</b>	~ ~ / de de DUMM	~ ~ / ~ ~ / can non ADE, let us IN
3	<b>dactyl, dactylic</b>	/ ~ ~ DUMM de de	/ ~ ~ / ~ ~ VIC to ries, TWO of them
Less Often Used: spondee, spondaic (DUMM DUMM) pyrrhus, pyrraic (de de)			

The beat of poetry feet in called **meter**. Marking lines as the following are marked to show **feet** or **meter** is called **scansion**:

~ /     ~ /     ~ /     ~ /  
The stag | at eve | had drunk | his fill

This line is **iambic tetrameter**. If meter should vary within a line, it is called **inversion**.

The number of feet in a line is expressed as follows:	
1 foot <b><u>monometer</u></b>	6 feet <b><u>hexameter</u></b>
2 feet <b><u>dimeter</u></b>	7 feet <b><u>heptameter</u></b>
3 feet <b><u>trimeter</u></b>	8 feet <b><u>octameter</u></b>
4 feet <b><u>tetrameter</u></b>	9 feet <b><u>nonameter</u></b>
5 feet <b><u>pentameter</u></b>	

**Pauses** do not usually figure significantly in scansion, but they do affect the rhythm of a line, just as they affect the rhythm of music. There are three types of pauses:

**End-stopped** which is a pause at the end of a line.

**Caesura** which is a pause that occurs within a line.

**Enjambement** which is a line that "runs over" to the next line without a pause.

## WHAT IS MELODY?

Like music, each poem has **melody** (i.e., sound devices). A poet chooses words for their sound, as well as for their meaning. **Rhythm**, of course, is a kind of sound device based upon pattern. **Euphony** (literally “good sound”) and **cacophony** (literally “bad sound”) contribute to producing **melody**, or a musical quality in verse.

One of the principle tools of melody is rhyme — that is where two words have the same sound on their last accented vowel preceded by different consonants, such as:

<b>Single (Masculine) Rhyme</b>	dame, same love, dove
<b>Double (Feminine) Rhyme</b>	napping, tapping weather, heather
<b>Triple Rhyme</b>	mournfully, scornfully victorious, glorious

Other rhyming terms include:

**Sight (Eye) Rhyme** in which two words look alike but don't sound alike, such as “LOVE” and “JOVE” or “DAUGHTER” and “LAUGHTER.”

**Slant (Imperfect) Rhyme** in which two words are nearly rhymed but have a slight variation in vowel sound, such as “LAKE” and “FATE.” **NOTE:** Sometimes what is now a sight rhyme was once a true rhyme, but pronunciation changes have occurred, such as “AGAIN” and “RAIN.”

**Identical Rhyme (Rime Riche)** in which two words are spelled differently but have the same pronunciation (also called **homonyms**), such as “TWO” and “TOO” or “RITE” and “RIGHT.”

**End Rhyme** in which the rhyming words occur at the ends of lines of poetry.

**Internal Rhyme** in which the rhyme occurs inside a line, such as –  
“Let's BEAT the HEAT.”

Besides rhyme, poets also use other sound effects:

**Alliteration** is the repetition of similar speech sounds in closely associated words or syllables. There are three kinds of alliteration:

<b>Consonantal Alliteration</b>	<u>P</u> eter <u>P</u> iper <u>p</u> icked a <u>p</u> eck of <u>p</u> ickled <u>p</u> eppers.
<b>Vowel Alliteration</b>	<u>A</u> pt <u>a</u> lliteration's <u>a</u> rtful <u>a</u> id is often an <u>o</u> ccasional <u>o</u> rnament in prose.
<b>Internal Alliteration</b>	The <u>m</u> oan of doves in <u>i</u> mmemorial <u>e</u> lms, And <u>m</u> urmuring of innumerable bees.

**Assonance** is the repetition of identical vowel sounds in syllables that have different consonant sounds, such as “LAKE” and “FAKE” or “In Xanadu did Kubla Khan” (which repeats only vowel sounds).

**Consonance** is the repetition of identical consonant sounds in syllables that have different vowel sounds, such as “BILL” and “BALL” or “BORN” and “BURN.”

**Onomatopoeia** is the use of words which sound like their meanings, such as “HISS,” “MURMUR,” “BUZZ,” and so on. A really skillful poet may merely use S-sounds in a poem about a snake, rather than the word “HISS.”

## WHAT IS IMAGERY

Each poem also uses **imagery** which is produced by **figures of speech**. These take many forms, but all are rhetorical methods which affect the literal meaning of words. Let's start by looking at single words which appear synonymous:

dumb, stupid, slow, uneducated, ignorant, obtuse, dense  
smart, clever, shrewd, brilliant, intelligent, with-it, cagey  
skinny, slender, thin, emaciated, scrawny, lithe, lean, underweight  
fat, chubby, plump, corpulent, pudgy, junoesque, zaftig. overweight  
home, house, shack, bungalow, mansion, crib, pad, hearth, quarters

Even though the **denotation** (literal meaning) of the words appears synonymous, the **connotation** (figurative meaning) is different. Figures of speech work the same way.

**Imagery** is the use of figures of speech which are **concrete** — it always refers to a sensory experience. The sun perceived by the senses is **concrete**; the enlightenment associated with it is **abstract** (perceived by the intellect, not the senses). Thus, we have the **image** of a peacock which serves as the **vehicle** of the comparison. Its **theme** or meaning may be something abstract like vanity or beauty, but the **image** must be concrete. Generally speaking, there are three kinds of figures of speech: comparisons, substitutions, and ambiguities.

### Comparisons

<b>Analogy</b>	A comparison of two things, alike in certain aspects – a simile is an expressed analogy; a metaphor is an implied one.
<b>Metaphor</b>	Two unlike things compared directly, implying several similar qualities, such as “The river is a snake which coils on itself .”
<b>Simile</b>	Two unlike things compared using “like” or “as,” implying only one similar quality, such as “The man paced like a hungry lion.”
<b>Personification</b>	Giving human qualities to inanimate objects or non-human creatures, such as “The trees danced in the breeze.”
<b>Apostrophe</b>	Addressing some abstract object as if it were animate, such as “O world! Tell me thy pain!” Thus, it is a kind of personification.
<b>Allusion</b>	Referring metaphorically to persons, places or things from history or previous literature, with which the reader is expected to have enough familiarity to make extended associations, such as “The new kid is as mean as Grendel and twice as ugly” or “He must think he’s some kind of Superman.”
<b>Allegory</b>	A form of extended metaphor in which objects, persons, and actions in a narrative are equated with meanings that lie outside the narrative itself, such as Everyman. Special kinds of allegories include the fable and the parable.
<b>Conceit</b>	An extended or elaborate metaphor which forms the framework of an entire poem with all comparisons being interrelated in some way, such as “What Is Our Life?” by Raleigh.
<b>Symbolism</b>	The use of one object to represent or suggest another object or an idea. Thus, a rose might be used to symbolize the loved one or love in general, depending on the context.

## Substitutions

<b>Metonymy</b>	Substitution of one word for another closely related word, such as “The pot’s boiling” or “The White House announced.”
<b>Synechdoche</b>	Substitution of part for the whole, such as “All hands on deck.”
<b>Synaesthesia</b>	Substitution of one sensory response for another (or the concurrent stimulation of several senses), such as “a blue note” or “cool green” or “The blind man turned his face to feel the sun.”

## Ambiguities

<b>Hyperbole</b>	Saying more than is true, an over-exaggeration, such as “He wore his fingers to the bone.”
<b>Meiosis</b>	Saying less than is true, an under-exaggeration, such as “The reports of my death have been exaggerated.”
<b>Irony</b>	Saying the opposite to what is true, such as “War is kind.”
<b>Antithesis</b>	Using contrasts for an accumulative effect, such as “Man proposes; God disposes.”
<b>Oxymoron</b>	An antithesis which brings together two sharply contradictory terms, such as “wise fool,” “little big man,” “eloquent silence,” and “loving hate.”
<b>Litotes</b>	A form of understatement in which a thing is affirmed by stating the negative of its opposite, such as “He was not unmindful” which actually means he was mindful.
<b>Paradox</b>	A statement which while seemingly contradictory or absurd may actually be well-founded or true; a “logic twist,” such as “Everything I say is a lie.”
<b>Pun</b>	A play on words based on the similarity of sound between two words with different meanings, such as “She offered her honor; he honored her offer; and all night long he was on her and off her.”
<b>Neologism</b>	A word concocted for deliberate effect, such as “slithy” from “lithe” and “slimy,” “frumious” from “fuming” and “furious.” Some such words actually become a part of the language, such as “smog,” “brunch,” or “motel.” Sometimes called a <b>coined word</b> or a <b>portmanteau word</b> .

## WHAT IS “POETIC LICENSE”?

It means that a poet is allowed to break rules in order to improve his poem in some way. For example, he may break a spelling rule to make his rhyme or his meter more perfect, such as using “’oft” instead of “often.” Poets also use such special effects as:

1. **Catalexis:** An unstressed syllable omitted from the beginning of an iambic or anapestic line – or from the end of a trochaic or dactylic line.
2. **Hypermeter:** Adding an unstressed syllable at the beginning of a trochaic line – or at the end of an iambic line.

The whole point of “poetic license” is dependent upon the poet’s knowledge of the very rules he is breaking. Irregularities should be deliberately planned by the poet to establish a desired poetic effect; they should not be unintentional errors.

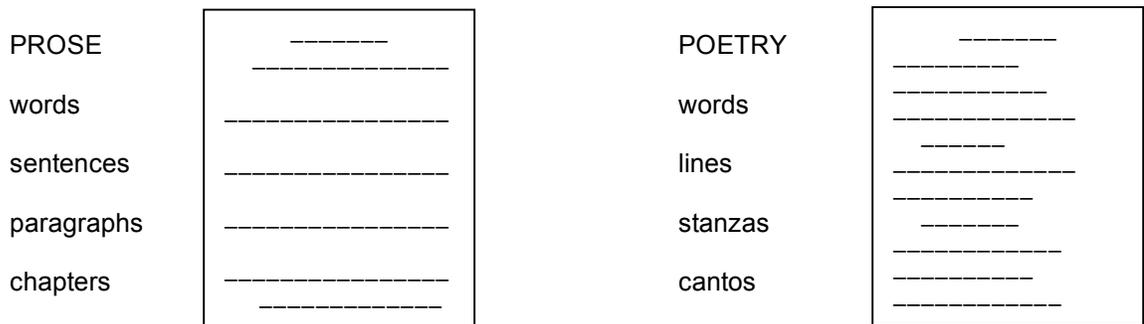
## WHAT IS FORM?

And finally, every poem has form. A poet can arrange his poem so that you will read it as he wants you to read it to get its sound, rhythm, and emphasis. The length of lines and the location of pauses affect the speed at which you read his poem. In modern free verse the very typographical arrangement of words in lines produces emphasis, just as regular rhythm and rhyme produce emphasis in regular verse.

There is such a vast difference in the following arrangements of words that the very meaning of the words is changed:

Star, if you are a love compassionate, you will walk  
with us this year. We face a glacial distance who are  
here huddled at your feet. —Burford

Star,  
If you are  
A love compassionate,  
You will walk with us this year.  
We face a glacial distance who are here  
Huddl'd  
At your feet.  
--Burford



The appearance of the poem is often a clue to its form, since form is usually determined by the number of lines, the length of the lines, the rhythmic pattern, and/or the rhyming scheme. The **rhyming scheme** (rhyme pattern) can be determined only by looking at the form of the whole poem. Rhyme schemes are indicated by the use of letters to designate rhyming combinations:

-sound	=	A		
-ten	=	B		
-men	=	B	=	A B B A C
-round	=	A		
-fight	=	C		

**KINDS OF POETRY ACCORDING TO FORM:**  
Regular Verse, Blank Verse, Free Verse

No. of Lines	REGULAR VERSE: Rhyme and Rhythm	
	What It's Called	What It Is
2	rhymed couplet	2 lines with identical rhymes
2	heroic couplet	2 lines with identical rhymes
3	tercet, triplet	3 lines – any rhyme scheme, any meter
4	quatrain	4 lines – any rhyme scheme, any meter
4	ballad quatrain	4 lines rhyming a b c b; 1st & 3rd lines iambic tetrameter, 2nd & 4th lines iambic trimeter
5	quintet	5 lines – any rhyme scheme, any meter
5	cinquain	5 lines – no rhyme, no meter BUT consisting respectively of 2, 4, 6, 8 and, 2 syllables a line
6	sestet	6 lines (often 3 sets of couplets) any rhyme scheme, any meter
7	rime royal	7 lines rhyming a b a b b c c iambic pentameter
8	octave	8 lines – any rhyme scheme, any meter
8	ottava rima	8 lines rhyming a b a b a b c c iambic pentameter
9	Spenserian stanza	9 lines rhyming a b a b b c b c c lines 1 - 8 iambic pentameter line 9 iambic hexameter
14	sonnet	14 lines iambic pentameter <b>English</b> - 3 quatrains + 1 couplet abab cdcd efef gg <b>Italian</b> - 1 octave + 1 sestet abbaabba cdecde OR cdcdee OR cdccdc OR...
19	villanelle	19 lines – 5 tercets + 1 quatrain 2 repeating refrains – 8 of 19 lines are refrain line 1 A' (repeated entirely at 6, 12, & 18) line 3 A" (repeated entirely at 9, 15, & 19) scheme – A'bA" abA' abA" abA' abA" abA'A"
BLANK VERSE		Any number of lines No rhyme Usually iambic pentameter
FREE VERSE		Any number of lines No rhyme No meter

**POETRY IS ALSO CLASSIFIED BY CONTENT:**

Type of Poetry	Definition	Specific Forms
<b>Narrative Poetry</b>	A nondramatic poem which tells a story or presents a narrative, whether simple or complex, long or short.	<b>ballad</b> <b>epic</b> <b>metrical romance</b>
<b>Dramatic Poetry</b>	Poetry which employs dramatic form or dramatic techniques as a means of achieving poetic ends.	<b>verse drama</b> <b>dramatic monologue</b> <b>verse dialogue</b>
<b>Lyric Poetry</b>	A brief subjective poem marked by imagination, melody, and emotion, but strict definition is impossible.	<b>dirge, epithalamion, elegy,</b> <b>epigram, epitaph, hymn,</b> <b>sonnet, song,</b> <b>light verse, ode, pastoral, vers de societe,</b>

## HOW CAN ONE RECOGNIZE WHAT IS AND IS NOT A SYMBOL IN A POEM?

There is no simple or sure method to guarantee recognition. Only through practice and study can you gain confidence and skill in reading and analyzing poetry – for its symbols as well as for other features. BUT here are three tips that may help:

1. Read carefully and closely, looking for the repetition of words, phrases, and ideas, and especially verbal patterns. Remember symbols do not so much “stick out” as EMERGE from the body of the poem.
2. Paraphrase the poem, or at least its notable parts, seeing if objects and the like suggest more than what at first they appear to. Paraphrasing often reveals in surprising ways a symbol or the likelihood of a symbolic element.
3. Observe in particular biblical, mythological, and historical references, or any pattern of seasonal and daily repetitions which may point to symbolic meanings.

It is better to find too few symbols than too many. The impulse to read too much into a poem, to project personal views or prejudices, and to confuse images with symbols is great and should be balanced with thoughtfulness. Every red rose does not have to be love and romance; every conflict between persons, an Oedipal or a Faustian struggle; every unfortunate victim, a crucified Jesus. Sometimes a rose is a rose is a rose!