

University of Tikrit
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English Department
First year/Introduction to Literature
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Introduction to poetry: Poetic Literary Devices

Sound Devices in Poetry:

Alliteration in Poetry

Alliteration is a term for repeated letter sounds (usually consonants, but not always) at the stressed part of two or more words. One example is “glowing golden grains.” Another word for alliteration is initial rhyme or head rhyme.

Ezra Pound’s “The Seafarer” uses several examples of alliteration.

May I for my own self song's truth reckon,

Journey's jargon, how I in harsh days

Hardship endured oft.

Bitter breast-cares have I abided,

Known on my keel many a care's hold,

And dire sea-surge, and there I oft spent

Narrow nightwatch nigh the ship's head

While she tossed close to cliffs.

(Pound, "The Seafarer")

The steady waves of alliteration that rise and fall. They mirror the rise and fall of a ship on the ocean, much as Pound’s speaker is describing.

Assonance in Poetry

Like alliteration, assonance is the repetition of sounds in multiple words. Assonance describes repeated vowel sounds in the middle of words with different consonant end sounds.

You can see assonance in the phrase “faded gray waves.” A great example of assonance comes from “The Raven” by Edgar Allen Poe:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,

Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore...

(Poe, “The Raven”)

“Dreary” and “weary” are rhyming words because they have the same ending sound, but “weak” shares the same /ea/ vowel sound as the surrounding words. “The Raven” contains several examples of assonance that both keep the poem moving and reflect the speaker’s slow descent into madness.

What Are Sound Devices in Poetry? Examples and Types

Poetic sound devices help the reader “hear” a poem. The way a poet structures their stanzas and chooses their words can bring a poem to life. Keep reading to learn more about common types of sound devices in poetry, as well as examples from famous poems.

Sound Devices in Poetry

Did you know that repeating a word or selecting a rhyme scheme can create sound in a poem? Repetition and rhyme are only a few of the many sound devices found in beautiful poetry. Check out these types of sound devices and see how many resonate with you!

Alliteration in Poetry

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Ezra Pound’s “The Seafarer” uses several examples of alliteration. See if you can spot them in the first eight lines:

May I for my own self song's truth reckon,

Journey's jargon, how I in harsh days

Hardship endured oft.

Bitter breast-cares have I abided,

Known on my keel many a care's hold,

And dire sea-surge, and there I oft spent

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(Pound, "The Seafarer")

The steady waves of alliteration that rise and fall. They mirror the rise and fall of a ship on the ocean, much as Pound's speaker is describing. You can find more examples of alliteration in poetry [here](#).

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Rhyme in Poetry

Even people who don't read much poetry can recognize a rhyme. Rhyming words have the same end sound repeated at the end of a line. Many poems, such as free verse poems, don't use a particular rhyme scheme.

Robert Frost uses an ABAAB rhyme scheme in "The Road Not Taken" to strong effect:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth...

(Frost, "The Road Not Taken")

The first, third, and fourth lines rhyme, while the second and fifth lines rhyme. You can also find rhyme within a line called internal rhyme. Learn more about the different types of rhyme.

Rhythm in Poetry

The rhythm of a poem is its beat. It marks the accented syllables as well as the downbeats. You can track a poem's rhythm by its feet and meter.

Clap to the beat of the first stanza of Emily Dickinson's poem "Because I could not stop for Death" to see rhythm in action:

Because I could not stop for Death –

He kindly stopped for me –

The Carriage held but just Ourselves –

And Immortality.

(Dickinson, "Because I could not stop for Death")

Lines 1 and 3 are in iambic tetrameter – four feet with the stress on the second syllable of each foot. Lines 2 and 4 are in iambic trimeter, which also stress the second syllables but in only three feet instead of four.