

## RHYME

Most traditional poems use **rhyme as a basic device for holding the poem together. Rhyme is the agreement in sound between words or syllables.**

The best way to think of rhyme is not as a series of lock stepping sound effects but as a **system of echoes. Poets use rhyme to recall earlier words, to emphasize certain points, and to make their language memorable.** In fact, rhymes can be extremely effective in making language take hold in a reader's mind.

(from AN INVITATION TO POETRY)

## RHYME PATTERN VARIATIONS

There are **several different kinds of rhyme.**

### i. **END RHYME or TERMINAL RHYME**

The **most common** rhyme pattern used by poets is that called end rhyme. This simply means that the **end words of lines rhyme. Two consecutive lines may rhyme, or alternate lines may rhyme, or even more distant lines.**

E.g. lines from *Alfred, Lord Tennyson's THE EAGLE*

He clasps the crag with crooked <b>hands</b> ;	a
Close to the sun in lonely <b>lands</b> ,	a
Ringed with the azure world, he <b>stands</b>	a

E.g. lines from *Alfred, Lord Tennyson's CROSSING THE BAR*

Sunset and evening <b>star</b> ,	a	
And one clear call for <b>me!</b>		b
And may there be no moaning of the <b>bar</b> ,	a	
When I put out to <b>sea.</b>	b	

### ii. **INTERNAL RHYME or MIDDLE RHYME**

**When the rhyme pattern involves rhyming a word half way through a single line of poetry with the end word of the same line, it is called internal rhyme.** It is used fairly frequently in ballads and occasionally in other kinds of poetry.

E.g. lines from S.T. Coleridge's THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

And I had done a hellish thing  
 And it would work'em woe:  
 For all **averred**, I had killed the **bird**  
 That made the breeze to blow. Ah wretch! said **they**, the bird to **slay**,  
 That made the breeze to blow.

(from APPRECIATING POETRY)

**Internal rhyme is an effect that adds particular emphasis and also quickens the pace of the rhythm.**

E.g. lines from S.T. Coleridge's THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

The fair breeze **blew**, the white foam **flew**,  
 The furrows followed free;  
 We were the **first** that ever **burst**  
 Into that silent sea

(from POETRY APPRECIATION FOR A-LEVEL)

**iii. FULL RHYME or ORDINARY RHYME**

Full rhyme consists of two words or final syllables of words that sound exactly alike except for the initial consonant sound.

E.g.            **sing**            **ring**            **king**  
                   **indestructible**            **ineluctable**

**iv. IMPERFECT RHYME or HALF RHYME or NEAR RHYME**

Sometimes called **SLANT RHYME** or **OFF RHYME**.

Half Rhyme involves the use of words that **suggest rhyme but**, for some reason, **fail to satisfy the criteria of true rhyme**. Sometimes the final consonant varies, so that the half rhyme is really **assonance**. More commonly, the final consonant is identical, but the vowel sound varies slightly (**hall/hell**). The effect of half rhyme is to create a sense of rhyme, with a **slightly discordant feel**.

(from THE FORMS OF POETRY)

Pararhyme or half rhyme or **PARTIAL RHYME** is where the first and last consonants are the same but the intervening vowel is different.

**flip/flop**            **leaves/lives**            **grained/groined**

(from Longman Exam Guides, ENGLISH LITERATURE)

There is a particular kind of near rhyme that can be described with precision. This is called **CONSONANTAL RHYME** or **PARARHYME** and was used a great deal by *Wilfred Owen* in his poetry of the First World War. In Pararhyme the consonant sounds of the two related words are identical but the vowel sound must differ:

**lap/lip**            **drift/draught**            **mystery/mastery**

The **dissonance or slightly harsh, off key effect of pararhyme** seemed especially suitable for the brutal subject matter of much of *Owen's* poetry.

E.g. *EXPOSURE*, where pararhyme is used at the end of the first four lines, rhyming ABBA.

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that **knife us**            A  
 Wearied we keep awake because the night is **silent**            B  
 Low, drooping flares confuse our memory of the **salient** ...            B  
 Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, **nervous**,  
 A  
 But nothing happens.

(from HOW TO ENJOY POETRY)

Such rhyming produces a **deliberately uncomfortable disconcerting effect**. *Wilfred Owen* made effective use of such rhyming **to highlight the tragedy of war**.

(from POETRY APPRECIATION FOR A-LEVEL)

**v. VISUAL RHYME or SIGHT RHYME or EYE RHYME or COURTESY RHYME**

Words look alike but do not sound the same. Words spelt alike but not actually rhyming.

E.g. **one/bone**            **key/prey/**            **low/how**  
                   **love/move/drove**            **cough/bough/rough**

**vi. MASCULINE or STRONG RHYME**

Rhymes that occur on stressed syllables are masculine. All monosyllabic rhymes of course, must be masculine. Rhyming words of two or more syllables are masculine if the final syllable is stressed.

E.g. desire/conspire                      concentrate/felicitate

(from HOW TO ENJOY POETRY)

When the final syllable of the rhyme is a stressed syllable such as  
**defeat/repeat                      request/invest.**

Such rhyming tends to produce a pronounced or emphatic effect. Single syllable rhyming tends to have a pointed and telling impact as in the opening of *Auden's* poem *IN MEMORY OF W.B. YEATS*:

Earth, receive an honoured guest,  
 William Yeats is laid to rest.

**vii. FEMININE or WEAK RHYME or DOUBLE RHYME**

This refers to a rhyme in which the final syllable is unstressed as in  
**morrow/sorrow    finger/linger.**

Because the final syllable is unstressed, such rhyming tends to produce a falling away effect, as in *Hopkins' INVERSNAID*:

Of a pool so pitchblack, fell-frowning,  
 It rounds and rounds Despair to drowning.

(from POETRY APPRECIATION FOR A-LEVEL)

**viii. POLYSYLLABIC RHYME**

In polysyllabic rhymes only the final syllable, or syllables, need correspond:  
**elation/sensation                      intersection/affection**

(from HOW TO ENJOY POETRY)

Polysyllabic rhyme is when several syllables are part of the rhyme. Such elaborate rhyming will call attention to itself and is often used to comic or humorous effect, as in *Byron's* intellectual/hen-pecked you all rhyme. Such rhyming is heavily emphasized as it arrests the rhythm and flow of a poem quite dramatically.

(from POETRY APPRECIATION FOR A-LEVEL)

**ix. TRIPLE RHYME**

Triple rhyme is rhyme on a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables.

**laborious/victorious                      sufficiency/deficiency**

(from Longman Exam Guides, ENGLISH LITERATURE)

**x. Another form of rhyme which again does not constitute true rhyme, but which may be used for a certain effect is the exact repetition of the same sound in words that carry different meanings.**

**right/write                      sought/sort                      sight/site**

(from POETRY APPRECIATION FOR A-LEVEL)

## RHYMING FORMS

- i. **HEROIC COUPLETS** may be of two kinds: **closed couplets and open couplets**. **Closed couplet** is two iambic pentameters using end rhyme, forming a **complete unit of sense**:

E.g. Pope's *ESSAY ON CRITICISM*:

'Tis not enough no Harshness gives Offence,  
The Sound must seem an Eccho to the Sense.

The closed couplet, is self contained; it makes a complete statement. The open couplet differs in that the sense runs on into the next couplet.

E.g. Byron's *ENGLISH BARDS and SCOTCH REVIEWERS*:

Who in soft guise, surrounded by a choir  
Of virgins melting, not to Vesta's fire,  
With sparkling eyes, and cheek by passion flushed  
Strikes his wild lyre, while listening dames are hushed?

Rhymed couplets may be used in other metres than iambic pentameter, and the most common alternative is rhymed tetrameter (a line of four iambic feet). A good example of rhymed tetrameter is the beautiful and witty *TO HIS COY MISTRESS* by *Andrew Marvell* (1612 – 1678), which begins:

Had we but world enough, and time,  
This coyness, lady, were no crime.  
We would sit down, and think which way  
To walk, and pass our long love's day.  
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side  
Should'st rubies find: I by the tide  
Of Humber would complain. I would  
Love you ten years before the Flood,  
Till the conversion of the Jews.

## ii. **QUATRAINS**

A great favourite among English verse forms is the quatrain, a stanza, in any metre, of four lines. The **BALLAD STANZA** is a quatrain of alternate tetrameters and trimeters, usually rhyming **ABCB**, as in:

The king sits in Dunfermline towne	A
Drinking the blood-red-wine;	B
'O where will I get a skilful skipper	C
To sail this ship of mine?'	B

The stanza form used in *Gray's ELEGY WRITTEN IN A COUNTRYCHURCHYARD* is known as the **HEROIC QUATRAIN** and it consists of four iambic pentameters, rhyming **ABAB**:

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,	A
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,	B
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,	A
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.	B

*Tennyson*, in his great poem to the memory of his friend *Arthur Henry Hallam* who died tragically young, uses a quatrain that has come to be known as the **IN MEMORIAM STANZA**, from the title of the poem, *IN MEMORIAM*. The four lines are iambic tetrameters, rhyming **ABBA**:

Be near me when the sensuous <b>frame</b>	<b>A</b>
Is rack'd with pangs that conquer <b>trust</b> ;	<b>B</b>
And Time, a maniac scattering <b>dust</b> ,	<b>B</b>
And Life, a Fury slinging <b>flame</b> .	<b>A</b>

iii. **Six-line stanzas** are quite commonly used and one, known as the **STAVE OF SIX**, can be either in pentameter or tetrameter, rhyming **ABABCC**. *Matthew Arnold* (1822-1888) showed a fondness for the tetrameter form of the stave of six :

But when the moon their hollows <b>lights</b> ,	<b>A</b>	
And they are swept by balms of <b>spring</b> ,	<b>B</b>	
And in their glens, on starry <b>nights</b> ,	<b>A</b>	
The nightingales divinely <b>sing</b> ;	<b>B</b>	
And lovely notes, from shore to <b>shore</b> ,		<b>C</b>
Across the sounds and channels <b>pour-</b>	<b>C</b>	

To Marguerite

iv. **RHYME ROYAL** or the **CHAUCERIAN STANZA** (used in *Chaucer's TROILUS* and *CRISEYDE*) consists of seven pentameters, rhyming **ABABBCC**, though the final line, as in the stanza quoted below from *Wordsworth's RESOLUTION* and *INDEPENDENCE* may be a hexameter (a line of six feet):

All things that love the sun are out of <b>doors</b> ;		<b>A</b>
The sky rejoices in the morning's <b>birth</b> ;	<b>B</b>	
The grass is bright with rain-drops ; - on the <b>moors</b>		<b>A</b>
The hare is running races in her <b>mirth</b> ;		<b>B</b>
And with her feet she from the plashy <b>earth</b>		<b>B</b>
Raises a mist, that, glittering in the <b>sun</b> ,	<b>C</b>	
Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth <b>run</b> .	<b>C</b>	

v. **OTTAVA RIMA** is probably the most common of the English eight-line stanzas, and it is the form employed by *Lord Byron* in his comic masterpiece *Don Juan*, an extract of which is given below. All eight stanzas are pentameters and they rhyme **ABABABCC**:

He turned his lips to hers, and with his <b>hand</b>		<b>A</b>
Called back the tangles of her wandering <b>hair</b> ;	<b>B</b>	
Even then their love they could not all <b>command</b> ,	<b>A</b>	
And half forgot their danger and <b>despair</b> :	<b>B</b>	
Antonia's patience now was at a <b>stand</b> -	<b>A</b>	
'Come, come', 'tis no time now for fooling <b>there</b> ' ,	<b>B</b>	
She whispered, in great wrath - 'I must <b>deposit</b>	<b>C</b>	
This pretty gentleman within the <b>closet</b> '.	<b>C</b>	

- vi. *Edmund Spenser* (1552-1599) invented a special stanza for his immensely long allegory *THE FAERIE QUEENE*. The **SPENSERIAN STANZA** consists of nine rhymes rhyming **ABABBCBC**, the first eight being pentameters and the ninth a hexameter. *John Keats* (1795-1821) made a splendid use of the form in *THE EVE OF ST. AGNES*:

And still she slept an azure-lidded <b>sleep</b> ,	A	
In blanched linen, smooth, and <b>lavendered</b> ,	B	
While he from forth the closet brought a <b>heap</b>	A	
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and <b>gourd</b> ;	B	
With jellies smoother than the creamy <b>curd</b> ,		B
And lucent syrups, tinct with <b>cinnamon</b> ;	C	
Manna and dates, in argosy <b>transferred</b>	B	
From Fex; and spiced dainties, <b>every one</b>	C	
From silken Samarcand to cedared <b>Lebanon</b> .	C	

(from HOW TO ENJOY POETRY)

- vii. There are various other stanza forms such as the **ODE**, **SONNET** and **BLANK VERSE**.

## THE EFFECTS OF RHYME

Rhyme achieves several functions in poetry.

- Firstly, it affects the rhythm of the verse.

E.g. In Coleridge's *ANCIENT MARINER*:

The fair breeze **blew**, the white foam **flew**,  
The furrows followed free;  
We were the **first** that ever **burst**  
Into that silent sea

**The sharp, repeated, light, one syllable rhyme can accelerate the movement quite dramatically.**

We have already noted how **the use of couplet rhyme tends to regulate the rhythm in a steady, assured manner, or how the couplet can be used to convey a sense of finality, with its rounded neatness**, as in Milton's

At last he rose, and twitch'd his mantle blew:  
Tomorrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new.

- As we read a poem, **rhyme may act upon us almost subconsciously, providing a flow and satisfying unity that relates poetry to music. It also has the effect of linking together the words being rhymed** – words that one may not usually associate together. This **can create an unexpected, or surprise element that forces us to think sharply** about what the poet is saying, as in Blake's

Love seeketh only Self to please,  
To bind another to Its **delight**,  
Joys in another's loss of ease,  
And builds a Hell in Heaven's **despite**.

- A final general consideration concerning rhyme relates to its **purely aural quality; that is, the actual effect of the sound that is being rhymed**. Much of the 'music' of the verse will lie in the type of sounds that are repeated by the rhyme. Obviously this can cover a range of effects, from the full rich effect of Hopkins':

When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;  
Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush . . .

to the gentle, **lyrical quality of Tennyson's**:

But such a tide as moving seems **asleep**,  
Too full for sound and **foam**,  
When that which drew from out the boundless **deep**  
Turns again **home**.

or the **harsh, grating effect of Owen's**:

What passing bells for these who die as **cattle**?  
Only the monstrous anger of the **guns**.  
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid **rattle**  
Can patter out their hasty **orisons**.

(from POETRY APPRECIATION FOR A-LEVEL)

**It is clearly not good enough to point out that lines rhyme.** To help you think about it, **five points will be made in guidance**: the **technical terms**, the **harmony** rhyme creates, its **role in giving emphasis** to the words of a poet, its **ability to focus the meaning** of a poem, and its capacity to produce **comic effects**.

### i. The Technical Terms

It is worth noting that **masculine rhyme often sounds settled and determined**, whereas **feminine rhyme is fluid and musical**.

E.g. In *Blake's INFANT SORROW* from *The Songs of Experience*, the masculine rhymes create a **hard and fixed effect**:

My mother groaned! my father **wept**.  
 Into the dangerous world I **leapt**:  
 Helpless, naked, piping **loud**:  
 Like a fiend hid in a **cloud**.

The arrival of the child has a dramatic effect; the settled, determined rhymes give the impression that he is tough.

By contrast, listen to the effect of these lines from *Bejeman's INDOOR GAMES NEAR NEWBURY*.

Rich the makes of motor **chirring**,  
 Past the pine-plantation **purring**  
     Come up, Hupmobile, **Delage!**  
 Short the way your chauffeurs **travel**,  
 Crunching over private **gravel**,  
 Each from out his warm **garage**.

The feminine rhymes help to enact the sense of speed. Each flows musically after the other to create a feeling of quick yet smooth movement.

### ii. Harmony

When we hear one word rhyme with another, we usually experience pleasure in finding **harmony between the two**. **Harmony creates a feeling of completeness, the sense that something has been resolved or finished**.

*Eliot's BURBANKJ with a BAEDEKER : BLEINSTEIN with a CIGAR:*

Burbank crossed a little bridge  
 Descending at a small **hotel**;  
 Princess Volupine arrived,  
 They were together and he **fell**.

The stanza is a little story in itself: Burbank, who is associated with small hotels, meet the exotic Princess Volupine and falls for her. The rhymes **hotel** and **fell** enact the sense of finality: Burbank, we feel, has fallen hopelessly in love, and nothing can be done about it. The rhyme, to put it simply, says: "that's it".

### iii. **Emphasis**

**When two words rhyme, you notice them.** Poets can exploit this by using rhyme to **emphasize important words**. There are **two particular ways** in which **this can be done**: the **frequent use of rhyme and internal rhyme**.

In *Betjeman's* delightful *POT POURRI* from a *Surrey Garden*, **three lines of the last six-lined stanza rhyme**. The poet is anticipating his marriage to Pam:

Over the redolent pinewoods, in at the bathroom **casement**,  
 One fine Saturday, Windlesham bells shall call:  
 Up the Butterfield aisle rich with Gothic **enlacement**,  
 Licensed nor for **embracement**,  
 Pam and I, as the organ  
 Thunders over you all.

Rhyme brings together **casement**, **enlacement** and **embracement**; **polished, feminine rhymes**. These prominent words are **important to the poem's meaning**. The **casement** is open to admit the sound that dominates the last stanza; **enlacement** is a clever way of describing architectural detailing and it also suggests the loving ties that are made in marriage, an idea also present in **embracement**.

### iv. **Focus of Meaning**

**Internal rhyme**, which occurs when a word within a line rhymes with the one at the end, surprises the reader, who is compelled to listen to what the words say. It also **tends to quicken the pace of a line**.

In the last stanza of *THE GARDEN OF LOVE*, *Blake* sees with increasing horror how black gown priests energetically destroy his beloved garden:

And I saw it was filled with graves,  
 And tombstones where flowers should be,  
 And priests with black gowns were walking their rounds  
 And **binding** with **briars** my joys and **desires**.

Internal rhyme emphasizes that **briars** are **binding** . . . **desires** and increases the pace of the line so that the dark, purposeful priests seem unstoppable. By emphasizing **briars** with **desires**, internal rhyme enacts the conflict in the poem: the priests want to discipline and inflict pain upon someone who wants to express his feelings.

Rhyme's ability to focus the meaning of a poem is an extension of the way it **emphasizes certain words**. In the *Blake* poem the theme is the conflict between "briars" and "desires". **Poets use rhyme to focus the reader's attention upon words that are central to the poem's meaning**.

**v. Comic Effects**

**Rhyme can be comic, particularly when it comes in short lines.**

*Belloc* is a master of the short line; in *LORD LUCKY* he tells of how a Mr. Meyer accidentally kills a lord while out shooting:

As he was scrambling through a brake  
Discharged his weapon by mistake  
And plugged out an ounce of lead  
Piff-bang into his grace's head -  
Who naturally fell down dead.

The **humour comes from the way the deft rhymes make a ghastly accident sound very clean and neat. The harmony of rhyme lends an inappropriate, and hence funny, smoothness to an unhappy event.** Indeed, the sharp contrasts between events that are ghastly or absurd and the neat harmony of rhyme may be the reason why comic poetry usually requires rhyme to be funny.

[from MASTERING ENGLISH LITERATURE]

## OTHER TECHNICAL TERMS

There are other technical terms related to prosody (i.e. the study of versification):

### (a) CAESURA

A pause, often marked by punctuation, dividing a line of verse into two parts.

E.g. Satan exalted sat // by merit raised  
Milton's PARADISE LOST

### (b) END STOPPED LINES

A line ending in a pause, marked by punctuation.

E.g. Whereto with speedy words, the Arch-Fiend replied:  
Fallen cherub, to be weak is miserable,  
Doing or suffering.

Milton's PARADISE LOST

### (c) RUN ON LINES

There is no pause at the end of a line. This running over of the sense of one line into the next is also called **ENJAMBEMENT**.

E.g. *But see! the angry Victor hath recalled  
His ministers of vengeance and pursuit  
Back to the gates of Heaven.*

Milton's PARADISE LOST

### (d) WEAK ENDING

The slack or unstressed, tenth syllable in an unrhymed iambic pentameter.

E.g. Since what I am to say must be but that  
Which contradicts my accusation, and  
But what comes from myself.

Shakespeare's THE WINTER'S TALE

### (e) FEMININE ENDING

The slack, or unstressed, eleventh syllable in an unrhymed iambic pentameter.

E.g. If you would not so,  
You pity not the state, nor the remembrance  
Of his most sovereign name.

Shakespeare's THE WINTER'S TALE

[from THE LITERARY TERMS AND CRITICISM and  
THE CRITICISM OF POETRY]