

Write the World's Glossary of Poetry Terms

TECHNIQUE

Alliteration

The repetition of sound in a series or sequence of words.

Example:

"And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain" (Poe)

Dissonance

A disruption of harmony or rhythm, for an intended jarring effect; sounds clash with each other.

Example:

"The wind flung a magpie away and a black-

Back gull bent like an iron bar slowly"

(Ted Hughes, "Wind")

Figure of Speech

A non-literal use of language, such as metaphor or simile.

Metaphor

A figure of speech that compares two things (object, feeling, idea, place, sound, etc.), which are not literally applicable; often used to give the reader a richer understanding of the subject being described.

Example:

"The moon was a salt lick

For her cattle of darkness"

(Frank Stanford)

Objective Correlative

The technique of representing a particular emotion with symbols, images, actions, and events; used to evoke a desired emotional response in the reader.

Example:

"The piercing chill I feel:

my dead wife's comb, in our bedroom,

under my heel..."

(Taniguchi Buson)

Oxymoron

A figure of speech that conjoins contradictory words.

Examples:

Act natural; pretty ugly; jumbo shrimp

Personification

A figure of speech in which a nonhuman thing is described as if it were a person.

Example:

*"There was never a sound beside the wood but one,
And that was my long scythe whispering to the ground."
(Robert Frost, "Mowing")*

Simile

A metaphor that uses "as" or "like."

Example:

*"What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or festers like a sore—
And then run?"
(Langston Hughes, "A Dream Deferred")*

Symbol

Something that represents or is a sign for something else.

Example:

"Brown and barren" in following poem represent growing old.
*"Now the fields are brown and barren,
Bitter autumn blows"
(Sarah Teasdale, "Wild Asters")*

FORMS

Haiku

The haiku form originated in Japan and follows the following structure:

- First Line 5 syllables
- Second Line 7 syllables
- Third Line 5 syllables

Traditionally, the subject matter of haikus focused on an aspect of the natural world, and often juxtaposed two images or ideas. For example, in the following poem, the image of leaves and birds are compared.

Example:

*The last winter leaves
Clinging to the black branches
Explode into birds.
-unknown*

Limerick

Centuries old and almost always humorous, limericks became so popular in the 19th century that newspapers across the US and UK held weekly limerick-writing competitions. The Limerick Breakdown:

- Five lines
- A rhyme scheme of aabba (lines 1, 2, and 5 rhyme and lines 3 and 4 rhyme)
- Lines 1, 2 and 5 have 7-10 syllables and lines 3 and 4 have 5-7 syllables

Example:

*Is Algebra fruitless endeavor?
It seems they've been trying for ever
To find x, y, and z
And it's quite clear to me:
If they've not found them yet then they'll never.*
(Graham Lester)

Prose Poem

Poetry that is not broke into lines, but is, instead, written in a series of sentences and paragraphs.

Sonnet

A classic form that has inspired poets for centuries, the traditional sonnet has 14 lines, each 10 syllables long. Its rhymes are arranged as either:
ab ab, cdcd, efef, gg - English
abba abba cdecde - Italian

Spoken Word / Slam Poetry

Poetry intended for live performance; roots in hip hop, rap, jazz, and folk; often focuses on contemporary issues, such as social justice, politics, and community.

PARTS & PIECES

Stanza

A group of lines in a poem. Just like paragraph break, a space between stanzas can indicate a shift in time, tone, or thought; or indicate a pause.

Refrain

A phrase or line repeated throughout a poem.

VERSE

Blank Verse

Unrhyming iambic pentameter.

Example:

*My grave is like to be my wedding bed.
But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?
(Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliette)*

Couplet

Two successive rhyming lines that are of the same length.

Example:

*"The time is out of joint, O cursed spite
That ever I was born to set it right!"
(Shakespeare, Hamlet)*

Elision

The deletion of unstressed syllables.

Example:

“ere” for “ever”

Foot

The unit of measurement for meter, usually containing one stressed syllable and at least one unstressed syllable.

Free Verse

Poetry with lines that do not rhyme, or have a regular meter.

Iamb

A foot with one unaccented syllable followed by one accented syllable (the most common meter of poetry).

Example:

In the words, belong and predict, the second syllable is typically accented, so they read beLONG and preDICT.

Iambic Pentameter

A line consisting of five iambs.

Example:

*And I do love thee: therefore, go with me;
I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee,
And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep,
And sing while thou on pressed flowers dost sleep
(Shakespeare, A Mid Summer Night's Dream)*

Meter

The pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables within the lines of a poem

Example:

WORDS in a SEN-tence you STRESS when you SPEAK.

Syllable

A single unit of sound within a word.

Example:

The dash-es in this sen-tence mark the syll-a-bles.

Verse

Poetry that follows a certain rhythm.

WANT MORE? CHECK OUT THE POETRY FOUNDATION!

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/glossary-terms?category=forms-and-types>