

lyrical LANGUAGE LAB



GLOSSARY OF POETIC TERMS

There are many online glossaries of poetic terms, including the [Poetry Foundation](#)'s exhaustive list. This glossary contains just those terms we will be addressing during the course.

acatalectic	The term for a perfect line of meter with the correct number of stressed and unstressed syllables in the correct order. See also catalectic , catalexis , headless meter , hypercatalectic , and truncated meter .
alliteration	The repetition of consonant sounds, usually at the beginning of words (<i>initial alliteration</i>), but also within words (<i>internal/hidden alliteration</i>), as in <i>The black bear bounced on his big behind</i> .
anapest	A metrical foot consisting of two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable, as in the words <i>underfoot</i> , <i>contradict</i> , <i>interrupt</i> .
apostrophe	A direct address to something or someone that cannot answer, such as an inanimate object, an animal, or a dead or absent person. See dramatic voice .
assonance	The repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds, as in the phrase <i>Who knew what Sue intended to do</i> .
ballad	A narrative poem that generally consists of rhymed quatrains that alternate lines of four feet and three feet and that recounts a dramatic, tragic, or comic story. See " Annabel Lee " by Edgar Allan Poe.
base meter	The core meter of a given stanza, verse, or work, such as iambic pentameter or anapestic tetrameter.
cadence	The rhythmic sequence or modulation of sounds in language and natural speech, or in poetry without meter, such as free verse.
caesura	A strong pause in a line of verse, usually in the middle of a line and marked with a comma, semi-colon, or period.
catalectic	The term for an incomplete metrical line that occurs when a metrical foot is missing an unstressed syllable. This usually occurs at the end of a line of poetry, but may also occur at the beginning. A missing final unstressed syllable is a common feature in trochaic and dactylic poems. See also catalexis , headless meter , hypercatalectic , and truncated meter .

catalexis	The absence of one or more syllables in a line of verse, especially in the last foot. See also catalectic , headless meter , hypercatalectic , and truncated meter .
cinquain	A poetic form popularized in the U.S. by Adelaide Crapsey, the cinquain consists of five lines with a syllable pattern of 2, 4, 6, 8, 2, respectively. Pronounced <i>sin-cane</i> .
connotation	The emotions or implication aroused by a word, either positive or negative.
consonance	The repetition of consonant sounds, as in <i>Sackwell Knucklehead felt rickety and sick</i> .
conversation poem	A dialogue between two voices, animate or inanimate. See dramatic voice .
couplet	A pair of successive rhyming lines. A <i>closed couplet</i> is one that forms a complete thought.
dactyl	A metrical foot consisting of one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables, as in the words <i>strawberry</i> , <i>scorpion</i> , <i>tenderly</i> .
diction	The writer's choice of words. Poetic diction might be described, for instance, as formal or informal, elevated or colloquial, abstract or concrete, simple or complex. Diction usually respects the audience, so a children's poem would use language appropriate for children.
dimeter	A line of verse composed of two metrical feet .
dramatic voice	When a poem expresses the thoughts or emotions of someone or something other than the poet, as in apostrophe , mask , and conversation poems, it is written in the dramatic voice. See also lyrical voice .
elegy	A melancholy poem in which the poet laments the loss of a person or thing. See " Elegy for a Daffodil " by Renée LaTulippe.
ellipsis	The omission of one or more words that are not necessary for a phrase to be understood.
end rhyme	A rhyme that occurs in the last syllable(s) at the end of a line of poetry.
enjambment	The continuation of a sentence or clause over a line break; that is, instead of stopping or pausing at the end of a line of poetry, the poet completes the meaning of the sentence on a later line.
envelope verse	Two rhyming lines surrounded by two other rhyming lines to form a rhyme scheme of <i>abba</i> . Also a stanza or poem that begins and ends with the same line.

eye rhyme	A visual trick based on spelling rather than sound. At first glance, two words look like they should rhyme, but they are pronounced differently, as in <i>daughter/laughter</i> and <i>wreath/death</i> . Also called visual or sight rhyme.
falling meter/foot	A unit of meter in which an stressed syllable is followed by one or more unstressed syllables. See trochee and dactyl .
feminine ending	Line of verse with an extra unstressed syllable at the end.
feminine rhyme	A rhyme made up of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable, as in <i>Do you think fishes / have big wishes?</i> <i>Fishes</i> and <i>wishes</i> are made up of one stressed and one unstressed syllable. See also masculine rhyme .
figurative language figures of speech	Nonliteral language that shows an imaginative relationship between diverse things. Figures of speech include metaphor , simile , apostrophe , allegory, hyperbole, irony, personification , and synecdoche.
foot	A unit of meter with a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. See anapest , dactyl , iamb , spondee , pyrrhic , trochee , and meter .
form	The structural components of poetry such as stanza, meter, syllable count, and rhyme scheme.
free verse	Poetry that relies on the natural rhythm of everyday speech rather than on the constraints of regular meter, fixed forms, and rhyme schemes. Free verse still uses poetic elements like metaphor, imagery, alliteration, and even rhyme.
haiku	Japanese form consisting of three lines and seventeen syllables in a 5-7-5 pattern, though the traditional syllable pattern is not as rigid in contemporary haiku. Haiku do not use rhyme or meter.
half rhyme	A rhyme in which the initial accented syllables rhyme but the final unaccented syllables don't, as in the words <i>nearly / clearing</i> .
headless meter	The term for a metrical line that is missing one or more unstressed syllables at the beginning of the line. See also catalectic/catalexis .
hypercatalectic	The term for a metrical foot that includes an additional unstressed syllables. See also catalectic/catalexis .
iamb	A metrical foot consisting of one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable, as in the words <i>amuse, behold, inspire</i> .
iambic pentameter	A line consisting of five iamb s, or iambic feet.
imagery	The use of language in a way that evokes sense impressions (usually visual), or that paints pictures with words, as in similes and metaphors .
incremental refrain incremental repetition	A repeated section in a poem or ballad in which the repeated phrase recurs with minor differences as the story progresses. See refrain .

internal rhyme	Any rhyme occurring in the middle of a line, such as when a word in the middle of the line rhymes with the word at the end of the same line, or when two words in the middle of the same line rhyme, or when a word in the middle of a line rhymes with a word in the middle of another line.
inversion	Reversing the order of normal speech in order to make the words fit a particular rhythm, rhyme, or both, as in <i>Sloopy Snail was never slow, / faster, faster he did go</i> . Also called <i>inverted syntax</i> .
irregular meter mixing meter	It is rare for a poem written in a specific meter to be perfectly regular, and most will contain some irregularities. Irregular meter is acceptable as long as it doesn't disrupt the ease of reading. Irregular meter can also help vary the overall rhythm of a poem to prevent it from becoming sing-song. As a general rule for mixing meters, rising meters like iambic and anapestic fit well together, as do falling meters like trochaic and dactylic.
limerick	A form of light verse consisting of five lines with an aabba rhyme scheme. Lines 1, 2, and 5 contain three feet; lines 3 and 4 contain two feet.
line	A basic structural component of a poem. Lines may be written in metrical form, free form, or syllabic form, as in a haiku .
lyrical voice	When a poem expresses the thoughts and emotions of the poet, it is written in the lyrical voice. Often identified by the use of personal pronouns. See also dramatic voice .
masculine rhyme	A rhyme on a stressed syllable, as in <i>I had a wish / to eat a fish</i> . <i>Fish</i> and <i>wish</i> are stressed syllables in this couplet. See also feminine rhyme .
mask/persona poem	A poem in which dialogue between two voices, animate or inanimate. See dramatic voice .
metaphor	A figure of speech that makes a non-literal, imaginative comparison between two objects or actions, as in <i>She was drowning in desire</i> , in which desire is compared to a body of water.
meter	The measurement of a line of poetry, including its length and its pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. See also iamb , anapest , trochee , dactyl , and foot .
metrical feet / foot	See foot .
narrative voice	When a poem tells a story, it is written in the narrative voice. Most nursery rhymes are written in the narrative voice.
near rhyme	See slant rhyme .
occasional rhyme	Rhyme used in an inconsistent, sometimes haphazard manner marked by the intentional irregularity of location and frequency.

octave	A stanza consisting of eight lines. Also called an octet.
onomatopoeia	The use of words that imitate the sound associated with an object or action, such as <i>clang, cuckoo, buzz, plop</i> .
pantoum	A Malayan verse form featuring interlinked quatrains with an abab rhyme scheme and specific pattern of repeated lines. See how to write a pantoum .
pentameter	A line of verse composed of five metrical feet . See also iambic pentameter .
perfect rhyme	Words that correspond aurally in that they share all sounds following the last stressed vowel, as in <i>curious/furious</i> and <i>sleigh/neigh</i> . Also called exact, full, or true rhyme. See also slant rhyme and eye rhyme .
personification	A figure of speech in which inanimate objects or abstract ideas are given human characteristics. Personification is a form of metaphor .
poetic license	The freedom of poets to depart from the normal rules of written language and/or literal fact in order to create an effect. Poets often use poetic license when they use inventive figurative language.
quatrain	A stanza consisting of four lines.
quintet	A stanza consisting of five lines.
refrain	A phrase, line, or stanza repeated throughout a poem, often at the end of each stanza and sometimes with variations. See also incremental refrain .
repetition	The simple repeating of a sound, word, phrase, line, or stanza to create a particular effect or rhythm.
rich rhyme	A rhyme between homophones, as in <i>scent/sent</i> .
rhyme	The repetition of vowel and consonant sounds at the ends of words, such as <i>bat / cat</i> and <i>bottle / throttle</i> . See also perfect rhyme, slant rhyme, and eye rhyme .
rhyme scheme	The pattern of rhymes established in a poem. These patterns are analyzed by using letters at the end of lines that rhyme, such as <i>abab</i> and <i>aabb</i> .
rhythm	The regular, repeated pattern of beats or stresses in a line that create a sense of movement.
rising meter/foot	A unit of meter in which an unstressed syllable is followed by one or more stressed syllables. See iamb and anapest .
scansion	The analysis of the lines of poetry to determine their metrical pattern.
septet	A stanza consisting of seven lines.

sestet	A stanza consisting of six lines.
sijo	A Korean verse form usually consisting of three lines of 14-16 syllables each. The first two lines generally set up . The first two lines contain 14-16 syllables, and the last contains 15 sylfourteen or fifteen syllables and the last composed of fifteen syllables.
simile	An image in which one thing is compared to another, usually using the word <i>like</i> or <i>as</i> .
slant rhyme	A rhyme in which the end sounds are not exact but close enough to resonate, as in the words <i>supper</i> and <i>lover</i> . Also called near, imperfect, approximate, partial, off, and oblique rhyme.
stanza	A basic component of poetry consisting of one or more lines grouped together and separated from each other by spacing.
substitution	The use of a different metrical foot in a line that has an otherwise regular metrical pattern, i.e., the use of a trochee in an iambic line.
syllable	A single unit of pronunciation. <i>Sun</i> is one syllable; <i>sunshine</i> is two syllables. Syllables are either stressed or unstressed.
tetrameter	A line of verse composed of four metrical feet.
tercet	A stanza consisting of three lines. Sometimes called a triplet.
trimeter	A line of verse composed of three metrical feet .
triolet	A French form consisting of an octave in which the first two lines are repeated as the last two lines, and the first line is also repeated as the fourth line. The triolet features only two rhymes.
trochee	A metrical foot consisting of one stressed syllable followed by one unstressed syllable, as in the words <i>clever</i> , <i>shatter</i> , <i>injure</i> .
truncated meter	The term for a metrical line that is missing one or more unstressed syllables in the middle or at the end of the line. (Note: The term <i>truncated</i> can actually refer to a line that is missing syllables anywhere, including at the beginning. For the sake of clarity, however, this course uses the term to refer only to missing syllables in the middle or at the end of a line.) See also catalectic .
villanelle	A French form usually consisting of nineteen lines arranged as five tercets and one final quatrain . The intricate rhyme scheme is dictated by the first tercet – <i>a1-b-a2</i> – and is then repeated twice in the form of <i>a-b-a1</i> and <i>a-b-a2</i> and then concluded with the quatrain rhymed <i>a-b-a1-a2</i> . See sample .