

Popular Poetic Devices

From Nikki Grimes' Poetry Prompts

- **Alliteration:** Two or more words in close proximity begin with the same consonant sound. E.g. "tooth-tingling, tangy sweetness." (Most of us grew up hearing "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers." We've been engaging with alliteration since early childhood.)
- **Anaphora:** Beginning a series of successive sentences or clauses with the same phrase. E.g. Dickens, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness."
- **Assonance:** Specifically involves the repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds, strung close together. Assonance can occur at the beginning, middle, or end of words. ("A stitch in time saves nine"; "The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain"; "The light of the fire is a sight to inspire.")
- **Conceit:** A fanciful, elaborate, extended metaphor that compares two completely different things as if they were connected. (E.g. Emily Dickinson's poem "Because I could not stop for Death/He kindly stopped for me", a conceit describing a dying person as being on a carriage ride with Death.). A modern conceit might be comparing a human brain to a computer.
- **Consonance:** Repetition of consonant sounds occurring in words in close proximity. (Don't ask me to **borrow sorrow** — not today, and not **tomorrow**. The **black** hat is on the **rack** out **back**.)
- **Imagery:** Descriptive language that brings mental images or sensory experiences to life by weaving in strong visual, auditory olfactory, and tactile sensations through the vehicle of language. (e.g. lines from T. S. Eliot's *Preludes*: "The burnt-out ends of smoky days; A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps. And now a gusty shower wraps the grimy scraps of withered leaves about your feet.")
- **Internal Rhyme:** Rhyme that falls in the middle of lines of poetry, rather than at the line's end.
- **Metaphor:** Compares two things by treating one thing as if it is another. ("Friends have worked diligently to **empty my basket of need**.")
- **Meter:** The way rhythm is measured in a poem. The pattern works on two levels: the number of syllables in a line of poetry, and how each syllable is either

unstressed (not emphasized) or stressed (emphasized, e.g. the first syllable in "nature"). There are different kinds of meters, each with its own name. A meter with eight syllables is called iambic tetrameter, while one with ten syllables is called iambic pentameter, but don't worry about memorizing that. Just pay attention to the beats.

- **Personification:** Attaching human traits and emotions to inanimate objects and non-human life forms. ("The sun smiled down on us.")
- **Refrain:** A specific type of repetition. An entire line or phrase repeats at regular intervals, usually at the end of a stanza.
- **Repetition:** Repeat, repeat, repeat is the name of this game. By returning to a word, phrase, or entire line over and over again, often at random intervals, the poet underscores the meaning and importance of that word or phrase.
- **Rhythm:** The beat created by intentional arrangement of stressed or unstressed syllables.
- **Simile:** Compares two things by using the words "like" or "as." (Busy as a bee; blind as a bat;)