

Poetry-specific Literary Devices/Vocabulary

Literary Device	Explanation & Example
Stanza	Essentially a paragraph in a poem. Stanzas with specific numbers of lines have their own names. ○ Monostich: single line stanza/poem ○ Couplet: a pair of lines/two-line stanza (usually rhymes) ○ Tercet: 3-line stanza ○ Quatrain: 4-line stanza ○ Quintain: 5-line stanza ○ Sestet: 6-line stanza ○ Septet: 7-line stanza ○ Octave: 8-line stanza
Rhyme	A repetition of similar sounds in two or more words. There are many types of rhyme – here are a few examples: ○ Perfect rhyme: Two words whose stressed syllables share identical sounds, e.g. “compare” and “despair”. ○ Imperfect rhyme: When the stressed syllable of A word rhymes with the unstressed syllable of another, e.g. “uptown” and “frown”. Note that the bold text signifies stressed syllables. ○ End rhyme: A rhyme at the end of a line. This is the most common type of rhyme. ○ Internal rhyme: Rhymes that do not occur at the end of a line, e.g. “I drove myself to the lake / and dove into the water.” ○ Cross rhyme: A word at the end of one line rhyming with a word in the middle of another line. ○ Eye rhyme: Words that don’t share any sounds, but look like they should because of their spelling, e.g. “rough” and “cough”, or “Christ” and “wrist”. ○ Half rhyme: The rhyming of the ending consonant sounds in a word, e.g. “tell” and “toll”, or “sopped” and “leapt”. This list is not exhaustive. Further examples include pararhyme, forced rhyme, masculine/feminine rhyme, monorhyme, identical rhyme, heroic couplets, alternate rhyme, enclosed rhyme, etc.
Rhyme Scheme	A pattern of rhyme that runs throughout a poem. Rhyme schemes are labelled with letters, like the following: I wandered lonely as a cloud A

	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>That floats on high o'er vales and hills,</td><td>B</td></tr> <tr> <td>When all at once I saw a crowd,</td><td>A</td></tr> <tr> <td>A host of golden daffodils;</td><td>B</td></tr> <tr> <td>Beside the lake, beneath the trees,</td><td>C</td></tr> <tr> <td>Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.</td><td>C</td></tr> </table> This would be classed as an ABABCC rhyme scheme, or 4 lines of alternate rhyme followed by a rhyming couplet.	That floats on high o'er vales and hills,	B	When all at once I saw a crowd,	A	A host of golden daffodils;	B	Beside the lake, beneath the trees,	C	Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.	C
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,	B										
When all at once I saw a crowd,	A										
A host of golden daffodils;	B										
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,	C										
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.	C										
Stressed/ Unstressed Syllables	In speech, we stress certain syllables over others, i.e. we emphasise different parts of words. In this resource, stressed syllables will be written in bold. Remember that words can be stressed in different ways depending on the context. You should get a feel for what rhythm, if any, the poet is trying to create – this will give you an idea of how confusing words might be read. In older poems, you may find words like “o’er” or “cursed”. These are examples of words that are/can be read in unexpected ways. “O’er” literally means ‘over’, but it is read in one syllable, almost like the word ‘or’. The apostrophe is there to show that a syllable has been taken out. “Cursed”, on the other hand, is usually read in one syllable; however, if the rhythm requires it, it can be read as ‘curse-id’, in two syllables.										
Metric Foot	A foot (or a metric foot) is a combination of stressed and unstressed syllables. They are usually only 2-3 syllables long. The main types are: ○ An iamb: unstressed, stressed. ○ Example: com-pare. ○ A trochee: stressed, unstressed. ○ Example: ti-ger ○ A dactyl: stressed, unstressed, unstressed ○ Example: po-et-ry ○ An anapaest: unstressed, unstressed, stressed ○ Example: un-der-stand ○ A spondee: stressed, stressed ○ Example: head-ache										
Meter	Meter is a regular pattern of metric feet. A poem can use a single meter throughout, or it can have different meters in different places. Meter can be analysed regarding the whole poem, a stanza, or even a line. When trying to identify the type of meter a poem (or section) is written in, we need to look at two things:										

- The type of metric foot the section is written in.
- How many metric feet are in each line.

The type of metric foot will decide the first half of the meter's name:

- Written in iambs = Iambic
- Written in trochees = Trochaic
- Written in dactyls = Dactylic
- Written in anapaests = Anapaestic

The number of metric feet in each line will decide the second half of the meter's name:

- Monometer: a line consisting of 1 metric foot
- Dimeter: a line consisting of 2 metric feet.
- Trimeter: a line consisting of 3 metric feet.
- Tetrameter: a line consisting of 4 metric feet.
- Pentameter: a line consisting of 5 metric feet.
- Hexameter: a line consisting of 6 metric feet.
- Heptameter: a line consisting of 7 metric feet.
- Octameter: a line consisting of 8 metric feet.

Combining them together will give us the full name of the type of meter:

- Iambic line with 5 feet = Iambic Pentameter
 - "Shall **I** **compare** thee **to** a **summer's** **day**?"
- Trochaic line with 4 feet = Trochaic Tetrameter
 - "**Double, double toil and trouble**;"
- Dactylic line with 6 feet = Dactylic Hexameter
 - "**This** is the **forest** primeval. The **murmuring** **pin**es and the **hem**locks."
- Anapaestic line with 4 feet = Anapaestic Tetrameter.
 - "The **Assyrian** came **down** like the **wolf** on the **fold**."

There are also other, more specific types of meters that have been given their own names, such as Alexandrine or Adonic verse.



STUDY PLUS
A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Our students have full access to all our resources on request. Gain access to our full poetry terminology list and so much more!



Book your free initial assessment!