

English Poetry Terms

If, as the cliché goes,

“a picture paints a thousand words”

then a poet attempts to do the reverse:

“paint a picture with the fewest possible words.”

In so doing, a poet chooses his words precisely to carefully convey images to the mind of the reader.

For the poetry unit and the final exam, you are expected to know and be familiar with these terms. You should know their definitions and examples. Many of these devices have been grouped together into related categories.

Basic Sound Devices

Alliteration

The same beginning sound is repeated two or more times close together.

- Peter Piper picked a peck of pickle peppers.
- Sally saw a dress she liked.
- Some ketchup was caught in her sleeve.

Assonance

The same middle and/or ending vowel sound is repeated two or more times close together.

- Today we may play a game
- Three weeks seem like a long time
- Hoist up sail while gale doth last

Consonance

The same middle and/or ending consonant sound is repeated two or more times close together.

- Paint ain't great for covering things.
- Whenever you hover never forget your manners.

Onomatopoeia

The formation or use of words that imitate the sounds associated with the objects or actions they refer to.

- Buzz
- Thud
- Whirl
- Boom
- Mummer
- Snap, Crackle, Pop....

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Comparisons

Simile

A figure of speech where two unlike things are compared with the use of “like”, “as”, or “than”.

- I need ice cream **like** I need oxygen.
- He is as thin **as** a toothpick.
- She is larger **than** a house.

Metaphor

A figure of speech where a word or phrase is substitute for another that makes a direct or indirect comparison

- The man was known to be a pig.
- My mind is full of scorpions.
- All the world’s a stage.

Metonymy

(a type of metaphor & optional under new Ministry guidelines)

A figure of speech where in which a word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated.

- Ottawa has announced a new program for seniors.
- Victoria will be providing more funds for libraries next year.
- The crown presented new evidence in the criminal case against the accused.

Synecdoche

(a type of metaphor & optional under new Ministry guidelines)

- A figure of speech in which a part is used for the whole as in *hand for sailor*),
- **OR** the whole for a part as *the law for police officer*),
- **OR** the specific for the general as *cutthroat for assassin*)
- **OR** the general for the specific (as *thief for pickpocket*),
- **OR** the material for the thing made from it (as *steel for sword*).

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Complex Comparisons or References

Allusion

An indirect reference to a person, event, location in history or in literature.

- As she summoned the strength to lift the car off the trapped child she almost turned green before his eyes. (The Hulk)
- As he watched the bombs explode in the news footage he remembered how he felt when the planes hit. (9/11)
- While he was a tall man with no facial hair, his words of hatred and anger made him seem to shrink and a mustache to grow. (Hitler)

Antithesis

A figure of speech where contrasting ideas are juxtaposed in balance or parallel or grammatical structure.

- Fair is foul and foul is fair.
- All for one and one for all.
- Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country
- Man are the root of all evil; woman are the root of all good
- You may be only one person in the world, but you may also be the world to one person.

Apostrophe

The direct address of an imaginary or absent person or of a personified abstraction.

- O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth, / That I am meek and gentle with these butchers.
- Poetry, you are an electric, a magic, field-like the space between the sleepwalker's outheld arms.
- In the presence of Time, it flows like a river over me.

Denotation

The literal and strict meaning of a word; the dictionary meaning.

- House : dwelling place
- Home : dwelling place

Connotation

The figurative or emotional/imaginative suggestions connected with a word

- House : place where others dwell
- Home : the place where you live; security; happiness;

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Euphemism

The substituting of a mild, indirect, or vague term for one considered harsh, blunt, or offensive.

- Tommy's mother had recently passed away. (died)
- They decided it was best to let him go after his colourful outburst to the boss. (fired him / angry swearing)

Hyperbole

An intentional exaggeration for comic or serious effect.

- I'm so tired I could sleep for a million years.
- If I can't be with her then I will die.
- I will love you forever.

Imagery

The use of vivid descriptive language to convey a mental picture or sensation.

- With her fingers tightened around the belt loops, the girl lay on the bed and tried to wriggle into her tight blue jeans
- The fruit flies swarmed out of the locker as it was opened and the stench of rotten fruit, moldy bread, and unwashed gym clothes oozed into the hallwat.

Oxymoron

A figure of speech where two words are used that are in opposition or incongruous to one another

- There was a deafening silence as she entered the room.
- Tom brought some jumbo shrimp to the party.
- He was a member of the Hell's Angels.
- She was a pretty ugly girl.

Paradox

A seemingly contradictory statement that is nonetheless apparently true or is self-contradictory even though logically true.

- Sometime standing still is more tiring than walking.
- The more I know, the less I understand
- Can God make a rock he cannot lift?
- Deep down he is a very shallow person

You may have ears, but you cannot hear.

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Personification

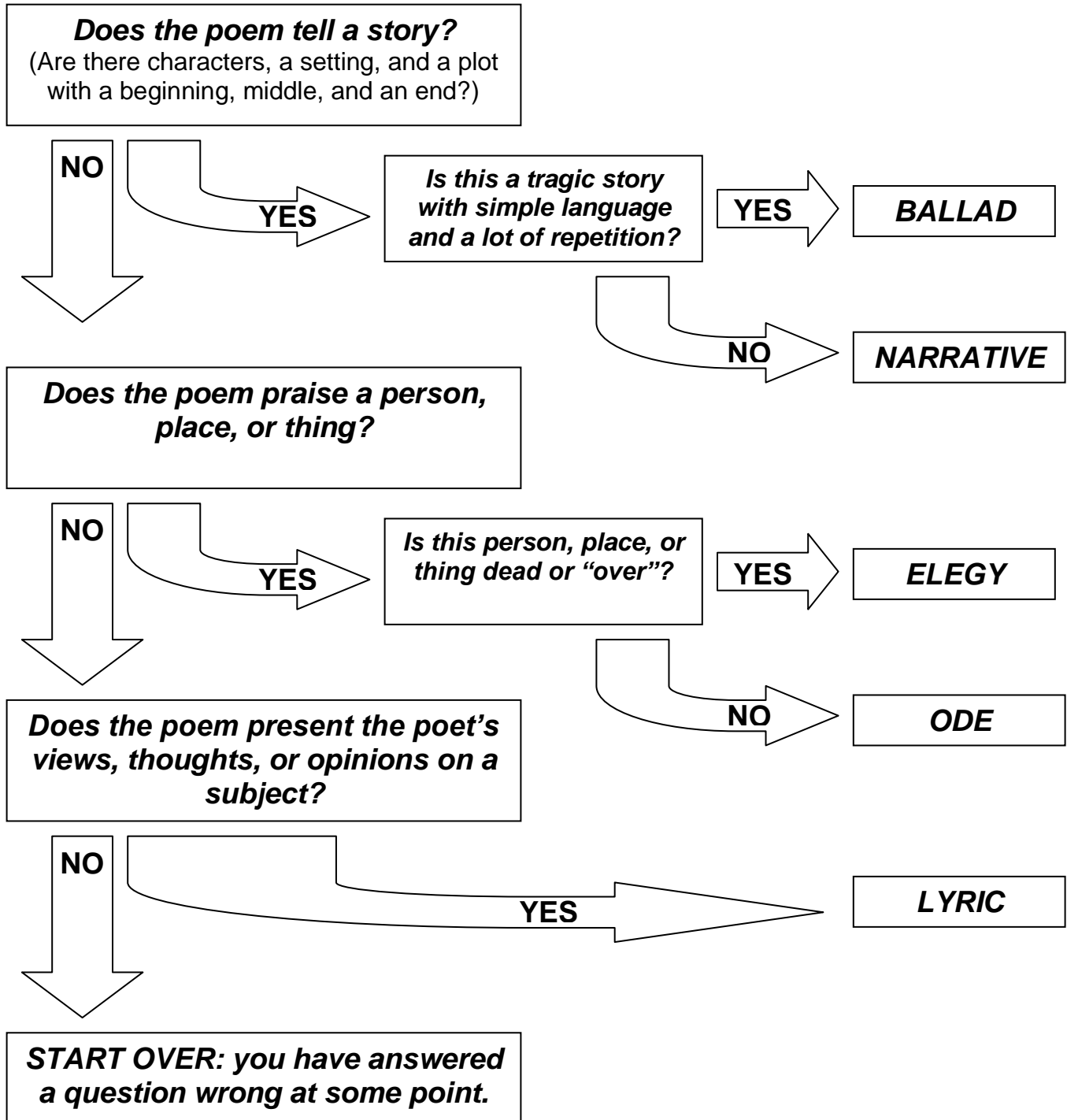
A figure of speech in which inanimate objects or abstractions are given human qualities or are represented as possessing human form.

- The stars danced in the sky
- The cat smiled and winked
- I see the moon, and the moon sees me
- The waves threw themselves against the shore with an angry vengeance.

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Types of Poems

Just like there are many different types of movies (romantic comedy, sci-fi thriller, slasher horror, horror parody, road movie, etc), there are also many types of poems. The subject matter and how the writer of the poem portrays it define a poem's type. For our purposes there are only 5 major types. To determine what is the type of poem, there are some basic questions you ask:



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Forms of Poems

In mathematics, sides and angles and their relationship to one another define basic and complex shapes: squares, circles, ovals, rectangles, trapezoids, parallelogram, rhombus, etc. In poems, the various lines with their lengths and structures define basic and complex forms of poetry.

Rhyme

Exact repetition of sounds in at least the final accented syllables of two or more lines

End Rhyme: occurs at the end of lines

- I do not like green eggs and ham
- I do not like them Sam I Am.

Internal Rhyme: occurs in the middle of lines

- He was the man with the plan.
- She lay on the beach and ate her peach.

Perfect Rhyme: dominant sounds that are exact

- Man / Plan
- Ham / Am
- Girl / Pearl
- Weight / Date

Approximate/Near Rhyme: dominant sounds are similar but not exact

- Work / Dark (instead of Work / Jerk or Park / Dark)
- Exam / Man (instead of Exam / Ham)

Rhyme Scheme

The Eagle

He clasps the crag with crooked hands; (A)
Close to the sun in lonely lands, (A)
Rings with the azure world, he stands. (A)

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls; (B)
He watches from his mountainous walls, (B)
And like a thunderbolt he falls. (B)

Alfred Lord Tennyson

Rhythm

Specific patterns or flow of sounds using specific syllables and their arrangement and stresses such that the reader expects similar series to follow.

I do not like green eggs and ham (8 syllables)
I do not like them Sam I Am (8 syllables)

I do / not like / green eggs / and ham (iambic emphasis)
I do / not like / them Sam / I am (8 syllables; tetrameter)

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Stanza

The smallest division in a poem, having a repeated rhyme scheme and grouping of lines

- Couplet : 2 lines
- Quatrain: 4 lines
- Sestet: 6 lines
- Octave: 8 lines

Metrical Feet

*(You do not need to know ALL the different types, but merely understand that there are various different forms; you must however be able to identify **iambic pentameter** as it plays a part with **Sonnet** and **Blank verse**)*

A rhythmical pattern consisting of specific syllables and the emphasis of the inflection on those syllables.

- Iamb (iambic) : a/lóng
- Trochee (trochaic): líght/ly
- Anapest (anapestic): ín/dis/tínt
- Dactyl (dactylic): tén/der/ly
- Spondee (spondaic): líght/hóuse

- Monometer: one
- Dimeter: two
- Trimeter: three
- Tetrameter: four
- Pentameter: five
- Hexameter: six
- Heptameter: seven
- Octameter: eight

- To be or not to be, that is the question (iambic pentameter)
- Forget not yet the tried intent (iambic tetrameter)
- Peter, Peter pumpkin eater (trochaic tetrameter)
- Twinkle, twinkle, little star (trochaic tetrameter)

Sonnet

A 14 line poem in **iambic pentameter**, with a specific rhyme scheme and a pattern of development (problem presented, usually in an octave and then solved in a sestet)

Blank Verse

Unrhymed iambic pentameter, usually without regular stanza form

Free Verse

Poetry written with rhythm and other poetic devices, but without meter or a regular rhyme scheme