The SOUNDS of words

Words or portions of words can be clustered or juxtaposed to achieve specific kinds of effects when we hear them.

**Alliteration**: Repeated consonant sounds at the beginning of words placed near each other, usually on the same or adjacent lines. A somewhat looser definition is that it is the use of the same consonant in any part of adjacent words.

Example: fast and furious

Example: Peter and Andrew patted the pony at Ascot

It is noted that this is a very obvious device and needs to be handled with great restraint.

**Assonance**: Repeated vowel sounds in words placed near each other, usually on the same or adjacent lines. These should be in sounds that are accented, or stressed, rather than in vowel sounds that are unaccented.

Example: He’s a bruisin’ loser

**Cacophony**: A discordant series of harsh, unpleasant sounds helps to convey disorder. This is often furthered by the combined effect of the meaning and the difficulty of pronunciation.

Example: My stick fingers click with a snicker

And, chuckling, they knuckle the keys;

Light-footed, my steel feelers flicker

And pluck from these keys melodies.

—“Player Piano,” John Updike

**Euphony**: A series of musically pleasant sounds, conveying a sense of harmony and beauty to the language.

Example: Than Oars divide the Ocean,

Too silver for a seam—

Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon

Leap, plashless as they swim.

— “A Bird Came Down the Walk,” Emily Dickenson (last stanza)

**Onomatopoeia**: Words that sound like their meanings.

Example: boom, buzz, crackle, gurgle, hiss, pop, sizzle, snap, swoosh, whir, zip

**Repetition**: The purposeful re-use of words and phrases for an effect. Sometimes, especially with longer phrases that contain a different key word each time, this is called parallelism.

**Rhyme**: Words that have different beginning sounds but whose endings sound alike, including the final vowel sound and everything following it, are said to rhyme.

Example: time, slime, mime

A variation which has been used effectively is called half rhyme. If only the final consonant sounds of the words are the same, but the initial consonants and the vowel sounds are different, then the rhyme is called a half rhyme.

Example: soul, oil, foul; taut, sat, knit

**Rhythm**: The organization of speech rhythms (verbal stresses) into a regular pattern of accented syllables separated by unaccented syllables. Rhythm helps to distinguish poetry from prose.

Example: i THOUGHT i SAW a PUSsyCAT.

Such patterns are sometimes referred to as meter.

Poetry is organized by the division of each line into “feet,” metric units which each consist of a particular arrangement of strong and weak stresses. The most common metric unit is the iamb, in which an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed one (as in the words reVERSE and comPOSE).

Stressed syllables are labelled with an accent mark: / Unstressed syllables are labelled with a dash: –

Metrical feet may be two or three syllables in length, the most common is the iamb-

Pattern Name Example

– / Iamb/Iambic invite

Meter is measured by the number of feet in a line. Feet are named by Greek prefix number words attached to “meter.” A line with five feet is called pentameter; thus, a line of five iambs is known as “iambic pentameter” (the most common form in English poetry, and the one favoured by Shakespeare).

The most common line lengths are:

monometer: one foot tetrameter: four feet heptameter: seven feet

dimeter: two feet pentameter: five feet octameter: eight feet

trimeter: three feet hexameter: six feet

A skilful poet manipulates breaks in the prevailing rhythm of a poem for particular effects.

The MEANINGs of words

Most words convey several meanings or shades of meaning at the same time. Often, some of the more significant words may carry several layers or “depths” of meaning at once.

**Allegory**: A representation of an abstract or spiritual meaning/ message. Often, it is a symbolic narrative that has not only a literal meaning, but a larger one understood only after reading the entire story or poem

**Allusion**: A brief reference to some person, historical event, work of art, or Biblical or mythological situation or character.

**Ambiguity**: A word or phrase that can mean more than one thing, even in its context.

**Analogy**: A comparison, usually something unfamiliar with something familiar.

Example: The plumbing took a maze of turns where even water got lost.

**Cliché**: Any figure of speech that was once clever and original but through overuse has become outdated.

Example: busy as a bee

**Connotation**: The emotional, psychological or social overtones of a word; its implications and associations apart from its literal meaning.

**Denotation**: The dictionary definition of a word; its literal meaning apart from any associations or connotations.

**Hyperbole**: An outrageous exaggeration used for effect.

Example: He weighs a ton.

**Irony**: A contradictory statement or situation to reveal a reality different from what appears to be true.

Example: Wow, thanks for expensive gift...let’s see: did it come with a Happy Meal or the Burger King equivalent?

**Juxtaposition**: Closely arranged things with strikingly different characteristics.

Example: He was dark, sinister, and cruel; she was radiant, pleasant, and kind.

**Metaphor**: A direct comparison between two unlike things, stating that one is the other or does the action of the other.

Example: Her fingers danced across the keyboard.

**Oxymoron**: A combination of two words that appear to contradict each other.

Example: a pointless point of view; bittersweet–5–

**Personification**: Attributing human characteristics to an inanimate object, animal, or abstract idea.

Example: The days crept by slowly, sorrowfully.

**Simile**: A direct comparison of two unlike things using “like” or “as.”

Example: Her eyes are like comets.

Arranging the words

**Point of View**: The author’s point of view concentrates on the vantage point of the speaker, or “teller” of the story or poem. This may be considered the poem’s “voice” — the pervasive presence behind the overall work. This is also sometimes referred to as the persona.

• 1st Person: the speaker is a character in the story or poem and tells it from his/her perspective (uses “I”).

• 3rd Person limited: the speaker is not part of the story, but tells about the other characters through the limited perceptions of one other person.

• 3rd Person omniscient: the speaker is not part of the story, but is able to “know” and describe what all characters are thinking.

**Line**: The line is fundamental to the perception of poetry, marking an important visual distinction from prose. Generally, but not always, the line is printed as one single line on the page.

There is a natural tendency when reading poetry to pause at the end of a line, but the careful reader will follow the punctuation to find where natural pauses should occur.

Stanza: A division of a poem created by arranging the lines into a unit, often repeated in the same pattern of meter and rhyme throughout the poem; a unit of poetic lines (a “paragraph” within the poem).

Stanzas in modern poetry, such as free verse, often do not have lines that are all of the same length and meter, nor even the same number of lines in each stanza.

**Stanza Forms**: The names given to describe the number of lines in a stanza, such as: couplet (2), tercet (3), quatrain (4), quintet (5), sestet (6), septet (7), and octave (8). Some stanzas follow a set rhyme scheme and meter in addition to the number of lines.

**Rhetorical Question**: A question solely for effect, which does not require an answer. By the implication the answer is obvious, it is a means of achieving an emphasis stronger than a direct statement.

Example: Could I but guess the reason for that look?

**Rhyme Scheme**: The pattern established by the arrangement of rhymes in a stanza or poem, generally described by using letters of the alphabet to denote the recurrence of rhyming lines.

In quatrains, the popular rhyme scheme of abab is called alternate rhyme

**Enjambment**: The continuation of the logical sense beyond the end of a line of poetry (without punctuation).

**Form**: The arrangement of the poem’s stanzas, rhyme and meter.

• **Open**: poetic form free from regularity and consistency in elements such as rhyme, line length, and metrical form

• **Blank** **Verse**: unrhymed iambic pentameter (much of the plays of Shakespeare are written in this form)

• **Free** **Verse**: lines with no prescribed pattern or structure — the poet determines all the variables as seems appropriate for each poem–7–

• **Couplet**: a pair of lines, usually rhymed; this is the shortest stanza

• **Quatrain**: a four-line stanza, or a grouping of four lines of verse

• **Ballad**: a narrative poem written as a series of quatrains. Most ballads are suitable for singing: “Barbara Allen” is an example.

• **Epitaph**: a brief poem or statement in memory of someone who is deceased, used as, or suitable for, a tombstone inscription; now, often witty or humorous and written without intent of actual funerary use

• **Ode**: written in a style marked by a rich, intense expression of an elevated thought praising a person or object. “Ode to a Nightingale” is an example.

• **Sonnet**: a fourteen line poem in iambic pentameter with a prescribed rhyme scheme (usually alternate); its subject was traditionally love. Three variations are found frequently in English, although others are occasionally seen.

**Imagery**: The use of vivid language to generate ideas and/or evoke mental images, not only of the visual sense, but of sensation and emotion as well. Related images are often clustered or scattered throughout a work, thus serving to create a particular mood or tone.

**Tone**: The overall mood of the poem itself, in the sense of a pervading atmosphere intended to influence the readers’ emotional response and foster expectations of the conclusion.