

## SOUND DEVICES USED IN POETRY

### A List of Definitions

Sound devices are resources used by poets to convey and reinforce the meaning or experience of poetry through the skillful use of sound. After all, poets are trying to use a concentrated blend of sound and imagery to create an emotional response. The words and their order should evoke images, and the words themselves have sounds, which can reinforce or otherwise clarify those images. All in all, the poet is trying to get you, the reader, to sense a particular thing, and the use of sound devices are some of the poet's tools.

These definitions, by the way, come by way of the **Glossary of Poetic Terms**, which can be found on the Internet at <http://shoga.wwa.com/~rgs/glossary.html>

#### ALLITERATION

Also called *head rhyme* or *initial rhyme*, the repetition of the initial sounds (usually consonants) of stressed syllables in neighboring words or at short intervals within a line or passage, usually at word beginnings, as in "wild and woolly" or the line from the poem, *Darkness Lost*:

*From somewhere far beyond, the flag of fate's caprice unfurled,*

Sidelight: The sounds of alliteration produce a gratifying effect to the ear and can also serve as a subtle connection or emphasis of key words in the line, but should not "call attention" to themselves by strained usage.

#### ASSONANCE

The relatively close juxtaposition of the same or similar vowel sounds, but with different end consonants in a line or passage, thus a vowel rhyme, as in the words, *date* and *fade*.

#### CONSONANCE

A pleasing combination of sounds; sounds in agreement with tone. Also, the repetition of the same end consonants of words such as *boat* and *night* within or at the end of a line, or the words, *cool* and *soul*, as used by Emily Dickinson in the third stanza of *He Fumbles at your Spirit*.

#### CACOPHONY (cack-AH-fun-ee)

Discordant sounds in the jarring juxtaposition of harsh letters or syllables, sometimes inadvertent, but often deliberately used in poetry for effect, as in the opening line of *Fences*:

*Crawling, sprawling, breaching spokes of stone,*

Sidelight: Sound devices are important to poetic effects; to create sounds appropriate to the content, the poet may sometimes prefer to achieve a cacophonous effect instead of the more commonly sought-for euphony. The use of words with the consonants *b*, *k* and *p*, for example, produce harsher sounds than the soft *f* and *v* or the liquid *l*, *m* and *n*.

## DISSONANCE

A mingling or union of harsh, inharmonious sounds that are grating to the ear.

## EUPHONY (YOO-fuh-nee)

Harmony or beauty of sound that provides a pleasing effect to the ear, usually sought-for in poetry for effect. It is achieved not only by the selection of individual word-sounds, but also by their relationship in the repetition, proximity, and flow of sound patterns.

Sidelight: Vowel sounds are generally more pleasing to the ear than the consonants, so a line with a higher ratio of vowel sounds will produce a more agreeable effect; also, the long vowels in words like *moon* and *fate* are more melodious than the short vowels in *cat* and *bed*.

## INTERNAL RHYME

Also called *middle rhyme*, a rhyme occurring *within* the line, as in the poem, *The Matador*:

*His childhood fraught with lessons taught by want and misery*

## ONOMATOPOEIA (ahn-uh-mah-tuh-PEE-uh)

Strictly speaking, the formation or use of words which imitate sounds, like *whispering*, *clang* and *sizzle*, but the term is generally expanded to refer to any word whose sound is suggestive of its meaning.

Sidelight: Because sound is an important part of poetry, the use of onomatopoeia is another subtle weapon in the poet's arsenal for the transfer of sense impressions through imagery.

Sidelight: Though impossible to prove, some philologists (linguistic scientists) believe that all language originated through the onomatopoeic formation of words.